



Women's economic empowerment to catalyze structural transformation in Cameroon

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Key Messages

Local researchers have identified two policy options as preferred avenues for achieving women's economic empowerment goals in Cameroon:

1. A policy to subsidize tuition fees for girls and women in post-primary vocational education and science course programs
 2. A policy to support women's agricultural entrepreneurship by facilitating women's access to agricultural land.
- In addition to improving the integration of women into the labor market, these policies would also help stimulate economic growth, while promoting a sustainable structural transformation of the Cameroon economy.
 - The expected impact is all the greater when these policies are applied simultaneously.

Structural transformation objectives in a context of persistent gender inequalities in Cameroon

Challenges in achieving economic goals

The average economic growth rate of 4.3% over the 2010-2019 period is below the 5.5% target set in the Growth and Employment Strategy Document (DSCE).

- This growth is mainly driven by the tertiary sector, which is dominated by women, and which is particularly vulnerable to fluctuating demand.

In an effort to stimulate economic growth and promote inclusive development, the government of Cameroon recently launched the National Development Strategy (SND-30). This ambitious initiative aims to foster structural transformation of the economy*.

*Structural transformation refers to a process of profound change in a country's economic structure, involving a significant redistribution of resources between different economic sectors (such as agriculture, industry and services) to stimulate sustainable, inclusive growth.

Persistent gender inequalities

Despite a slight improvement in the Gender Inequality Index, the situation in Cameroon continues to raise concerns, with the country falling from 138th to 145th place between 2016 and 2021, according to the UNDP.

In the field of education:

- Between 2014 and 2021, there was a decline in the net enrolment rate (NER) in:
 - Primary schools, from 84.9% to 78.7% for girls, compared with an increase from 86.1% to 90.4% for boys.
 - Secondary schools, from 41.6% to 35.5% for girls, and from 48.71% to 37.27% for boys.
- In 2022, only 32.5% of women over the age of 25 will have completed secondary education, compared to 39.2% of men.
- In 2021, the parity index for high-potential vocational courses at university was 0.62 girls to 1 boy.
- The under-representation of women in technical, vocational and scientific fields limits their access to well-paid, stable jobs.

In the agricultural sector:

- Women account for over 60% of the workforce, and 71.6% of informal (and therefore vulnerable) workers in the sector.
- Women have limited access to land:
 - Only 1.6% of women possess a land title in their own name.
 - Between 2005 and 2014, 79% of land titles were issued to men, compared with 19% to women.

NDS-30 also provides for an integrated approach to women's economic empowerment*, focusing on access to resources, capacity-building and training, equal opportunities, support to women's businesses, improved working conditions, and monitoring of results. However, significant gaps remain, particularly in the education and agricultural sectors.



Link between gender inequality and economic growth in Cameroon

Empirical work by a number of researchers shows that gender inequalities could have a negative impact on economic growth and the structure of the economy.

Policies to reduce gender inequality could therefore, in theory, help achieve structural transformation objectives.

***Women's economic empowerment** refers to the process by which women achieve greater financial independence, improved access to economic opportunities, and increased participation in economic decision-making. This includes aspects such as access to education, employment, economic resources and decision-making, enabling women to control their own resources and contribute significantly to the economy.

Research project and policy options



From 2023 to 2024, a team of Cameroonian researchers carried out a study on the link between women's economic empowerment and structural transformation in Cameroon. Specifically, the study aimed **to assess the impact of different macroeconomic policy options with a focus on increasing women's economic empowerment as part of national structural transformation objectives** - i.e. notably those related to economic growth, balancing the sectoral structure of the economy, and improving the structure of the labor market.

Considering the Cameroonian socio-economic context, the priorities in the National Development Strategy 2020-2030 (NDS-30), and based on current policy strengths and gaps analysis, the researchers identified two potential public policy options for increasing women's economic empowerment:

1. In the education sector: **a subsidy policy for the payment of school fees for girls and women in post-primary vocational education and science courses**. This policy could be financed by part of the savings from the reduction in subsidies on petroleum products.
2. In the agricultural sector: a policy to support women's agricultural entrepreneurship by **facilitating women's access to agricultural land** – i.e., by granting arable land to women farmers.

Methodology

To boost the impact of the two policy options, the authors used computable general equilibrium (CGE) modeling. CGE is a simulation technique that compares the state of an economy under different scenarios or shocks—either policies, events, or other changes experienced. During this exercise, the simulated policy or shock is the only change introduced into the model, meaning that the effects resulting from the shock are "isolated" from any other shocks or events that could occur simultaneously and affect the economy.

Thus, the results of CGE model simulations should only be used to "guide" decision-making processes, without creating specific expectations in terms of the quantified impacts of the interventions implemented, as these impacts will necessarily be influenced by a large number of competing factors, events and changes in environmental conditions, that cannot be accounted for in the model.

Main results

The analysis of the results of the simulations of the identified policy scenarios conducted by the researchers as part of the scientific study led to the following potential effects, for both policy options:

Option 1

Subsidize tuition fees for girls and women in post-primary vocational education and science programs.

This policy leads to a significant improvement in the **quality of education for girls**, reducing class repetition and drop-out rates, favoring higher success rates, while encouraging girls to stay in school longer. The effects also entail some improvement in the quality of education for boys, who benefit from the savings made by households because the girls' school fees in technical, vocational and scientific fields are now subsidized.

In the **labor market**, we find that the policy leads to an increase of up to 8% in the formal employment of women over the age of 20, including in the technical and professional sectors. Since skilled workers generally benefit from better economic opportunities, this transition contributes to reducing income inequality.

Despite relatively high initial costs, the results suggest that, in the long run, the policy would lead to an improvement in **economic growth** of up to 0.52%—the initial costs thus being offset, in the long term, by positive spin-offs for the national budget. In addition, the effects of the policy would contribute to a rebalancing of the Cameroonian economy, with an increase in the share of the secondary sector in GDP.

Option 2

Facilitate women's access to agricultural land.

By promoting **agricultural production and job creation**, especially for women, the granting of arable land to women farmers stimulates **economic growth** by 0.06% in the short term, and up to 0.86% in the long term. Increased agricultural production generates higher wages and stimulates demand for goods and services, while strengthening the overall economy. This increase also boosts tax revenues from agricultural taxes, thus encouraging **investment** in the sector.

Finally, this policy supports **growth in the secondary and tertiary sectors**, particularly in agribusiness, which also contributes to stronger economic growth. However, it could also have a negative impact on other primary industries.



A Guide to Political Decision-Making

In addition to their scientific analysis, the researchers carried out the evaluation of the two policy options by assessing the relevance of their implementation from the government decision-making point of view. To do this, they identified and used 4 criteria inspired by those set out in the Cameroon government's National methodological guide to public policy analysis, evaluation and capitalization ("Guide méthodologique national d'analyse et d'évaluation des politiques publiques et de capitalisation des expériences"). See the box below for a definition of the criteria:

Selection of national criteria for evaluating public policies

- **Efficiency.** In this context, this concept relates to the level of impact of each policy on structural transformation indicators, regarded as relevant for the Cameroonian government, such as economic growth, share of the manufacturing sector in GDP and market structure.
- **Cost-benefit.** This criterion identifies the policy that maximizes economic and social efficiency, considering budgetary constraints and limited resources.
- **Gender equity.** The extent to which each policy contributes to reducing disparities between men and women in terms of access to socio-economic opportunities, resources and benefits.
- **Feasibility.** This criterion determines whether each of the two policies is feasible in the Cameroonian context, based on existing capacities, time constraints and possible political or social resistance.

Table: Results of policy option evaluation according to policy decision criteria

	Option 1 : Tuition subsidies for women in post-primary technical, vocational and scientific education	Option 2 : Granting arable land to women farmers
Efficiency	Highly efficient <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improves the structure of the labor market - Contributes to an increase in long-term economic growth of up to 0.52% - Improves the secondary sector's share of GDP over the long term 	Efficient <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotes job creation, - Contributes to higher economic growth in the short and long term, up to 0.86%. - Growth support in the secondary sector (especially agribusiness) and the tertiary sector
Cost-benefit	Beneficial <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Initial investment costs of around 57.6 billion per year, offset by long-term positive impact on government revenues 	Very beneficial <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Certainty regarding implementation costs, with positive impact on government revenues in the short and long term.
Gender equity	Very high level of gender equity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduces gender inequalities in education (especially vocational, technical and scientific education) and the job market - Further improves the actual consumption budget of female-headed households 	High level of gender equity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduces gender inequalities in the job market by creating more jobs for women. - Improves the actual consumption budget of female-headed households in rural areas
Feasibility	High level of feasibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Requires financial resources that can be covered by part of the savings from reduced subsidies on petroleum product prices 	Fairly high level of feasibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Requires agrarian reform that takes gender concerns into account



Conclusions and recommendations

The results of the study allow us to conclude that the combination of the two policy options identified (i.e. a targeted subsidy for women's school fees, and the granting of arable land to women farmers) could help achieve structural transformation objectives. Indeed, the implementation of these two interventions would make it possible to sustainably improve the quality of the workforce, while promoting agricultural production and industrial processing (improving the secondary sector), as well as stimulating economic growth in the medium and long term.

In view of these results, the researchers make the following recommendations to the Cameroonian government:

- **EDUCATION SECTOR:** Consider a subsidy policy for the payment of women's tuition fees in post-primary technical, vocational and scientific education, which could be financed by savings from reduced subsidies on petroleum product prices.
- **AGRICULTURE SECTOR:** Facilitate the acquisition of arable land for rural women, notably through land reform.

In the overall context, researchers also recommend that the government improve the way in which the gender lens is integrated into the public policies planning, programming and budgeting, in particular by completing the institutional framework for gender-sensitive budgeting.

Roadmap

The researchers also identified the following next steps for implementing these recommendations at the governmental/institutional level:

- As part of the 2025 Finance Act, the Ministry of the Economy, Planning and Regional Development (MINEPAT), the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC), and the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP) should propose using part of the savings from the reduction of subsidies on petroleum product prices to finance a subsidy for women's tuition fees in post-primary technical and scientific education.
- The Ministry of Lands, Land Registry and Land Affairs (MINDCAF) is expected to engage in an agrarian reform incorporating policies to facilitate the acquisition of agricultural land by women as early as 2025.
- MINEPAT and the National Assembly are expected to finalize the institutional framework for gender-responsive budgeting by 2024, enabling the various administrations to better incorporate gender in the planning, programming and budgeting of public policies from 2025 onwards.

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