

Cameroon and the Hosting of International Conferences and Institutions (1961-2024)

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INTRODUCTION

With a surface area of about 475,442 square kilometers (km²) and a population of over 26,545,000 inhabitants, Cameroon lies across West and Central Africa, at the north eastern end of the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean. It is situated between latitude 2 and 13 degrees (°) north of the equator and longitude 8° and 16° east of the Greenwich meridian. Cameroon shares boundaries with Nigeria to the west and north, Chad to the North east, the Central African Republic to the east, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and the Republic of Congo in the South (Nchangvi, Che and Nchangvi, 2018: 164, 383). It was noticed with kin attention that since the independence of Cameroon in 1960/61, the country became a preferential choice for hosting sub regional, regional and international offices and meetings. Found at a crossroads between west and central Africa, Cameroon offer a good number of pull factors for the hosting of conferences comparatively with the 53 other African nations that worth this study. The success of this research is thanks to a carefully review of selected literature. Amongst the numerous sources consulted, Amindeh (2018), confirmed Cameroon not only being a fertile ground for international conferences but also a seat of many institutions in Africa¹. On its part, the International Council on Archives (2018) upheld the strategic and privilege position of Yaounde, the political capital of Cameroon in hosting these international conferenc². With all these appreciations, this study seeks to find out some of the forces of attraction that has made Cameroon a venue for conferences. With the use of the thematic and linear method, information from primary, secondary and tertiary sources permitted us to do an inventory of international conferences in Cameroon, examine the geostrategic position and human endowments of Cameroon as well as fallouts from Cameroon's hosting of these conferences.

METHODOLOGY

The method of selecting and analyzing data was qualitative, with the use of primary, secondary and tertiary sources. Primary sources like newspapers, audiovisual and field reports were consulted. To these were added library; books and other publications and tertiary internet sources. The quest for data collection drove us to the university libraries, archives and many other documentation centers. The choice of presentation of data results is thematic and linear.

Theoretical Framework

This study appealed for three theories; soft power, venue diplomacy and developmental regionalism theories. Joseph Nye Jr defines soft power in his work *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments” (Nye Jr 2004: p. x), or to be more concise, “soft power is attractive power” (Nye Jr 2004: p. 6). Nye explained that “when one country gets other countries to want what it wants, it might be called co-optive or soft power in contrast with the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants”. According to this author, the success of soft power lies on its resources and behaviours. Joseph Nye Jr (2004: p. 11) affirms that the soft power of a country is generated by three primary resources: culture, political values, and foreign policies. Culture refers both to high culture (i.e.

¹ Amindeh Blaise Atabong, Seat of institutions, Cameroon remains fertile ground, Cameroon tribune No. 11678/7877, Thursday September 13, 2018, p. 6.

² International Council on Archives, Welcome Yaounde, Cameroon, Archives, Governance, Memory and Heritage, 2018, p. 12, <https://www.ica.org>, update on 09/04/2018, consulted on 25/12/2024 at 11:12am.

literature, art, and education) and to popular culture, which is mostly addressed to mass entertainment. Political values refer to domestic values and policies of a country or ideology. The third source of soft power, according to Nye Jr, is the foreign policy of a country, which can generate attraction if perceived as legitimate by other countries. This research observed that these are the strong points of Cameroon's diplomacy. Since independences, Cameroon has reinforced its educational system, upholds the promotion of its diverse cultural values, embraced democracy and diversify its diplomatic machinery.

Cameroon is also making use of its geostrategic position in what this study calls "venue democracy" to nourish its diplomatic relations and position itself in its sub region. It is situated in the Central African sub region at the frontiers between West and Central Africa. This and its access to the Atlantic ocean has made Cameroon a *carrefour* of international meetings and institutions.

The theory of regionalism preached the gospel of regional integration. Drawing allusion from the European approach, Fredrik Söderbaum (2011, pp. 2-4) distinguish between the early and the more recent debate on regionalism. The early debate covers research undertaken between the 1950s and the 1970s, and the relevant theories were federalism, functionalism and neo-functionalism. Federalism, which inspired the pioneers of European integration, was rather a political program than a theory; it was skeptical of the nation state, although what was to be created was rather a new kind of state. Functionalism was also rather an approach to peace building than a theory. However, this European system of regionalism yielded to a free trade area, leading to a customs union and further to the establishment of a common market, economic union and political union. Taping from this example, Cameroon noticed the benefits of regionalism and put into play its venue diplomacy to tap these benefits.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

An Inventory of Some Conferences and Institutions Hosted By Cameroon

There are sub regional, regional and international conferences.

Sub regional conferences

Some of renowned sub regional organizations whose conferences were most often hosted by Cameroon were the Central African Customs and Economic Union (*Union Douanière et Économique de l'Afrique Centrale*), abbreviated in French as UDEAC and the Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States (ECCAS). It was created in 1964 by Heads of State of Cameroon, Chad, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Congo Brazzaville and Central African Republic, UDEAC entered into force in January 1st, 1966. The aim was to establish an ever-closer union between member states so as to reinforce sub regional solidarity establish and promote a Central African Common Market and to consolidate the African unity. Cameroon was opportune to host UDEAC summit in Yaounde in 1968. This was to sign agreements to harmonize economic and trade policies among the member states. In 1975, Douala also received the UDEAC Council of Ministers Meeting. This time, it was a gathering of finance and trade ministers from the UDEAC countries to strengthen the customs union and promote regional industrialization. (Ngoh, 2019: 327). In 1988, member states of UDEAC Economic and Financial Committee again converged in Yaounde. This was a technical-level meeting of senior officials responsible for economic and financial matters in the sub-region. The committee reviewed the state of the regional economy and custom union in the sub region.

Regional (Continental) conferences organized in Cameroon

Here, attention is focused on the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the African Union (AU) and many other intra-continental conferences. The OAU was created in Addis Ababa--Ethiopia on May 25th, 1963 by 32 newly independent African states to promote the unity and solidarity of African states, coordinate and intensify their cooperation and efforts to achieve a better life for the people of Africa, safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states, rid the continent of colonization and apartheid, promote international cooperation within the United Nations framework and harmonized members political, economic, diplomatic, educational, cultural, health, welfare, scientific, technical and defense policies. Cameroon was opportune to host the OAU

meetings for three times. The first was the OAU Heads of State summit of 1972 that was to discuss on decolonization strategies and the organization's role in mediation and conflict resolution in Africa. The second was the OAU Council of Ministers Meeting of 1981, which brought foreign ministers from OAU member states to review the political and economic situation in Africa and provide guidance to the OAU Secretariat³. The third was the 32nd OAU Heads of State summit held in Yaounde in 1996, with focus on the unity of Africa (Ngoh, 1996: 348). After the demise of the OAU, was the creation of the AU.

Cameroon hosted the AU Summit in Yaounde in 2006. This was a high-level meeting of the heads of state and government after the transition from the OAU to the AU. Discussions focused on AU institutional reforms, the African Peer Review Mechanism and peace and security challenges. In 2015, Yaounde play host to the AU Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development. Organized by the AU's Economic Commission for Africa, the ministers discussed strategies to accelerate Africa's economic transformation and attain the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2018, Cameroon, again, had the opportunity to host the meeting of Governors of the African capacity building foundation of the AU in Yaounde. This meeting was to fight against unemployment in Africa (Mbom, 2018: 11). Yaounde also hosted the 9th Conference of the African Communication Regulation authorities in 2018. The main objective was for media regulation (Yufeh, 2018:7). The 54th Steering Committee Meeting of the African Organization of Supreme Court Audit Institutions also took place in Yaounde-Cameroon (AFROSIAI). It discussed how to improve Public finance control in Africa (Amindeh Atabong, 2018: 2). Still in 2018, Cameroon's Prime Minister, Philemon Yang, welcomed members of the African Development Bank in Yaounde at the occasion of opening the Central African regional office in Yaounde (Kendemeh, 2019: 17). Cameroon hosted the Conference of member states of the Kinshasa Convention in Yaounde in 2018 to put measures against the Proliferation of light arms in Africa (Mbohhou, 2018: 2). This same year, Cameroon received the Meeting of board of directors of the African peace support trainers association (APSTA). The meeting was to restructure and harmonize the AU organ on the maintenance of peace (Messi Balla, 2018: 7). These events have offered platforms for Cameroon to contribute to continental policy discussions and strengthen regional integration efforts. Beside sub regional and regional conferences, Cameroon has equally played host to many international conferences on contemporary issues.

International conferences organized in Cameroon

These include conferences on climate change, peace and security, sustainable development, gender and many others. Cameroon hosted the United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference in Douala in 2011. This was a significant UN climate conference that brought together representatives from almost 200 countries. This was to advance the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol and lay the groundwork for the Paris Agreement. Cameroon played a hosting role and contributed to the conference negotiations as an African representative (Tsala Tsala, 2014). Cameroon also played host to the summit of the Gulf of Guinea that met in Yaounde from June 24 to 25, 2013, to discuss security challenges in the Gulf of Guinea (Essogo, 2013:2). In 2015, Cameroon hosted the World Forestry Congress in Yaounde. Organized by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), focus was on sustainable forest management. It brought together forestry experts, policymakers, and stakeholders from around the world. Discussions centered around the role of forests in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Another occasion came in 2019, with Cameroon hosting the World Climate Change Conference in Douala. This international conference was organized under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It provided a platform for countries to showcase their climate action plans and commitments ahead of the 2020 COP26 summit. Cameroon used the conference to highlight its efforts to preserve its Congo Basin rainforests. Besides, the country hosted the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Yaounde in 2022. The conference was organized by the UN to review progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. Climate change mitigation and adaptation were key themes, with a focus on aligning national plans with the Paris Agreement. Cameroon played a prominent role in the summit as a representative of Central Africa. (Tsala Tsala, 2014) As a country with immense tropical forest resources and vulnerability to climate change, Cameroon has been an important host for major international conferences

³Cameroon's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 22 March 2013, consulted on 12/12/2024, 10:42am.

addressing global environmental challenges. These events allowed Cameroon to showcase its climate leadership and advocate for increased support and finance for African countries on the frontlines of climate change.

Cameroon has also been privileged to host a number of Commonwealth meetings. Yaounde hosted the Commonwealth Ministers of Education Conference in 2018, the Commonwealth Forestry Conference in 2013. With respect to *Francophonie*, Cameroon organized the *Francophonie* Summit of 1996. This summit brought together leaders from French-speaking countries to discuss topics such as democracy, human rights, and sustainable development. Cameroon also welcomed the International Conference on the fight against HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections in Africa, organized by the *Francophonie* in 2000. Focus was on addressing the challenges posed by HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections in Africa. It aimed at promoting cooperation among Francophone countries in combating these diseases and improving healthcare systems (Yann, 2015). In 2009, another opportunity was given to Cameroon host the International Conference on Peace and Security in Central Africa. Organized in Douala, this conference aimed at enhancing regional cooperation and coordination in addressing peace and security challenges in Central Africa. It brought together representatives from Francophone countries to discuss strategies for conflict resolution and stability (Pondi, 1997: 563-570).

The Parliamentary Assembly of the *Francophonie* (APF) also held its 40th session in Yaounde in 2014. The APF is an international organization that promotes democratic values, human rights and the rule of law. The conference provided a platform for parliamentarians from Francophone countries to exchange ideas and collaborate on common issues. The International Conference on the Prevention and Fight against Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Africa took place in Yaounde in 2018. This conference brought together experts, policymakers, and stakeholders from Francophone nations to discuss strategies and share experiences in combating these challenges.

With respect to the promotion of gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence, Cameroon hosted the 50th *Francophonie* Summit of 2016. One of the key themes addressed during this summit was gender equality and the empowerment of women. Cameroon hosted the African Women's Forum in 2010. It brought together women leaders, activists, and experts from across the African continent to discuss issues related to women's rights, economic empowerment, and political participation. Another International Conference on Women's Leadership and Entrepreneurship was held in Douala in 2018. It provided a platform for networking, knowledge sharing, and the development of strategies to support women-led businesses. Besides, Cameroon also hosted the National Conference on the Beijing+25 Review in 2019. The conference was to assess the country's progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a landmark global agenda for advancing women's rights and gender equality. Yaounde was the host city for the Regional Conference on Gender-Based Violence in 2020. The event aimed at developing strategies and strengthening regional cooperation to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in Central Africa. Besides hosting conferences, Cameroon is a seat of many international offices.

Cameroon seat of international institutions

Besides conferences, Cameroon equally played host to offices of many regional and international organizations. Across the board, from education, sports, business and finance to security, agriculture, research and Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Cameroon played host to at least one institution of international character. Some institutional headquarters in Cameroon are; International Bamboo and Rattan Organization (INBAR). This inter-governmental institution, set up in 1997, carries out activities in Latin America, Asia and 19 African countries including Cameroon. Cameroon has also been very friendly to the United Nations (UN) agencies. No fewer than 20 UN agencies, funds and programs have different projects running in the country. UN agencies like United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Wired Equivalent Privacy (WEP), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), World Health Organization (WHO) have been very conspicuous (Atabong Amindeh, 2018: 6).

The country is also playing host to a number of international organizations and development agencies. Amongst them are the United States Agency for international development, SNV Netherlands Development Organization,

Japan International Cooperation Agency, International committee of Red Cross, African Regional Training Center for Labour Administration, International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, Transparency International and African Intellectual Property Organization (Ibid.)⁴.

In the domain of education, Cameroon is the proud host of the Pan-African University's Institute for Governance, Humanities and Social Science (PAUGHSS) at the University of Yaounde II – Soa and the University of Buea. The country equally accommodates the Pan-African Institute for Development-West Africa. The Central African Economic and Monetary Community (ECCAS) stock exchange market in Douala while the Bank of Central African States has taken seat in Yaounde (Ibid.). However, Cameroon's preferential choice to host international conferences is due to its geostrategic position, its human and infrastructural abilities.

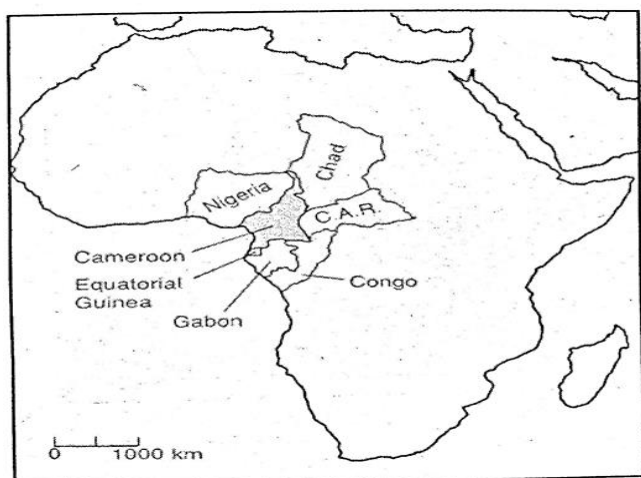
Geostrategic, Human And Infrastructural Endowments Of Cameroon

As the title indicates, attention here shall be focused on the geostrategic position of Cameroon.

Geostrategic Location and Rich Biodiversity

The Republic of Cameroon is situated at crossroads between West and Central Africa. Besides, this country is open to the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Guinea. These water bodies and strategic position ease the movement of persons, goods and services not only from north, south and east Africa, but from all over the world to Cameroon and back (Nchangvi Che and Nchangvi, 2024: 164). The coastal exposure of Cameroon also blessed this country with very mild climatic and other appealing geographical conditions (beautiful scenery and dense vegetation).

Africa, showing the geographical location of Cameroon



Source: Fanso V.G., 2017, Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges, from Prehistoric Times to Twenty-first Centuries, Revised and updated combined edition, Bamkika'ya-Kumbo, Team Work Press, p. 9.

The country has two main climatic belts: the equatorial climate in the south and the hot and semi-arid tropical climate in the north. (Nchangvi and Nchangvi, 2018: 171-172.)⁵. On the other hand, the tropical climate which cover the entire northern Cameroon stretches from latitude 6° to 13° north of the equator, that from Adamawa to lake Chad. Here, rain fall hardly exceed 1500 mm and decreases towards the north to about 400 mm close to

⁴ Ibid

⁵ The equatorial zone in Cameroon stretches from 2° to 6° N, covering the southern and the mountainous western part of the country, with 2 climate types; the Guinea and the Cameroon types. The Guinea type of climate in Cameroon is experienced in the whole of the Southern low plateau of Cameroon, stretching down to Kribi, with high uniform temperature of about 26 degrees Celsius (°C) year-round and low temperature of just 3°C. It has an abundant precipitation of about 2500 millimeters (mm). On the other hand, the Cameroon type is the equatorial climate whose characteristics have been modified by relief, nearness to the sea and the monsoon winds. It receives yearly 4000 mm and above of rainfall; it has a high average temperature of about 26°C and relative humidity of about 85 percent (%).

Lake Chad. It also has two types of climates; the humid tropical or Sudan climate and dry tropical or climate Sahel climate.

The country's favourable climatic conditions are regulated by the abundant and colourful vegetation and captivating scenery. Cameroon is Africa in miniature because it exhibits all the major climates and vegetation of the continent, mountains, desert, rain forest, savanna grassland and ocean coastlines. Yaounde, Cameroon's political capital is immaculately planned across seven hills. The city's layout features lush green spaces interspersed with buildings. Its unique 1970s government buildings, central location and a population of more than 2.8 million hospitable people makes the city a cultural destination and must stop point on any tour of the country⁶. The red, sandy, and dusty streets contrast with colourful local clothing of Maroua offers an authentic cultural experience, bustling markets, and serves as a base for exploring the Mandara Mountains in the north. A footstep below Maroua is Garoua with its Benoue National Park. A wildlife enthusiast's paradise, hosting elephants, hippos, and even lions. Its diverse ecosystem supports over 300 bird species, making it a haven for birdwatchers. Farther down south, another center of attraction is Limbe. Nestled on the slopes of Mount Cameroon, it presents an excellent natural beauty. Visiting the botanical garden will enable one to learn about local flora before exploring nearby waterfalls and the national park. In the south, is the Campo National Park, a treasure trove of biodiversity, this park is a home to gorillas in the south. Explore its lush rainforests and encounter rare and exotic creatures (International Council on Archives, 2018: 12)

Human and infrastructural endowments

The diverse cultural heritage and hospitality of Cameroonians is another non-negligible factor that gives Cameroon the prime of place in hosting international conferences. Cameroon has four cultural groups endowed with a very rich and vibrant cultural heritage, each with its unique traditions and customs. There are the Fang-Béti cultural group, the grassland cultural group, the coastal strip and the Soudano-Sahelian cultural group⁷. Besides this rich culture, Cameroon has more than 240 distinct ethnic groups and an estimated 240 languages (Nchangvi, Che and Nchangvi, 2024: 411). This research also took interest in the diversity of Cameroonian languages and varieties of dishes. These languages include the Akoose language, the Gbaya, the Fula, the Gyele, the Koozime, the Mundang, the Ngiemboo and the Vengo language. Cameroonian cuisine is also one of the most varied in Africa due to Cameroon's location at the crossroads between the north, west, and center of the continent. Some of the traditional dishes from Bantus, and Shuwa Arabs, as well as the legacy from the German, French and English colonial cultures include: fufu corn and *njama njama* (garden huckleberry leaves), brochettes, known locally as soya (a kind of barbecued kebab made from chicken, beef, or goat), *Sangah* (a mixture of maize, cassava leaf, and palm nut juice), *Mbanga* soup and *Kwacoco*...(Hamet al, 2017:55)

With respect to hospitality, Cameroonians are a very peaceful and loving people. Despite some challenges, Cameroon has made strides in promoting a culture of peace and tolerance. The fruit of this hospitality is the constant influx of tourists into the country. In 1971, 29,500 tourists visited Cameroon. This number rose to 100,000 tourists in 1975 and 130,000 in 1980. Most of them come from France, the United Kingdom and Canada, with business travelers making up one of the largest segments of Cameroon's tourists (Hudgens and Richard, 1999: 1154)

Cameroon equally demonstrates its ability to host international conferences in an arsenal of infrastructural dispositions. This ranges from accommodation to transport facilities. Accommodation infrastructures in Cameroon have steadily improved. The country offered 37 hotels with 599 rooms in 1960. This has risen to 203 hotels with 3,229 rooms in 1976. In 1980, the country offered 7,500 hotel rooms (DeLancey, Neh, and DeLancey 2010: 367) Some renowned hotels in the place are the Hotel Seme in Limbe, Hilton Hotel, Mount Febe Hotel in Yaounde, Sawa Hotel, in Douala, Mountain Hotel in Buea and the list is long. Nevertheless, the vast majority of these rooms are in two major cities (Gwanfogbe et al., 1983: 55). Besides accommodation, there are a good

⁶ According to the International Council on Archives, Yaounde has a surface area of about 180 square km, located at an altitude of 750 meters, with French and English as its official languages.

⁷ The four main cultural groups of Cameroon are the Fang-Béti cultural group of the South-Cameroonian tropical forest and other parts of Africa. It consists of over 20 distinctive tribes. Next is the grassland cultural group located in the Western and North-Western regions and hosts the Bamileke and Bamenda societies. There is also the coastal strip; home to the Sawa peoples. This region shares a rich historical lineage deeply rooted in ancestral values. The fourth and last is the Soudano-Sahelian cultural group.

number of seaports in Kribi, Limbe, Douala, Tiko are air ports in Garoua, Douala and Nsimalen-Yaounde that facilitated entry and exit of people and goods into and out of Cameroon⁸.

Fallouts From Cameroons' Hosting Of International Conferences

Cameroons' hosting of international conferences has been very beneficial to Cameroon. Implications of Cameroon's organization and hosting international organizations and conferences were political, security and socio-economic.

Political implications

Opportunities offered to Cameroon to host international conferences marked and guaranteed its sovereignty and engagement to international collaboration. For example, Cameroon's hosting the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1996 and Economic Community of Central African States enabled Cameroon to consolidate her foreign policy of non-interference, African unity and international cooperation adopted by President Ahmadou Ahidjo and Paul Biya (Ngoh, 2018: 327). It also solidified the country's role in continental affairs and enshrined Cameroon as a crucial member of the organization's history.

Security implications

These conferences often involve panel discussions, workshops, and presentations on various topics especially on national security. Cameroonians attending these conferences have gained valuable knowledge, insights, and best practices from international speakers and participants. A case in point is expertise acquired by the Cameroonian military at the Gulf of Guinea summit in Cameroon in 2018. This knowledge was applied in Cameroon by the navy and armed forces to enhance policies, security, programs, and initiatives to ensure maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea.

Socio-economic implications

These conferences have provided platforms for Cameroon to engage with other African and Western countries on issues related to gender equality, women's empowerment, the promotion of women's rights and advancing gender-related policies and initiatives within the country and the broader region. They have also allowed Cameroon to showcase its efforts and commitments in global challenges like climate change, economic depressions, the effects of globalization and many others (ONACC, 2019: 7). Hosting conferences brings global attention and increase visibility to Cameroon as a host country. It provides an opportunity for Cameroon to showcase its culture and achievements on an international platform. Cultural dance groups and other objects from the four corners of Cameroon exhibited during these conferences is enough to mirror the country's rich culture. This increased visibility contributed to the development of touristic sites, like the transformation of the former presidency into the National Museum. Besides, the hosting of sporting competitions also triggered the construction of facilities. In 1972 when Cameroon hosted its first African nations cup, only two stadia were fit to host the competition; the Ahmadou Ahidjo stadium in Yaounde and the Bepanda Reunification stadium in Douala. Today, Cameroon has world class stadia. This was thanks to the hosting of the female African nations cup in 2016 and the Male African nations cup in 2022 (Yerima, 2021). Some of these stadia are Japoma in Douala, Stade Roumbe Adjia in Garoua, Limbe Stadium, Kouekong stadium in Bafoussam, Paul Biya Omnisports stadium in Olembe-Yaounde, Ngoa-Ekelle stadium in Yaounde and the rehabilitation of many other existing ones (ANAFoot, 2024). Besides, there is the 5263 capacity Multipurpose sports complex inaugurated in Yaounde in June 19, 2009 (Noubissi, 2024). It has also opened Cameroon to networking and collaboration. Cameroons' hosted conferences brought together experts, policymakers and stakeholders from different countries and sectors have given Cameroonians the chance to interact and network with international participants, fostering collaborations, knowledge exchange and potential partnerships. For example, the 32nd Organization of the African Unity Summit in Yaounde in 1996 engendered the African Synergy, the first African First Ladies Summit, organized and hosted by Chantal Biya. Attended by first ladies from Botswana, Burundi, Cape Verde, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Malawi, Namibia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania, the summit

⁸ Martin A. Nkemngu, Facts and figures of the tragic protests, Cameroon tribune of 12 March 2008, p. 10.

focused on strategies to improve the lives of rural women, put an end to child labour and abuse, fight against HIV-AIDS⁹. Recognizing their powerful position as role models, spokeswomen, and advocates for their people, the African First Ladies Summit and the United States Doctors for Africa (USDFA) held another summit titled "Leadership for Health" in Los Angeles, California, in April 2009 (DeLancey, Neh & DeLancey, 2010: 24). These were the origins of inspirations of Cameroons first lady; Madam Chantal Biya to create The Chantal Biya Foundation, CERAC and subsequently CRACER which today put a smile on the faces of millions of Cameroonians and the world at large. This positive move of the first lady was a fruit of the 1996 OAU summit in Cameroon has ventilated the image of Cameroon, with Chantal Biya's multiple awards as UNESCO ambassador.

The recent ECCAS meeting held in Yaounde on the 16 December, 2024 was aimed to discussed critical issues such as regional security and financial challenges, The government of Cameroon profited for this occasion to strengthened bilateral relations with Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. It is important to note the frequent maltreatment and repatriation of Cameroonians in these countries. Besides, this meeting gave Cameroon the opportunity to consolidate her leading position in the sub-region. (Morgan, 2015). Though it was also risky for Cameroon hosting these conferences but the merits overshadowed the demerits

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Cameroon has played host to a number of sub regional, regional and world conferences due to its geostrategic position in Africa and its human and infrastructural potentials. Cameroon's natural and human potentials gave this country the opportunity to play host to UDEAC, ECCAS, OAU, AU, *Francophonie*, Commonwealth, Gulf of Guinea and many other international conferences and meetings. These advantages have also made Cameroon a seat of international institutions. Some of these agencies are UNICEF, UNHCR, OCHA, UNESCO, WEP, WHO... According to Manasse Aboya Endong (2018: 6), one of Cameroon's force to hosting Conferences and institutions is the country's diplomatic strength masterminded by President Paul Biya. Overall, Cameroon's hosting of these conferences has had far-reaching implications; political, security and socio-economic. This has guarantee its sovereignty, strengthened its regional cooperation, gain international visibility and many others. Though the country runs a risk in hosting these conferences, however, Cameroons' advantages in hosting international conferences out ways its risk. .

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