

Cameroon

Total population (July 2000 estimate): 15,422,000

Area: 475,440 km²

Annual population growth rate (2000): 2.47%

Life expectancy at birth (1998): 54.5 years

People not expected to survive to age 40 (1998): 27.4% of total population

GDP per capita (1998): US \$1474



Cameroon stretches from the bend of West Africa at the Atlantic Ocean to the Lake Chad area in the north. It is a country with varying climates and ecological zones, reaching from semi-arid savannah landscapes in the north to dense tropical rainforests in the south and southwest. The central part of the country is largely composed of upland savanna. A chain of volcanic centres straddles the coast along the border with Nigeria in a northeasterly direction.

Cameroon is a country well endowed with natural resources. The economy is largely dependent on income from crude oil production and agricultural production.

Food and export crops as well as livestock, fishing and forestry form the backbone of the agricultural economy of Cameroon. The agricultural sector provides 44% of the GDP and employs approximately 60% of the labour force. The main agricultural products for local consumption are cassava, bananas/plantains, maize and sorghum. The main export crop is cocoa, followed by coffee, cotton and rubber. In 1999, sugar production in Cameroon reached 1.35 million tonnes.

Cameroon is sub-Saharan Africa's fifth largest oil producer (in 2000: 84,800 barrels per day). Revenues from crude oil production account for approximately one third of government revenues. The planned Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline will cross Cameroon from the northeast to the southwest and deliver oil from Chad to the export facilities at Kribi at the Gulf of Guinea.

Cameroon hosts a number of small gold deposits, which are worked by small-scale miners. At present, Cameroon imports alumina from Guinea and processes it at the smelter at Edea, but is planning to develop some of its own bauxite resources.

Geological outline

Cameroon can be geologically subdivided into Precambrian rocks, Cretaceous sediments and Tertiary-Quaternary sedimentary sequences. Large parts of the Precambrian are undifferentiated gneisses and migmatites. Mesoproterozoic and the Neoproterozoic rocks are exposed in the southeastern part of the country. Some of these sequences are interpreted as platform or continental margin sediments at the edge of the Archean Congo craton, represented in Cameroon by the Ntem complex in the south (Toteu *et al.* 1994).

Cretaceous sediments overlie the Precambrian. In northern Cameroon the sedimentary facies of the Cretaceous is largely continental, while the Cretaceous in the coastal zone is mainly marine.

A zone of volcanic massifs and anorogenic complexes crosses Cameroon in a east-northeasterly direction. This 'Cameroon line' probably follows a major structural zone (Deruelle *et al.* 1991; Kampunzu and Lubala 1991).

AGROMINERALS

Phosphates

Little information exists on the phosphate rocks of Cameroon. Visse (1953) reported siliceous phosphatic nodules in the Bongue River valley (near Kompina), 50 km north-northwest of Douala on the coast. Here, slightly radioactive phosphatic nodules (1-3 cm in diameter) occur in black, 1-2 m thick lower Eocene marls (Dizangue Formation, Série de Bongue). The nodules contain 15-18% P₂O₅. At the top of the slightly phosphatic sequence (5-8% P₂O₅), are calcareous beds with phosphate pebbles containing 12-18% P₂O₅ (Visse 1953). The extent of these beds is not known.

Other agrominerals

Alkaline meta-igneous rocks from the Yaounde area contain some 'biotitites' with K_2O contents up to 11% and slightly elevated P concentrations (up to 2.9% P_2O_5) (Nzenti 1998).

There are several Precambrian marble deposits in the north of the country near Figuil, and in the south near Mintom. Some of the marbles are used as ornamental stone. Whether any of the Precambrian marbles are used for lime production is not known.

Cretaceous limestones occur in northern Cameroon, near Figuil. In the Cretaceous coastal basin, limestones are exposed near Kampina, Bongue River, Lagbadjeck/Dizangue and at the Mabanga River (Gwosdz 1996). Travertine deposits of Ngol village at the Nyock River are small but may lend themselves to small-scale limestone extraction.

Agromineral potential

Little information on agromineral resources is available from Cameroon. Extensive parts of Cameroon are covered by tropical nutrient-poor soils and it would be worthwhile to study the occurrences of phosphates and liming materials in this part of the country. In particular, the Eocene Bongue phosphates should be investigated for quantity and quality as well as for their potential extraction and subsequent use on P-deficient acid soils.

In addition, the 'biotitites' and magnetite-rich pyroxenites in southern Cameroon should be investigated for possible phosphate and potassium enrichment zones.

Cameroon's limestone/dolomite resources should be assessed on their potential as soil amendments on acid soils.

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