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Social protection and improvement of the human capital of the elderly in Cameroon

The ageing of the population on a planetary scale is one of the outstanding concerns of the 21st century. Thanks to medical advances, along with the reduction in the mortality rate as a corollary and hence an increase in life expectancy, we are witnessing everywhere in the world, albeit to varying degrees, a rapid increase in the number of people aged 60 and over.

If in 2018 for the first time in the world, people over 60 years old outnumbered children under 5 years old, the situation is however less alarming in sub-Saharan Africa where the elderly represent around 5% of the overall population, compared to 20% in developed countries.

The growing concern of the international community, including at the African level, with regard to ageing has materialized over time through a number of actions and resolutions, the most significant being:

- The holding of the first World Summit on Ageing in Vienna, Austria in 1982 resulting in the Vienna Plan of Action on Ageing;
- The adoption in 1990 by the United Nations General Assembly of October 1 of each year as the International Day of Older Persons;
- The adoption in 1991 of the United Nations Guiding Principles for Older Persons;
- The celebration in 1999 of the Year of Older Persons;
- The holding in 2002 in Spain of the 2nd World Assembly on Ageing resulting in the Madrid Plan of Action;
- The adoption by the African Union of the strategic orientation framework and the continental plan of action on ageing in June 2002;
- The adoption by the African Union in January 2016, of the Protocols to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, relating to the rights of older persons.

At the national level, the situation of older persons clearly emerges in this statement by the Cameroonian Head of State, **His Excellency Paul Biya**, to the national community on November 3, 2011: *"We should have the courage to acknowledge that the living conditions of our elderly and retired populations are very difficult, particularly in rural areas and around urban centres"*. In fact, in Cameroon, as in many other countries, old persons live in precariousness and isolation because of the social changes characterized in particular by the decline of family and community solidarity for the emergence of selfishness and individualism.

To cope with this situation, multisectoral actions aimed at promoting the participation of old persons in development and ensuring better living conditions for them are being carried out by various actors in the public and private sectors, with the support of bilateral and multilateral partners, and in the absence of a national platform for consultation with those concerned, the National Committee for Ageing (CONAVI) being still in its implementation phase. The translation of this political will takes the form of legal and institutional measures.

- *Legally*, the preamble to the Constitution recalls that **"The Nation protects (...) the elderly"**. In addition, numerous civil, criminal and social provisions have been introduced to reinforce this protection framework.

- At the institutional level,
- The Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS) incorporates a Directorate for the Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities and the Elderly and a Sub-Directorate for the Protection of the Elderly (SDPPA). In addition, the External Services and Technical Operational Units of MINAS provide daily close supervision of the elderly.
- The availability since 2012 of a **National Policy Document for the Promotion and Protection of the Elderly** which advocates for an inclusive society through five (5) major axes, namely: ***Health and well-being, participation, supportive and nurturing environment, Improvement of the living conditions of older persons and research on ageing.***
- The development since 2017 of a **National Action Plan** which operationalizes the implementation of the Policy Document.

More concretely, a certain number of large-scale actions for the elderly have been carried out at the macro level. Including:

- the creation of geriatrics pavilions in certain hospitals;
- improving the care of pensioners and introducing voluntary insurance at the CNPS;
- the automatic granting of a retirement pension to civil servants, from the first month following the cessation of activities;
- the production of volume 1 of the "**Guide to healthy and active ageing**";
- the ongoing construction of the **house of ages** whose mission is to provide seniors, their families and communities with a fulfilling living environment;
- the ratification by Cameroon on December 28, 2021 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the rights of older persons.

Improving the overall situation of the elderly requires:

- Better knowledge of their living conditions, expectations and needs;
- The mobilization of multifaceted solidarity at the family, community, national and international level;
- Strengthening intergenerational relations and the accountability of juniors to seniors.