

Sustainable management of natural resources crucial

Environmental protection, sustainable development and natural resources preservation are some of the fundamental pre-requisites and challenges that feature in Cameroon's "Vision 2035". As President Paul Biya emphasized, Cameroon's environmental challenge is to "preserve the green lung of the planet while ensuring forestry revenues at the same time".

InfocusReports speaks exclusively to Environment Minister, Pierre Hélé, in greater depth about this vision.

IF: Let's talk about the Durban Summit, which took place in January. What were the main concepts discussed, and to what extent is Cameroon concerned?

Minister Hélé: We were expecting a lot from it but the results have fallen behind our expectations in the four areas that comprise the Bali Action Plan, which speaks about a shared vision based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility; adaptation to harmful climate changes; attenuation thanks to REDD+ (national strategies of UN-REDD program) and MDP mechanisms; and implementation instruments (financing, technology transfer and capacity strengthening).

What are the main challenges for preservation and protection?

There is a lot of construction going on in the country and it is imperative we get the balance right. In December 2011, we changed to the "Ministry of Environment, Nature Preservation and Sustainable Development", widening our range of responsibilities to five strategic fields:

- Sustainable management of biodiversity, where the objective is to reverse the current trend of damage

to natural resources.

- Fighting against climate change; that goes mainly through avoiding damage, deforestation, and promoting preservation, sustainable management and reforestation.

- Fighting against desertification; the "Green Sahel" operation needs to be continued, so basically it implies growing trees in arid areas, especially in the north of the country.

- Fighting against pollution, nuisances and dangerous chemicals; we will implement a fiscal incentive system to favor the use of green and biodegradable substances. The systematic repression of polluters will also be implemented.

- Sustainable development promotion; we will ensure environmental compliance of every important socioeconomic project in the country. Indeed, environmental and social studies are mandatory before a project begins and as it develops audits must be performed.

As part of our plan to promote sustainable development, we are also calling upon our educators. Schools, from elementary to university level, must make people understand and live the realities of our world, of the environmental challenges it faces and how to tackle them. This is everyone's duty to preserve environment and promote sustainable development.

In terms of coastal preservation, do you intend to bring in new laws to ensure prevention and protection against pollution?

An institutional framework for coastal and marine protection already exists in Cameroon. We have representatives on our shores that can act at the very first alert. We also have a national inspection squad ready to intervene at any time.



Pierre Hélé, Minister of Environment, Nature Preservation and Sustainable Development

On top of that, Cameroon has made amendments to the Abidjan Convention protocol, about state cooperation in fighting pollution in a time of crisis, in order to strengthen our own national emergency plans in case hydrocarbons are spilled in the sea.

The environment and natural resources are fundamental pillars of Cameroon's development. What is your policy in terms of the sustainable management of those resources, especially in mining, water and hydrocarbons?

In accordance with the Convention on Biodiversity, we set up a sustainable management program of natural resources and biodiversity loss reduction. In order to implement it, we have carried out suitable strategies. We have programs for forestry, flora and fauna.

Mining resources are plentiful (bauxite, nickel, cobalt, iron ore, gold, diamond etc.) and a strict mining code was set up regarding their exploitation. Several mega



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Protecting and preserving Cameroon's natural balance is key priority for the country's government.

projects are being carried out at the moment.

We have many hydropower projects going on such as Nachtigal, Memvéele, Menchum, Mekin, Song Mbenge and of course Lom Pangar. That is very interesting for our country because we will have plenty of green and non-polluting energy, which we could even export.

Whatever the project, it is important to understand that every one of them must be compliant with environmental studies.

To what extent are you cooperating with China in your field?

Chinese cooperation is quite hard to quantify, because it is so broad

and diversified, in every sector and at every level. China is indeed a strategic partner for Cameroon. You only have to look around at the dams, conference centers, stadiums, roads, hospitals and so on. Cooperation goes beyond infrastructure, however. We have financial cooperation, as well as academic and technological.

In terms of urban development, the option chosen by the President is clear: the use of green energy, hydropower and solar energy especially. The goal is to absorb the energy deficit the country is currently facing, but to absorb it in a sustainable development fashion.

That's why we are putting the

emphasis on building dams and solar facilities. We support that step toward a greener economy. This is the trend and the challenge ahead is to achieve all this as quickly as possible.

Why should Chinese businesses select Cameroon?

Cameroon, known for its legendary hospitality, is pleased to welcome Chinese partners to its soil. It is a stable and peaceful country and has a very attractive investment code to match the many investment opportunities it offers. I invite Chinese people to come and invest in Cameroon so our two countries can grow together.



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Domestic producers get ready for partnership

Cameroon counts many ambitious companies eager to integrate into the globalized economy

With long-term sustainable development the leading priority for President Paul Biya, the Cameroon government is actively looking to increase water and energy resources. Among the targets that have been drawn up is an increase in access to drinking water from 35 percent to 60 percent by 2016 and to have 3,000 megawatts of power by 2020.

"Cameroon enjoys a total power production capacity of 1,017 megawatts, including 720 megawatts of hydroelectric power and 297.2 megawatts of thermal power," Basile Atangana Kouna, Minister of Water and Energy, explained.

"What these figures show is that the offer is very limited against the demand that is growing consistently. The government is therefore working to establish a sustainable supply both in terms of production and quality of service, spatial distribution and access to services across the territory. To achieve this, we have drawn up the Development Plan of the Electricity Sector by the year 2030. Investment required for its implementation is estimated at 4 trillion CFA (\$7.5 trillion)."

With a network of new gas and hydroelectric power plants earmarked for development across the country, AES-SONEL, the national company for electricity production, transport and distribution, is gearing up for major expansion.

A highly successful partnership between the state and the US-owned AES Corporation, which has a presence in 27 countries worldwide, AES-SONEL has increased electricity production by almost 30 percent in Cameroon since it began operations in 2001, significantly reducing the country's dependence on hydropower. During that time, it has invested more than 550 billion CFA in Cameroon in both production capacity and infrastructure, and played a key role in opening up the sector to globalization and increasing competitiveness.

As Jean David Bilé, General Manager of AES-SONEL, said: "Our growth rate over the last five years has been between 7 and 8 percent. Turnover for 2011 amounted to 222 billion CFA for a balance sheet valued at around 610 billion CFA.

"The sector is growing by more than 7 percent a year, which means a doubling of capacity every 15 years. The demand is enormous. Over the next 10 years, we will need to invest between 2 and 4 billion CFA in the sector. AES-SONEL is therefore keen to provide the necessary support to the government to attract additional private investors."

Camwater, the state water provider, is meanwhile, actively working with international donors to strengthen the water supply in urban areas and create new infrastructure.

The company has set up an investment program of around 400 billion CFA and is working on a two-phase project with China to develop the drinking water system in Douala.

"China provides valuable financial assistance and we benefit from their proven expertise in infrastructure," said General Manager Jean-Williams Sollo.

Harvesting growth

Thanks to abundant rain and fertile soils, Cameroon's agricultural producers are well prepared for expansion and development.

"We are fifth in the world in terms of cocoa, and 22nd in terms of coffee, yet we aim to market a high-quality product that will increase substantially in volume," Michael Ndoping, general manager of the National Board of Coffee and Cocoa (ONCC), explained.



Jean David Bilé, general manager of AES-SONEL

Created in 1991 to augment the production of cash crops, regulate exports and ensure international quality standards, ONCC is now promoting Cameroon's new image.

With cocoa the second-largest export after oil, it is vital the precious resource adds as much value to the economy as possible, which means processing the bean at home. "My vision of the cocoa sector is an industry modernized," said Jérôme

Mvondo of Cocoa Development Company SODECAO.

Palm oil has also proved to be a lucrative resource for Cameroon. One of the largest names in this field, Pamol Plantations Plc manages three estates that produce an annual output of 14,000 tonnes of palm oil, 1.5 million seeds, 1,200 tonnes of palm kernels, 1,400 tonnes of laundry soap and 520 tonnes of rubber.

In April, the company launched a program to extend the existing plantations and replant trees, and hopes to attract international investment to bring the endeavor to fruition.

General Manager Obi-Okpun Wanobi Osang said the project will go a long way to alleviating rural poverty. "Land has already been acquired for the new plantations and we have replanted palms on 1,500 hectares. We expect it to create around 3,000 direct jobs and up to 15,000 indirect jobs by completion," he said. "The market is very promising. We don't have enough palm oil to satisfy the local demand, so during the rehabilitation process, we will contribute our quota and reduce the imports

that affect our balance of payments. Pamol Plantations is a very profitable business with bright prospects and expectations both in the local and international markets.

"Abroad, the emphasis on biofuels underscores the high demand, so foreign companies are interested in investing here. We have the necessary wealth of experience and the economic requisites, so we call on them to join us."

Another flagship company, Camlait is the country's leading dairy producer. Thanks to a mass diversification strategy, Camlait boasts 15 percent annual growth and a 50 percent market share on fresh products.

"Cameroon is a dynamic country with many companies eager to integrate internationally," said CEO Paulin Landry Toukam Zuko.

"Camlait wishes to benefit from market opportunities to become a major player in the sub-region and needs partners to support this vision. Our expertise is not negligible and can interest foreign companies. We also have a good knowledge of the African market, and flexibility."

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