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## **The Impact of Gender and Spatial Differentials on Schooling Decisions: A Socio-Cultural Perspective of Cameroon**

**Summary:** This article discusses how socio-cultural views of families relate to schooling decisions in a developing context. It shows that socio-cultural interactive ways in Cameroon differ not only with respect to rural-urban settings and gender but also influence the ways families and other stakeholders make educational decisions. The article brings to light socio-cultural and interactive differences and influences in families' schooling decisions with respect to rural-urban as well as gender perspectives. How divergent are these aspects and what factors can be attributed to such differences? The higher values of Gini-coefficients between the urban and rural samples portray the relatively higher level of social inequality that exists in most developing countries. This also shows the effect of collectivist values that still exist in rural communities in developing countries. Through this comparison, the article affirms Hofstede's cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism. It further draws attention to the point that even within countries, different forms and values of cultures are practiced. These are important stepping stones that can guide national and global stakeholders in their educational and economic plans.

**Keywords:** gender, urban-rural, socio-cultural interaction, inequality, cultural dimensions, schooling decisions

**Zusammenfassung** (Die Wirkungen von Gender- und räumlichen Unterschieden auf Bildungsentscheidungen: eine soziokulturelle Perspektive Kameruns): Dieser Artikel beschreibt, wie sich sozio-kulturelle Ansichten von Familien auf Schulentscheidungen in einem Entwicklungsland auswirken. Gezeigt wird, dass sich soziokulturell-interaktive Möglichkeiten in Kamerun nicht nur in Bezug auf Stadt-Land-Einstellungen und Geschlecht unterscheiden, sondern dass sie auch die Art und Weise der Bildungsentscheidungen von Familien und anderen Akteuren beeinflussen. Der Artikel verweist auf soziokulturelle und interaktive Unterschiede und Einflüsse bei familiären Bildungsentscheidungen unter Beachtung ländlicher und städtischer sowie geschlechtsspezifischer Aspekte. Welche Abweichungen gibt es, und welche Unterschiede können auf diese Aspekte zurückgeführt werden? Die in dem Befund gezeigten höheren Werte des "Gini-Koeffizienten" zwischen der städtischen und ländlichen Probe porträtieren die relativ höheren Grade an sozialer Ungleichheit, wie sie in den meisten Entwicklungsländern existieren. Dies kennzeichnet auch die Wirkung kollektivistischer Werte in ländlichen Bevölkerungsgruppen in Entwicklungsländern. Durch diesen Vergleich werden auch Hofstedes kulturelle Positionen zu Individualismus und Kollektivismus gestärkt. Des Weiteren wird gezeigt, dass auch innerhalb der einzelnen Länder unterschiedliche Formen und Werte der Kulturen praktiziert werden. Dies sind wichtige Aspekte, die nationale und globale Akteure in ihren Bildungs- und Wirtschaftsplänen berücksichtigen können.

**Keywords:** Gender, Stadt-Land-Unterschiede, sozio-kulturelle Interaktion, Ungleichheit, kulturelle Dimensionen, Schulentscheidungen

**Резюме:** (Брендан Нгелоо Абамуког: Влияние гендерных и территориальных различий на образовательные решения: социо-культурная перспектива Камеруна): данная статья описывает, как социо-культурные взгляды семьи в развивающейся стране воздействует на школьные решения. В статье показывается, что социо-культурно-интерактивные возможности в Камеруне отличаются не только в отношении город-село и пола, но и что они оказывают влияние на способ принятия школьных решений семьей и других участников. Статья указывает на социо-культурные и интерактивные различия и влияния при принятии семейных образовательных решений с учетом сельских и городских, а также специфических гендерных аспектов. Какие

*существуют расхождения, и какие различия объясняются данными аспектами? Более высокие значения «коэффициента Гини», показанные в результатах исследования, между городской и сельской пробой создают портрет более высоких степеней социального неравенства, которое существует в большинстве развивающихся стран. Это характеризует также влияние коллективистских ценностей в сельских группах населения развивающихся стран. Благодаря данному сравнению усиливаются также культурные позиции Хофстеде к индивидуализму и коллективизму. Далее показывается, что и внутри отдельных стран практикуются отдельные формы и ценности культур. Это важные аспекты, которые могут учитывать национальные и глобальные деятели в своих образовательно-экономических планах.*

**Ключевые слова:** *гендер, различия города и села, социо-культурное взаимодействие, неравенство, культурные масштабы, школьные решения*

## **Problem Description**

Diverse ecological conditions, differing cultures, varied languages and traditional beliefs make Cameroon to be commonly referred to not only as “Africa in miniature” but also as a mosaic of differing cultures, united only by an accident of colonial history (Brock & Cammish, 1997). The result of this diversity includes the existence of a varied human response and adaptation, which comes along with socio-cultural complexity. Also, the existence of a number of significant urban clusters, associated with administrative and economic development such as Yaoundé (political capital) and Douala (economic capital), promote the development of corridors of modernization, which intend to encourage urbanization at a possible expense of rural societies and their economies, especially through an increase in rural-urban exodus. This can result in the existence of a very complex social geography in such urban centers, caused partly by the massive rural-urban exodus in the country. Such complexities come along with related educational implications, among other factors.

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The universal validity and recognition of education as an important factor in increasing both individual and societal developmental and productive capacity is not debated, e.g., as a way to achieve peace (German Commission for United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2013); as a medium for the formation of a supranational identity (Europa-Union Deutschland, 1995, p. 6) or as a lever of economic growth (European Parliament 2000, p. 3; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2010, p. 3). However, despite universal efforts granted for education for all through the MDGs, high disparities with respect to gender, place of residence and social class, among other factors, continue to exist in most developing contexts (Dongmo & Nguetse, 2012). With respect to gender, for example, it has been acknowledged that a universal bias exists in favor of males, which is a deterrent to females taking up and following through with educational opportunities (Brock & Cammish, 1997). In a developing context like Cameroon, this disparity is partly attributed to “the widespread operation of patriarchal systems of social organization; of customary early marriage; of the incidence of early pregnancy (in and out of marriage); of heavier domestic and subsistence duties of females (especially in rural areas)” (Brock & Cammish, 1997, p. 2).

Such a lower regard for the value of female life can adversely affect the participation of girls and women in formal education and can eventually result in a decline in female role models who could help challenge the traditional ways in most rural settings. With its complex social geography, this is not different in Cameroon. The distributive aspect and structure of the population is therefore very important in guiding policy makers and other stakeholders to ensure social development and inclusion, with the aim of improving human capital (Dongmo & Nguetse, 2012). However, if not relatively and equally distributed, the result can be a negative effect of income scattering as well as a lack of social cohesion throughout the country and beyond.

The nature of cultural complexity in the Cameroonian context therefore contributes to the existence of a great diversity in traditional attitudes in rural and urban settings and more particularly towards women and girls. It is, for example, to this date not easy to generalize problems of female participation in both community activities and employment, among other areas. This drawback in generalizability can partly be associated with the geographical aspect of educational penetration of the country by various Christian missionaries (Dongmo & Nguetse, 2012), with the focus of promoting education for the boys first and only later on for the girls. This has partly contributed to the current gender disparity in education and other sectors in Cameroon. This disparity does not limit itself to gender but is also witnessed between rural and urban centers in almost all parts of the country. Factors which make this dichotomy prevail also include the practice of polygamy (more common in rural areas), family size (most often bigger in rural settings) and whether mothers work outside the home, among other factors which tend to negatively affect the role, status and education of females in the country.

The problem of female participation in Cameroon remains less acknowledged (Brock & Cammish, 1997), partly due to the presence of diverse socio-cultural attitudes. The majority of Cameroonian women have tended to remain in marginal positions and mostly oppressed, irrespective of their parallel and complimentary roles. For example, Cameroonian women were and are still considered assets to be given in marriage to the highest bidder. Although the father's role and influence tends to be decreasing, the operation of a patriarchal system and the custom of bride price have also made the investment in the education of girls less attractive, especially to rural parents, when compared to that of boys. It is therefore not a surprise that girls in most rural tribal groups are prepared to be good house-keepers and mothers as they are mostly viewed as a transitory figure within family groups.

Though party to many major international treaties and forums concerning women's rights (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW], the Beijing Declaration Platform for Action), as well as the support granted to women's initiatives in both the Ministry of Women's Affairs and several other gender related NGOs, the Cameroonian government has recently demonstrated only a surface-level commitment to increasing the right of women in the country (Montemarana, D. 2011). Although the government constitutionally recognizes gender equality as well as encourages women's political participation at the national level (cf. Montemarano, 2011), social, economic and political inequality still remains a reality for many women in the country.

The impact of fewer women in key positions of political power does not only affect the urban setting. This trend has tended to be a strong factor in rural areas, resulting in a host of problems confronting rural women in particular. The result is the existence of traditional prejudices, favoring gender inequality and female subjugation. As a consequence, issues such as education and drop-out gaps between boys and girls, economic inequality and violence against women, among other problems, continue to remain significant for the country's female population (Montemarano, 2011). Tenikue (2007) for example argues that a weak female aged 12-15 is less likely to be enrolled in school compared to a weak male of the same age. Seng (2006) also supports the point that dropping out is caused by a combination of factors, including male privileges, especially in most African settings, which often exclude women from most decision-making processes. Gender and spatial inequality has therefore remained a problem for Cameroonian women in all spheres of the economy (work place, government view, social settings, among others). This is more prevalent in rural settings, where traditional gender rules tend to dominate social and political life.

Therefore, to understand human social life and interaction we need a crucial understanding of culture. Without culture, social life would be hard to imagine. While other species mostly rely on their

instincts in order to survive, human beings use culture to do so. It is therefore human nature to use culture either to reproduce meaning as we engage with each other, with the objects which surround us and with the environments we are part of. Humans therefore categorize and identify others on the basis of gender, place of residence, race, etc. In doing so, we include and exclude as well as (re)produce symbolic and moral boundaries in order to make things happen. Likewise, unlike other species, we turn the world and ourselves into objects that we try to understand and act upon. This form of culture includes manifestations such as religion and other beliefs that are usually enacted and embedded in institutions, fields, organizations and social networks.

But how was the Cameroonian social life structured even before colonization? Though tentative in nature, the knowledge of the pre-colonial past and earlier social life of African societies opens up the possibility of understanding and accessing the importance of resistance to penetration by the capitalist system, especially into traditional sectors of the continent. This also helps to highlight the causes of setbacks to current attempts at modernization in these sectors. Before the colonial era, bands of individuals grouped together and lived by hunting and gathering, sharing equitably. This total solidarity lifestyle is partly a result of the uncertainty of the conditions of life in Africa during that era and to some extent helps to reveal a scenario that can contribute to understanding the stagnation, regression, and crisis that Africa is experiencing today in political, economic and social domains. It is therefore reasonable to believe that the division that threatens a country's internal cohesion and solidarity is partly rooted in its society, geography, and demographic setup (Ayuk, 2001). It is within this background that this article discusses how socio-cultural factors influence schooling decisions with respect to gender and place of residence. Do socio-cultural interactive ways vary regarding rural and urban settings as well as in terms of gender? Do they shape how families and other stakeholders make educational decisions? What differences exist in the relationship between social ties and educational decisions for urban and rural settings and gender, and which socio-cultural factors can be attributed to such differences? Are such differences in line with some aspects of Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions? What implication does this have for both national and international educational policy makers and other stakeholders?

## **Linking Cameroon's education system to its colonial past**

To this day, Cameroon has two parallel education systems. To ease understanding of its current education structure and system, it is worth highlighting its colonial past. Even by African standards the modern notion of Cameroon is an artificial construction (Lee & Schultz, 2012). It unites four major ecological areas (coastal lowland, tropical highland, tropical plateau, and arid savanna), three major religious traditions (Islam, Christianity and Animism) and hundreds of ethnic and linguistic groups. The creation of this mixture can be associated to the Germans, Cameroon's initial colonizers. In 1884, Germany colonized Cameroon. The signing of the Germano-Douala treaty in July 1884, whereby Cameroon became a German protectorate, marked this event. With the success of the Allied Powers during the First World War, Britain and France invaded Cameroon and with the help of the League of Nations (L.O.N), the territory was divided between Britain and France, and administered first under the League of Nation's mandate and later under the United Nations' trusteeship. Britain got two small portions along the Nigerian border in the West known as North British Cameroon and South British Cameroon and the French got the rest of the territory. France administered its part as an independent territory whereas Britain administered its portion from Lagos in Nigeria. Though reunited at independence in 1960 with a strong policy of centralization, the two areas have nevertheless retained separate legal and education systems and a strong attachment to the language and culture of their respective colonizers.

At the break of independence however, French Cameroon, due to the fact that France considered it one of its model colonies, had a much higher Gross National Product (GNP) per capita and much higher social indicators than the British territory, which was considered by Great Britain as a marginal province of the colony of Nigeria. Due to the above reasons, Cameroon has today two subsystems of education: the Anglophone system of education based on the Anglo-Saxon model and the Francophone system based on the French model. Although the two are used side by side, a bilingual system of education is also operational at the university level where studies are carried out in both English and French (Echu, 2013).

The English-speaking region (where this study was based) consists of the Southwest and Northwest provinces, and the French region (dominant in numbers and power) consists of the remaining eight provinces. The English-speaking region is divided into two cultural regions. The Grassfields peoples of the Northwest province (made up of nearly one hundred chiefdoms each ruled by a divine king (*Fon*, with a patrilineal kinship system) and the people of the Southwest region (with a less hierarchical system of governance and social organization) have diverse cultural values based on wealth and education. Though a sense of a common national culture created through shared history, schooling, national holidays and symbols exists throughout Cameroon, ethnic distinctiveness still prevails and ethnic identity has become an increasingly important source of social capital in the country.

### **National variations in socio-cultural relations: a cause for concern?**

The consideration of internal national studies as a focus in comparative analysis has long been controversial (Lor, 2011). However if an internal study is in itself not comparative, a good description of individual cases can be useful as raw material for comparisons or as the first steps in a comparative study (Lor, 2011; Hörner, 1993). Moreover, a study of a single country can be very intensive if conducted in considerable detail (Lor, 2011). However some scholars may not be persuaded by such arguments. In such cases, local variations in regional and informal institutions are taken to be of less value. On average however, the most important structures of national political economy tend to be determined by national regulations. Likewise, subnational comparative methods can help overcome some major limitation of existing work on neoliberal reforms which include extreme dependence on aggregate national level data, among other factors (Culpepper, 2005). Therefore, according to Culpepper, (2005) comparative politics is best portrayed when comparative cases are used to illuminate general mechanisms of social and political causation. This therefore implies that what is important in finding out the benchmark against which the quality of comparative research is assessed is such a test and not the number of countries involved in a study (Culpepper, 2005). This is also true when exploring internal national variations in socio-cultural relations in a developing context like Cameroon.

The differences in the practice of modern or Western lifestyles in urban areas and traditional ways of life in rural areas make socio-cultural relations of populations complex, especially in developing countries (Lissock et al., 2011; Mbanya et al., 1988; Njong 2010). For pedagogical reasons also, spatial analysis can be divided between analysis of location and analysis of interaction (Grasland, 2009). This implies that studying the variability of individualism and collectivism, for example, should not be limited only to cross-cultural studies since people at times perform actions which reflect both traits. Internal studies, for example, can also point out the importance of separating specific institutional differences from broad cultural and historical factors (Lee & Schultz, 2012). Exploring internal variations therefore do not only give us the opportunity to study the effect of institutions



and policies on post-independence outcomes but also guide us on how to manage and avoid many of the identification problems that plague cross-national studies (Culpepper, 2005).

Moreover, the usage of nations as cultural entities by many studies in cross-cultural psychology, among other fields, can lead to the omission of sources of variations within cultural contexts as well as the treatment of national cultures as homogenous and territorially defined units. A failure to take internal variations into consideration can also lead to an overgeneralization of personal attributes, since nations are made up of individuals with diverse backgrounds as well as varied positions in the social structure. Since the study of the spatial behavior of individuals and groups seems to be a subject that has been largely overlooked in the social sciences (Grasland, 2009), acknowledging an internal national variation is thus essential in cross-cultural comparisons.

Individualism and collectivism are understandably the most popular concepts used theoretically and empirically in contemporary cross-cultural psychology (cf. Green et al., 2005). These concepts try to explain and predict differences in attitudes, values, behaviors, socialization and communication, among other factors. In individualist societies, for example, people mostly tend to look after themselves and their direct families. In collectivist societies, on the other hand, people belong to 'in-groups' that take care of them in exchange for loyalty (Green et al., 2005). Individualist traits are frequently used to characterize people from the West, while non-Westerners are described with collectivist features. Though derived frequently due to their complex constructs (Green et al., 2005), typical attributes associated with individualism include independence, autonomy, self-reliance, achievement orientation and competition, among other attributes. Collectivism, on the other hand, is associated with a sense of duty towards one's group, interdependence with others, a desire for social harmony and conformity with group norms. This implies that behaviors and attitudes of collectivists are determined by norms or demand of the in-group such as extended family or close-knit communities (compare Green et al., 2005). However, the point that cultural and national groups are frequently differentiated from each other also must be emphasized.

In illustrating Hofstede's framework for cross-cultural communication, for example, De Mooij & Hofstede (2011) describe how a society's culture can affect the values of its members and how these values relate to behavior. However the usage of Hofstede's framework for cross-cultural analysis makes it possible to distinguish between countries but not to differentiate between members of societies. This can result in a lack of individuals' personalities and eventual less information about organizational and individual variations within similar socio-economic circumstances. Citing the example of gender, it can be said that a man's culture differs from that of a woman in most societies and the degree of gender differentiation in a given country depends primarily on its culture and history. Evaluating the diverse nature of socio-cultural relations within a country with respect to gender and place of residence can therefore serve as a guide to both national and global education and economic stakeholders.

## **Methodology**

The results presented in this article are based on a section of a quantitatively based comparative survey carried out during a PhD program in Germany and Cameroon (for a summary of the variations between the countries, see Ngeloo & Jobst (2016). The theoretical part of the study focuses on the social capital theory of Coleman (1988) and explores variations in the relationship between social capital and school decisions for at-risk young adults. Coleman sees social capital to be inherent in the structures of relations between and among actors. He argues that social capital "is not a single action but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of

social structures and they facilitate certain actions of actors – whether persons or corporate actors – within the structure” (Coleman, 1988, p. 98). The social structure that enables people to act consists of three forms of social capital: trust/expectations, information channels and social norms (Coleman, 1988). Coleman linked these sociological reflections to schooling and carried out one of the first studies that combined the fields of social capital theory and dropout (Coleman, 1988, 2000). In this study, he identifies a correlation between levels of social capital possessed by a student and the tendency to drop out of school before completion of high school. However, this article focuses only on the internal national results gained from the Cameroonian sample and illustrates how differences in socio-cultural views influence school decisions for families with respect to place of residence and gender. The empirical base of the analysis lies in the individual level of socio-cultural relationships of youths with their societies. Respondents to this survey were therefore drawn from a homogeneous population made up of youths from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds in both rural and urban settings in Cameroon. The assumption here was that socio-cultural factors will have similar effects on school decisions irrespective of gender and area of residence.

### *Data and methods*

The following analysis is based on a questionnaire (see also Ngeloo & Jobst, 2016) carried out with about 70 school dropouts in Cameroon. Though no consensus exists on how to define a school dropout (Pallas, 2002), a dropout is considered to be someone who leaves school before high-school completion. For the purpose of this article, dropping out of high school was associated with a status drop and provided cumulative data on dropouts among young adults within a specified age range. The participants therefore included young adults in the age ranges between 17 and 25, with a few above 25 years but not older than 30.

“Snow-ball sampling” was used in contacting the participants. This technique was chosen due to its advantage as an ascending methodology for locating and bringing into focus at the ground level citizens who are needed to fill knowledge gaps on a variety of societal contexts. Through this technique therefore, it was possible to access populations previously hidden in society and it also helped in finding participants who initiated chain referrals with some initial respondents, engaging them as unofficial research participants (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

The questionnaires were prepared during a nine-month guest-research stay at the German National Youth Institute (DJI). The questionnaire content included questions dealing with the educational paths of the youths, their present situation as well as aspects of socio-cultural relations with parents, schools and communities during school years. Such factors must have influenced their decisions to quit school before high-school graduation.

Due to the large number and diverse nature of the variables selected from the theoretical framework on which this article is based (cf. Coleman, 1988; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004), a pre-evaluation analysis was carried out via factor analysis (principal-component analysis). This aided in reducing the data as well as in constructing latent independent factors for further analysis, with the intent to help reduce the problem of multi-collinearity, a pre-condition for multiple regression and correlation analysis (Schöneck & Voß, 2005). In doing so, the instruments for data measurement (such as Chronbach’s alpha, Kaiser Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy as well as the Bartlett Test of Sphericity) were also validated and the level of generalizability and reliability of the findings estimated (Schöneck & Voß, 2005). The newly created latent and uncorrelated independent factors were then given values and used in the analysis for multiple linear regressions (types of relationships) and multiple linear correlations (strengths of relationships) between the individual

independent variables and the level of education attained by at-risk youths before disengaging with the schooling process, which was the dependent variable for the study (Schöneck & Voß, 2005). Depending on the identified differences in types and strengths of relationships between social relations and school decisions with respect to place of residence and gender, socio-cultural factors were used to explain the differences.

### *Analysis and findings*

To avoid multi-collinearity (Schöneck & Voß, 2005), all 27 initial variables for this study were reduced to a smaller number (5) of newly derived latent and independent factors that were considered to be adequately summarizing the information in the original data set and could therefore be used for further analysis (Ngeloo & Jobst, 2016). This was followed by the usage of standardized scores of the newly created variables for multiple regression and correlation analysis. The usage of factorial analysis therefore necessitated the revelation of patterns that could not be easily found in analyzing each original variable separately. The 5 main factors retained for the final analysis were extracted with the help of the “Eigen values” and the “screeplot”. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was chosen for the analysis (Kinner & Gray, 1995; Schöneck & Voß, 2005). For details about selecting factors that permitted usage of PCA, see Ngeloo & Jobst, (2016).

In line with the main objective of this article, the following variations in types and strengths of relationships were identified with respect to place of residence and gender as seen in Table 1 below. However, only results with significant levels of variances were included in the discussion and they are highlighted in asterisks.

Table 1: Variations in social capital variables and school decisions with respect to gender and place of residence in Cameroon

Model with strengths of relationships (standardized coefficients-Beta)	Male <b>(27.5%)</b>	Female <b>(22.2%)</b>	Urban <b>(06.9%)</b>	Rural <b>(66.0%)</b>
Constant (dependent variable)	1.879	1.744	1.890	2.066
Financial stand of direct and extended family standing	.188	.046	.067	.711*
Mother’s level of education	.177	.159	-.109	.578*
Parent-child closure	.417*	-.019	.155	.130
Parent-teacher cooperation	-.246	-.223	-.074	.759*
Peer-peer interaction	-.076	-.361	-.164	.439*
Valid No.	32	37	42	27

Source: extracted from multiple regression and correlation analysis; (cf. Ngeloo & Jobst, 2016; Ngeloo, 2016, p. 117 (forthcoming)); dependent variable defined as level of education (1= primary & 2= secondary)

As can be seen in Table 1 above, multiple regression analysis shows that an increase in “financial standing”, “mother’s education”, “parent-teacher-cooperation” and “peer-peer interaction” show a corresponding positive increase on school decisions for rural youths in Cameroon. No significant relationships were registered for the urban sample. With respect to gender, a positive relationship



was identified between “parent-child closure” and school decisions of the male sample irrespective of place of residence.

Multiple correlation analysis on the other hand also showed higher strengths of relationships for the rural sample. When combined, for example, all variables are statistically able to explain 66.0% variance in the schooling decisions of at-risk rural youths in Cameroon as seen in Table 1 above. This is followed by the percentage value for males (27, 5%), then that of females (22, 2%). As also noticed in Table 1 above, all variables when combined were able to explain only 06.9% variation in the schooling decisions of Cameroonian youths in urban centers. This high disparity in Gini-coefficients between rural and urban findings can be said to be in line with the high level of social inequality that exist in most developing contexts. The Gini-coefficient was proposed by Corrado Gini (an Italian sociologist) as a measure of inequality of income or wealth and measures the inequality among values of a frequency distribution. The above results can be summarized with the following points:

- Social capital in rural settings has positive impacts on school decisions for youths in such areas.
- Increase in “parent-child closure” positively relates to schooling decisions for Cameroonian males.

Interpreting the above results will imply that social-cultural interactive patterns in rural settings in Cameroon positively influence the ways families and other stakeholders make educational decisions when compared to the situation in urban settings. However, the results show very minimal differences between social capital and schooling decisions with respect to gender. What do these results imply and which socio-cultural factors can be accounted for with such differences?

## **Discussion: Socio-cultural factors as reasons for variations in schooling decisions?**

Based on the above findings, this discussion focuses on answering the following questions: *Why does “parent-child closure” relate positively to schooling decisions only for the male sample? Which socio-cultural beliefs and interactive patterns exist in rural areas that favor schooling decisions and why are such factors lacking in urban settings? What factors can account for the great gap in Gini-coefficients between the rural and urban samples?*

Though gender equality seems to be a fundamental condition for the full enjoyment of human rights by both women and men and despite existing international efforts that promote and defend women’s rights, gender inequalities still persist in a wide range of areas (Robert, 2014). With respect to Cameroon and other developing countries, cultural beliefs have persisted especially in remote rural settings, though they are decreasing. Such beliefs have also been mostly detrimental to the wellbeing of the female child. How often a parent discusses and assists his or her child in educational matters, among other things, has tended to be more advantageous for the wellbeing of the male child.

Moreover, Cameroonian household schedules are often structured in such a way that most of the household tasks and activities are carried out by the female child. For example girls, especially in rural areas in Cameroon, tend to do more work at home and even in market places. Such alternative demands made on the time of female children negatively affect their educational efforts. Though decreasing, some rural families for example still believe that the female child belongs to another family and some parents will not want to “waste” their limited resources on the schooling programs of female children. Such micro-outcomes are in line with the macro-national context in the country.

National patterns in Cameroon have also shown overall lower levels of employment particularly for female Cameroonians even for those working with the state labor force.

Globally, it has also been acknowledged that mothers bear a large part of the burden of educating children. This is particularly the case in most polygamous homes in rural African settings, where each wife has more direct responsibility for her children compared to the husband. A mother's academic standing also measures the degree to which she is open to influences other than traditional ones, especially in rural settings in Africa (Tenikue, 2007). However, since most women in rural settings tend to be less educated, they rely mostly on traditional beliefs that put more value on educating the boy child. It is therefore not surprising that an increase in "parent-child closure" will for example lead to a corresponding increase in the decisions of male children to stay in school till graduation. Tenikue (2007) for example argues that a weak female aged 12-15 is less likely to be enrolled in school compared to a weak male of same age. Seng (2006) also supports the point that dropping out is caused by a combination of factors including male privileges especially in most African settings, which often exclude women from most decision-making processes. This implies that rural parents should be educated on the significance of education especially for the wellbeing of the girl child. Since traditional gender roles tend to limit the psychological and social possibilities for women, training girls to be more competitive, and more rational and rule-oriented can make them more self-confident and courageous in all they do. Though already practiced in some areas, the dismissal of old traditional thoughts such as those which give male children more privilege at the detriment of their female counterparts should be enforced.

As noticed in the urban-rural differences in Table 1 above, socio-cultural beliefs and interactive patterns in rural areas favor schooling decisions for the rural youths. This is not the case with the urban sample. One begins to question why increase in "*parent-teacher cooperation*"; "*economic viability*", "*peer interaction*" and "*mother's education*" show positive effects only for the rural sample. Such differences are partly linked to the higher level of trust as well as higher degree of collectivism that exist in most rural settings in developing countries. The positive relationship between socio-cultural interactions and school decisions for the rural sample also corresponds with the solidarity form of lifestyle that existed in most remote areas in Africa prior to the colonial era. Before the colonial era, bands of individuals grouped together and lived by hunting and gathering, sharing equitably. This total solidarity form of life started partly due to much uncertainty in Africa before European colonization.

This is not different from Hofstede's argument in his cultural dimensions. This article therefore does not only support Hofstede's view but also accentuates the point that even within countries, different types and values of cultures such as collectivism and individualism can be practiced side by side.

Moreover, the article supports the point that schooling effects are positive in areas where parents know the parents of their children's friends. What Coleman (1988) calls 'intergenerational closure', goes hand in hand with the collective lifestyle and is practiced in most rural developing settings, where higher levels of trust and voluntary community activities take place. The higher correlation scores registered for the rural sample in this article are therefore partly associated with the higher degree of intergenerational closure that exist in ways of interactions in most rural settings in developing countries. An increase in the level of intergenerational closure can therefore result in a corresponding increase in individual and societal trust levels. This in turn tends to increase the level of transparency in communities. It is therefore not a surprise that an increase in socio-cultural relations between teachers and parents as well as between children and their parents in most rural context in developing countries leads to positive school decisions. Such relationships are very limited in urban set-ups in Cameroon and other developing countries, which are lamentably a host to many

fostered families and children. In contrast to Western societies, most African families and households often extend beyond nuclear boundaries. About 10% of all Cameroonian children for example spend their schooling years in fostered urban families (Eloundo-Enyegue & Shapiro, 2004). Limited collective lifestyles in urban areas, for example, and the emulation of individualist thoughts partly result in the unequal treatment of fostered and biological children at the detriment of the former. Globalization and its effect of rapid transformation of family structures also result in youths in some instances being left alone to face the challenges of their world (Livingstone, 2007). Efforts therefore need to be put in place on how to adjust the impact of globalization and give families, especially working parents, active time spent with their children. This will for example indirectly reduce the global nature of lost childhoods partly due to uncontrolled internet usage.

At the level of pedagogical content in schools, more local knowledge and practices may be included into the school curriculum (Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011). This will help make the education system more relevant and context-based for learners. However this is already in practice in some areas but failures are still being noticed, especially as subjects such as agriculture and animal husbandry are not highly encouraged to adapt to sustainable situations. In rural zones for example, children are still being forced to leave school because they are needed to provide enough means of support to their families. The high rate of graduate unemployment in the country also continuously raises questions about the current curriculum and its relevance to the job market. The school curriculum therefore needs to be adjusted with more local knowledge and the experiences of teachers and students (even those outside the school) need to be integrated into the school's curriculum.

Just like other studies (Cipollone & Rosolia, 2007), this article emphasizes that peer effects are strong and suggests that peer interactions have an important impact on social returns. Therefore, to reduce or eliminate the lesser effects that "peer-peer interaction" has on the schooling decisions for Cameroonian urban youths school activities should be officially structured to include more organized and well-structured extra-curricular activities. The pedagogical content of the school curriculum should also meet the practical demands in Cameroonian society. This will sensitize especially at-risk youths during their early schooling years to the importance of such activities as they will be able to receive early orientations on how to achieve better outcomes from such interactions. This should be encouraged alongside community sensitization to the importance and mobilization to involve in educational practices.

Similarly, community organizations may be uncertain of the role or impact that youth may have in their efforts (Israel et al., 2001). Viewing young people as transient, participating in too many other activities and having less predictable schedules, some community organizations have excluded youths in their activities. It is also obvious that the extent to which a youth can contribute to the decision-making process of organizations and play an active role in program/policy development is important in shaping youth involvement. The active involvement of youth in community activities should therefore be encouraged as this will assumedly highlight their values and provide an opportunity to erase negative stereotypes. In addition, parents especially of at-risk school-aged children should be encouraged to become knowledgeable about their children's social contexts. Monitoring children's activities should therefore include not only knowing where one's children are, but also who their friends and peer associates are. It is also important to provide life options that give children constructive and safer opportunities for personal growth.

However, the recommendations proposed above (mindful of Cameroon's peripheral state in the global social economy) will be effective only if grants especially for educational purposes as well as the conditionality of such grants by external donor organizations are reasonable and sustainable to the African perspective. Most developing countries tend to support ambitious goals by global policy

makers in the area of education, for example, fostering an exchange of experience and keeping countries on specific education targets. This also involves goals in gender equity by the United Nations and poverty reduction strategies. Unfortunately, most developing countries are unlikely to meet the specific targets set by such global donors. For example, for its part the Cameroonian government with its quite passive foreign policy (Bertelsmann Foundation, 2012) is unable to claim any management successes as the state is only gradually starting to identify itself with a reform program that was demanded and to a larger extent formulated by donors. Notwithstanding, the Cameroonian government has also been referred to as one of the most disappointing adjusters by the World Bank in the first half of the 1990s and it still shows the tendency of playing donors against each other (Bertelsmann Foundation, 2012). It is therefore not surprising that, despite large-scale international programs such as education for all, enrollment and retention rates in Africa seem to continue to decline as pupils, parents and employers realize that formal education is not delivering what it has promised (underlying problems of African schools remain the same: low relevance to the real world outside school, inadequate and inappropriate learning, among other factors) (Smith, 2003). This shows that features of the colonial past still indirectly influence parents' decisions to keep children in school due to dictated school terms and attendance times without any flexibility to suit local realities of fishing and farming, among other sectors.

## **Conclusions, Implications and Limitations**

This article analyses the relationship between socio-cultural variables and schooling decisions in the Cameroonian context with respect to place of residence and gender and concludes that socio-cultural values in rural areas have positive effects on the schooling decisions of youths. With respect to gender, "parent-child closure" showed positive effects on the schooling decisions of male students. Meanwhile, higher regression and correlation scores were registered for the rural sample. These variations in forms and strengths of relationships between socio-cultural relations and schooling decisions with respect to gender and place of residence do not only depict the high value of social inequality that exists in most developing contexts but is also linked to the practice of a collectivist lifestyle in rural areas in Cameroon and other developing countries. The practice of the pre-colonial way of collectivism that still exists in rural settings in Africa vis-à-vis the emulation of the Western culture of individualism in urban centers partly accounts for such differences.

This paper therefore through its internal national analysis supports the sustainable nature of the culture of collectivism in most developing contexts against the idea of individualism, which, despite its strengths, is less sustainable in the African context. However, due to the ideologically-backed social relations involved in the act of collectivism that at times constitute barriers to development, this paper warns against the over-romanticization of such traditional village structures. This also concerns the lineage, tribal or caste relations that exist in most countries at the village level, solidly sustained by fossilized ideologies, which are sometimes very hostile to progress.

In summary, unlike Yu (2007), this article concludes that socio-cultural views influence schooling decisions with respect to gender and spatial location and therefore emphasizes the point that one model of school effectiveness does not fit all local contexts. Therefore, for school effectiveness measures to be globally realized this must be taken into consideration by both national and global stakeholders when implementing foreign patterns into other local contexts. School effectiveness research findings should therefore not be applied mechanically without any references made to the particular socio-cultural contexts of a school or a country.

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