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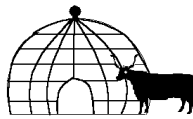
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'Organization with special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN'

OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES FROM THE 14 TO THE 15TH OF DECEMBER 2010;

PRESENTATION ON SOCIAL SECURITY AND MINORIY WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN CAMEROON.

BY HAWE BOUBA

**NATIONAL VICE PRESIDENT OF THE MBORORO SOCIALE AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT
ASSOCIATION OF CAMEROON**

Minority rights are human rights. They are individual as well collective rights, belonging to nationals, religious, ethnic and linguistic groups, who are minorities as compared to the rest of the population.

It is important to note that political factors influenced the formulation of minority rights, and this was decisive in the aftermaths of the 1st world war when the vainquors proceeded to the redefinition of frontiers according to the principle of nationality.

A principle understood as a right for all nations to constitute themselves in all independence and by so doing to do everything possible to take into account minority population by race, language, and religion.

While in Europe the minority issues were defined, regulated on normative and institutional base, in Africa the problem was different.

Africa was not devastated by two world wars, but by colonization. During the partition of Africa, the colonial masters did not take into consideration the principle of nationality as was the case in Europe.

Ethnic groups were cut across frontiers and in one state you can find a multitude of ethnic groups who speak different dialects and have different religious colorings. This makes it difficult to talk of minorities in the sense of the international law on Minorities.

Nevertheless after independence, the new Constitutions of the new States make mention of the protection of Minorities and Indigenous people. Most often such assertions are found in the preamble which does not have the same legal value as the body of the law,

The Cameroonian Constitution further in the text stipulates that the preamble has the same legal value as the body of the Constitution.

Unfortunately the groups are not defined as we know that difficult and complex issues can only be defined in the fundamental law.

Nevertheless there are ethnic groups that identify themselves as minorities. This is further ascertained in the Organic texts of the Ministerial Department of Social Affairs who has the responsibility of minority ethnic groups. These groups are given different appellations to suit the political situation of the Government. They are referred to as marginal people, indigenous or minorities. They are always rated on the same level with other vulnerable social groups like the blind and the dumb.

These ethnic minorities are the hunter gatherers, Mbororo pastoralists, and migrant fisher people of the creeks. They are numerically smaller and are at the margin of the society.

Their economic activity is purely traditional, herding, hunting, gathering and fishing. They do not live in accessible areas. There are no road infrastructures, nor any form of social facilities in the zones where they live and their economic activity is not considered as work in the sense of the labour code.

The Social Security Scheme in Cameroon was inherited from the colonial period, and is destined to cover workers governed by the labor Code who mainly work in the formal sector.

The scheme is based on deduction of social contributions by the employer to be paid into the National Social Insurance Fund. The workers benefit from family allowances, retirement benefits, protection against occupational diseases and industrial accidents, and maternity allowances.

There are negotiations to expand and modernize the scheme to other category of persons in some sectors that were not taken into consideration, like footballers, Drivers of all categories, and workers of the media, and artists by the Social Security Fund.

The right to work, to a decent job and to social security are ascertained in the fundamental law but Minorities face a lot of obstacles to fulfill these rights. The important

The informal sector is not yet regulated by any laws to allow for a legal recognition of the economic activity of the minorities as is recommended by the ILO Convention 169.

Recruitment in all the activity sectors covered by the social security is reserved for the main ethnic groups who wield political and economic power. Employment is essentially reserved for those who are from the same ethnic group like the top management.

To get a job for those from the minority groups who have the requirements we have to lobby, write officially asking for special measures from some influential officials sympathetic officials to the cause of minorities. Sometimes it work and we have two or three boys and some girls recruited in the army or public sector.

As you can see minority groups especially women are absent in the formal jobs sector and can therefore not be covered by the social security scheme, as their traditional activities are not considered and very few of them have access to jobs in the sector covered or are under negotiations.

In the transport sector there will be some Mbororo men who excel in the g sector. These men may benefit from the negotiations of the transporters sector. Their women may benefit indirectly through their husbands for maternity services.

The bulk of the women are excluded and that will be for a long time to come from the existing Social Security schemes despite the dispositions of international and Regional and National laws.

Many pastoralists who have lost their herds have moved to cities, but because they are minorities and are for the most part illiterates are relegated to mean jobs, small trades, guards to private persons, and driving. This does not give them access to social security for them and their families.

They live in precarious situations in the cities, but through the actions of the civil society the women have organized themselves into group in the rural and urban areas to ameliorate their living condition. They benefit from the support of NGO, projects on community organization and development.

The women of these groups are the lamp lights and are in the lead in the social movements to ameliorate their lives and that of their communities, through trainings in socio- professional knowhow, organizational capacity building, income generating activities and the fight against climate change through the adaptation of ameliorated cooking clay stoves and the introduction of solar energy in some communities

. With the modernization of the social security on health coverage through the creation of District mutual's, a project that is in discussion, there is a possibility to lobby and do a follow up so that women from minority ethnic groups can benefit from the scheme especially on primary and reproductive health care.