Politics of Road Development in Cameroon

James Patrick Leslie Harris
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“Politics of Road Development in Cameroon”

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Yaoundé, Cameroon
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The Johns Hopkins University
International Studies
Abstract

This project seeks to look at the process of Transportation Infrastructure Development (TID) in Cameroon. Emphasis is placed on interviewing individuals who work in the Ministry of Public Works, with complementary information provided by documents from the World Bank and African Development Bank, and interviewing a civil engineering professor. The objective is to gain an understanding of the road development process in Cameroon and how well the government and international partners are able to cooperate and operate efficiently. Interviewees provided their perspectives of this process, and gave broader insight into how their respective institutions operate, providing clues as to the political, bureaucratic, and financial processes inherent in road development efforts in Cameroon. The interviews were all conducted in French, with paraphrased transcriptions in English for the purposes of analysis. This paper demonstrates that a primary obstacle to road development in Cameroon may not necessarily lie in corruption on the part of the government, nor entirely in strictly financial restrictions, but rather in the capacity of the government, and specifically the Ministry of Public Works, to administer the road development process and police corruption on the part of private study bureaus and construction companies.

Ce projet veut regarder le procès du Développent de l’Infrastructure du Transport (TID) au Cameroun. Importance est placé sur les interviews avec des individus qui travail dans la Ministère des Travaux Publics, avec autres informations par les documents de la Banque Mondiale and Banque Africain du Développement, et une interview avec un professeur qui est ingénieur civil. L’objectif est de gagner une compréhension du processus du développement routier au Cameroun and comment le gouvernement et les partenaires internationales peuvent coopérer et opérier effectivement. Des gens interviewés ont donné leur perspectives de ses processus, et ils ont donnée une plus large perspicacité de comment leurs institutions respective travaillent avec le processus politique, bureaucratique, et finance naturel dans les efforts du développement routier au Cameroun. Les interviews étaient faites en français, avec des transcriptions approximées en anglais pour le but des analyses. Ce papier démontrait que le premier obstacle de développement routier au Cameroun peut-être n’est pas la corruption par le gouvernement, ni entièrement dans les restrictions finances, mais alors dans la capacité du gouvernement, et spécifiquement le Ministère des Travaux Publiques, d’administrer le processus du développement routier et policier la corruption par les bureaux d’études privées et les entreprise de construction.
Sources

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Introduction

Transportation Infrastructure is a capital asset that enables, to some degree or another, all other economic activity, and, by extension, the aggregate standard of living in a country. Without roads, children in the United States, for example, could not be driven to school on buses; grocery stores could not have stocks delivered to them; and manufactured products could not be bought and sold very far from their place of origin, and possibly would not be manufactured in the first place without a large market to support the industry. Land transportation forms the backbone of the physical trade and commercial activity in the industrialized nations.¹ It should come as no surprise, then, that those countries with underdeveloped transportation infrastructure face enormous difficulty in their efforts to industrialize and modernize their economies. If the government of Cameroon wants to build a school in a rural location; it has to pay for its construction and part of that price is the cost of transportation. If there are no quality paved roads from the sources of building materials, building contractors, et cetera, then it might be necessary to ship those things in to the school’s planned location on pickup trucks traveling slowly on dirt or mud roads. That increases the time of transportation, the amount of fuel required, and the total cost of the project.

Similar logic applies to all other sectors; hospital construction for health care, food transportation to areas that are not self sufficient, household goods, etc. It may very well still be possible to acquire all of these things in remote areas, but their costs will be higher than they would have been had it been possible to ship them in on quality paved roads and cargo trucks. As an example, a package of 6 1.5L Tangu water bottles can be purchased for 2000 CFA in Yaoundé, but costs 2800 CFA in Ngaoundéré.² Given that the fastest way of getting

² Observation 1. 2011.
from Yaoundé to Ngaoundéré short of flying is a 15 hour train ride, the added transportation cost is easily explained.

Transportation Infrastructure must be a key component of any long range development program, and it is thus logical that 28 percent of World Bank funds in Cameroon are allocated to the transportation sector. The objective of this research project is to gain an understanding of the political, bureaucratic, and financial processes by which the Cameroonian government and international institutions develop Transportation Infrastructure. The rationale for this focus is an assumption that a better understanding of these processes will allow a better understanding of why Cameroon’s roads are underdeveloped even when compared to those of other countries in the region. Given the advantages Cameroon holds, including: quantitative self sufficiency in food production, political stability, natural resources (petroleum, lumber, minerals, etc.), and strong national education programs, it could be assumed that it would be able to achieve a relatively modern transportation network. The World Bank states some of Cameroon’s economic advantages as including, “significant natural resources, including oil, high value timber species, and agricultural products (coffee, cotton, cocoa). Untapped natural recourses include natural gas, bauxite, diamonds, gold, iron, and cobalt. The Cameroonian economy is relatively diversified, with services accounting for 44 percent of 2009 GDP, agriculture and manufacturing 19 percent each, and oil and mining 7 percent.”

The World Bank additionally has this to say on the topic of the importance of roads in Central Africa, and the implications that Cameroon’s road conditions have for the region: “Cameroon is a key transit country for the landlocked countries of Central Africa. However, significant deficiencies in logistics performance prevent Cameroon from playing this role effectively. Transport costs along the main transit corridors to Chad and CAR are among the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa and transport times are abnormally long. Inefficiencies are

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3 World Bank Visit. 2011
4 Cameroon Economic Update. World Bank. 2011
caused by... poor road quality as well as governance issues in the management of transport services...In the road sector, massive investments on the corridors Douala – Njamena and Douala – Bangui should help improve the current situation; however, the sustainability of these investments is not yet guaranteed due to the lack of an efficient road maintenance system (despite the creation of Cameroon’s road maintenance fund financed by an earmarked fuel levy).”

I examined statistics on roads in Cameroon and other countries in the region collected by the United States Central Intelligence Agency and published in that organization’s Fact Book.

Table 1 shows this data alongside various calculations done in an effort to assign quantitative values to each country’s road network when compared with its area, population, and population density.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Pop./sq km</th>
<th>Paved Roads</th>
<th>Pvd/1,000 sq km</th>
<th>Pvd/1,000 pop.</th>
<th>Pvd/Pop Density</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>19,711,291</td>
<td>475,440</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>10.517</td>
<td>0.254</td>
<td>120.601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivory Coast</td>
<td>21,504,162</td>
<td>322,463</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>6,500</td>
<td>20.157</td>
<td>0.302</td>
<td>97.470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad*</td>
<td>10,758,945</td>
<td>1,259,200</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>31.766</td>
<td>3.718</td>
<td>4,681.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equatorial Guinea*</td>
<td>668,225</td>
<td>28,051</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2,880</td>
<td>102.670</td>
<td>4.310</td>
<td>120.898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>155,215,573</td>
<td>923,768</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>28,980</td>
<td>31.372</td>
<td>0.187</td>
<td>172.475</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gabon</td>
<td>1,576,665</td>
<td>267,667</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>937</td>
<td>3.501</td>
<td>0.594</td>
<td>159.072</td>
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<tr>
<td>USA</td>
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<td>9,161,966</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4,374,784</td>
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<td>13.967</td>
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<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>1,336,718,015</td>
<td>9,569,901</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>3,056,300</td>
<td>319.366</td>
<td>2.286</td>
<td>21,880.822</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>138,739,892</td>
<td>16,377,742</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>776,000</td>
<td>47.381</td>
<td>5.593</td>
<td>91,603.991</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*No distinction between paved and unpaved roads in data available on this country. Road figures likely include both paved and unpaved roads.

Table 1 demonstrates that Cameroon’s status of road development is, by several metrics, inferior to other countries in the region. Of the countries listed, only Equatorial Guinea and Gabon have fewer kilometers of paved roads, and both of these have smaller

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5 Cameroon’s Infrastructure- A Continental Perspective. World Bank. September 2011
populations and land areas. Cameroon scores lower than the other countries, excepting Gabon, in its paved roads per area and lower than the other countries, excepting Nigeria, in paved roads per population. Given this data, it is clear that Cameroon’s road-based transportation infrastructure is underdeveloped when compared to that of other countries in the region, let alone when compared to that of industrialized and powerful countries such as the USA, Russia, and China. The World Bank’s assessment furthermore indicates that the economy of the region as a whole is greatly dependent upon transportation within Cameroon. The objective of this research project is, in part, to examine the reasons why roads are underdeveloped in Cameroon by looking into the political, financial, and bureaucratic processes inherent in road development.

This study took place in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 14 November to 7 December 2011. I interviewed representatives of the Ministry of Public Works and a university professor of roads and civil engineering. The government representatives were selected to give me an insight into the bureaucratic and financial process of roads development in Cameroon. The university professor was selected to complement this information with perspectives on what the theoretical approach to road construction is.
Methodology

Hypothesis and Research Questions

My initial assumption was that Cameroon’s advantages suggested that, in aggregate terms, sufficient financial capital existed to finance road projects, and thus a large degree of the problem must rest with the political arena, including the bureaucratic process within ministries and in their cooperation with international institutions and road construction contractor companies. Given the large prices of road projects, it seemed logical to assume that they would be ripe targets for corruption.

While it is not the primary focus of this study, corruption is an important concept that must be understood as a prerequisite to understanding the broader issues facing the development of roads in Cameroon.

For the purposes of this study, I therefore have the following assumptions:

1. Transportation Infrastructure is a necessary and key component of economic and commercial activity as well as development.

2. Cameroon has the advantages of political stability (no civil wars or large scale conflict), natural resource endowments, a diversified economy, and international partners willing to provide financial assistance either in the form of grants or loans.

This study therefore has the following research questions:
1. Why is transportation infrastructure necessary to the economy and development of Cameroon?

2. What are the processes by which the primary actors in road development in Cameroon carry out their activities?

3. What are the primary obstacles to road development in Cameroon, and how can these obstacles be reduced or worked around?

My hypothesis for the purposes of this study is:

1. Transportation infrastructure, and in particular roads, are necessary in Cameroon because land transportation forms the backbone of large scale economic activity and is a primary enabling factor in development efforts.

2. The primary actors in road development in Cameroon are the applicable government ministries, international financing partners, and the private sector entities that work in road construction.

3. Given Cameroon’s apparent advantages, a key obstacle to road development is in the political and bureaucratic realm, and in the effective cooperation between all the necessary entities.

The primary approach utilized in this study was to conduct interviews with representatives of organizations that were believed to play a role in Transportation Infrastructure Development (TID). The objective of these interviews was to discover the perspectives of such representatives on their organizations and how they function in the broader context of TID. The secondary approach was to conduct interviews with
representatives or other organizations and 3rd parties which, while not strictly involved in TID, could offer additional perspectives on Transportation Infrastructure more generally.

My initial objective was to conduct preliminary interviews with a representative of each of my target organizations in the first week, but unfortunately this was not possible due to a variety factors. I was, however, able to make appointments to meet with interviewees the following week. The appointment making process was somewhat longer than would have been ideal due to it being necessary to physically visit the offices of my target organizations, in turn requiring the use of taxis, a time consuming process. I accepted this inefficiency as the only viable method of gaining access to the people I wanted to interview.

The level of cooperation I received from many people at the Ministry of Public Works was a key facilitating factor of my study. Had I been stonewalled by everyone I tried to speak with there, it would have been necessary to alter the focus of my study, detracting from its utility to my primary area of interest. The effective total lack of cooperation I encountered with Les Brasseries du Cameroon degraded my study in that I had initially wanted to interview some of the transportation managers there to better understand the economic importance of roads to large scale commercial operations with a large transportation component. As the project continued, the vast majority of its focus came to be dominated by interviews and data collection facilitated by the Ministry of Public Works, along with supporting and contextualizing information from the World Bank. The importance of the Ministry employees’ willingness to speak with me to this study cannot be overstated. Although I was unable to record my interviews with Ministry representatives, this did not prove to be a major problem, and several of my primary sources from the Ministry elected to provide their responses to my questions in written format rather than via a formal interview. Although at first apprehensive of this approach, I quickly realized that it would be the only way I had to learn what the people who were too busy to speak with me had to say.
Due to scheduling difficulties, I was unable to speak with the World Bank’s transportation expert in Cameroon, and this likely degraded the extent to which I was able to include the World Bank as a significant component of my study. Nonetheless, I did speak briefly with several persons there, and was able to access World Bank project documents pertaining to Cameroon found on their website. These project documents provided several primary sources that served as the best available substitute to a complete formal interview with the country transportation expert. In particular, information on such projects allowed me to compare another perspective with what I had previously been told in my interviews with the Ministry of Public Works.

Despite the shortcomings of this study, the general structure, at least in terms of my focus on the role of the government and international partner institutions, did not change. The majority of my primary source data was derived from either the Ministry of Public Works or the World Bank. While it would have been preferable to be able to speak with transportation representatives of Les Brasseries du Cameroon and persons at the construction companies, the lack of cooperation I received at the former and the field-work intensive nature of the latter prevented me from doing so. For this reason I cannot claim to have a strong understanding of the internal workings of the construction companies or of the views of a major shipping company on the state of transportation infrastructure in Cameroon. The inherent focus of this study on the roles of government and international institutions in Transportation Infrastructure Development means that the study’s shortcomings with respect to such secondary areas of interest do not represent a crucial failure.

A key assumption of this study was that Transportation Infrastructure, in particular roads, must form a key enabling factor in a country’s economy. Data from secondary sources was sought to confirm this assumption, and was largely found via Internet searches. During many of my interviews with Ministry of Public Works representatives, I touched on this point
to ascertain the extent to which importance is placed on the economic importance of roads by the Ministry of Public Works’ staff. The responses I received to such questions confirmed to my satisfaction that my assumption was a correct one. In other words, the purpose and utility of the study was not called into question by data which indicated that transportation infrastructure was, say, irrelevant to a country’s economy. The importance of beginning the study with this assumption is that it removed the necessity of focusing significantly on determining whether or not the assumption was true. To do so would have detracted from the extent to which I would have been able to focus on the true areas of interest: the roles of the government and international partners.

The greatest shortcoming of this study was without a doubt that I was unable to conduct as many interviews with as many different people as I had originally wanted to. I interviewed, in some cases several times, Ministry of Public Works department directors and managers from the key sections of the Ministry to my study, so it is true that I did get a good sampling of the Ministry’s different organs. What I did not do, however, was conduct extensive formal interviews with the secretaries and assistants of the relatively important officials I spoke with. Primarily, I did not think it would be prudent to do so. Had I made a large show of speaking with the secretaries about how they perform their jobs, it is possible that I would have aroused suspicion or at least confusion. I.E. having already officially spoken with their department heads, what possible reason could I have for speaking with lower ranking individuals who are not as well informed on the topic as the officials are? Did I not trust the officials I had spoken with? Additionally, while the secretaries would likely have provided interesting information pertaining to the detailed inner workings of the Ministry, my study was supposed to be on the broad roles played by the relevant institutions and the process of roads projects. I felt that the additional information I could have gained from speaking with lower down people en masse would not have been worth risking my continued
access to the officials that I did need to speak with as a primary focus. Nonetheless, I did
interview one secretary on the subject of her work to get access to her perspective
Analysis and Findings

1. The State of Roads in Cameroon

The development of transportation infrastructure in Cameroon has seen remarkable progress over the years, but still lags behind that of other countries in the region, as shown earlier in Table 1. The World Bank confirms this. “On several key infrastructure parameters, Central Africa’s infrastructure (including Cameroon’s) is the poorest in all of Africa... paved road density is a fraction of already low levels in West Africa... Simulations suggest that if Central Africa’s infrastructure could be upgraded to the level of the best performing country in Africa (Mauritius), the impact on real per capita economic growth would be in the order of 5 percentage points of GDP.”\(^7\) It cannot be argued that Cameroon’s roads are up to the same standards as developed or even other developing countries in the region; Cameroon’s roads’ being underdeveloped is an assumed fact that shall not be called into question in this research paper. Prolonged debate over the definition of what constitutes “underdeveloped roads” would detract from this paper’s main focus of the political and financial processes behind the development of transportation infrastructure, specifically roads, in Cameroon. Information on the current state of roads in Cameroon, and comparisons of this data to that on other countries, is given in order to justify the importance of a study on the process of road development in Cameroon. Part of the motivation for this study is furthermore to determine policy suggestions for the Cameroonian government and relevant international partners that could improve the road development process and by extension the overall condition of transportation infrastructure.

\(^7\) Cameroon Economic Update. World Bank. 2011
2. Process Overview

The political process of road construction in Cameroon is lengthy and involves numerous steps. Before any road construction project can be implemented, a decision must be made at the political level; and the basis for such a decision includes an assessment of economic need with due consideration for national economic development priorities. Given Cameroon's strong agricultural sector, for example, it is deemed important by the government to ensure agricultural products can be transported from their centers of production to areas where they can be purchased, either by domestic or international consumers. “Transportation is one of the primary factors of development. It allows economic exchange, commercial activity, and all of that.”\(^8\) The political decision to start a road project is filtered down to the Ministry of Public Works, which generally administers and coordinates the rest of the road development process on the project in question.

Studies of Potential Projects

Once a national economic need has been demonstrated for a road in a specific area or transportation corridor, a political decision to pursue a road construction project may be taken. This results in various studies being conducted to determine how best to go about doing so. The Ministry of Public Works sends out a request for bids by Study Bureaus via the media and other means. The company with the winning bid will dispatch a team of experts, including civil engineers, environmental specialists, etc. to the proposed project site. This team is tasked with examining geo-technical factors that would be expected to influence a road project, as well as environmental issues that could potentially crop up and must therefore

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\(^8\) Interview 3. November 2011.
be anticipated and appropriately dealt with. “First, studies of socio-economic and environmental factors are conducted. Based on the studies, a project proposal is put together. At that point requests for bids are sent out by the government, and contractor companies respond. The best bid will be chosen, and work will commence.”^9

After such studies have been conducted, the results are reviewed by the Ministry of Public Works, and the road project moves into the next phase. Although the Ministry and the government it represents take the lead in organizing road projects, the actual construction efforts are not undertaken by state construction companies as would be the case in the former Soviet Bloc. As a developing nation, Cameroon must involve its government in large scale projects in some fashion, but it is not necessary for the government itself to execute every stage of the process.

Request for Bids by Construction Companies

The Ministry of Public Works then sends out requests for bids to private road construction contractor companies and interested companies review the bid request, and submit proposals to the Ministry with their cost bids. Generally, the lowest bid submitted by a company deemed capable of executing the project is selected.^10

Execution of the Project

A private road construction contractor company is selected to execute the project, and it begins work at the project site. At this point the active role played by the Ministry of Public Works changes somewhat, and the Directorate of Norms and Studies steps in to monitor the

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project. The role of this Directorate (part of the Ministry) is to act as a partially independent entity that monitors the activities of the construction company to ensure that no irregularities take place in terms of the company failing to appropriately complete the terms of the contract either through not fully doing the construction work or misusing the funds.\textsuperscript{11} The Construction Company will execute the project and actually do the construction.

\textit{Funding}

Road development projects in Cameroon are funded primarily by two categories of sources. As the main actor in development programs, the Cameroonian government plays a large role and provides funds for road construction projects. The government generally budgets 2-3 years at a time for road development projects; given the inherently large scale of such projects, long term planning is essential.\textsuperscript{12} International partners such as the World Bank, European Union, African Development Bank (BAD), Islamic Development Fund, etc. also contribute funds either in the form of grants or loans. World Bank funded projects, whether in the form of grants or loans, generally have 100\% of the project’s funded provided up front by the Bank, making it the preferred international source of development aid by the Ministry of Public Works. BAD projects have 88\% of funds provided, and the Islamic Fund normally provides between 60 and 70\% of funds. \textit{Often the source of funding is an international one-the World Bank, European Union, African Development Bank, and the Islamic Development Fund. Generally, projects funded by World Bank loans have 100\% of the money provided. BAD funded projects have 88\%, and Islamic Development Fund projects 60\%-70\%. The rest must be provided by the government. The government will usually have development projects

\textsuperscript{11} Interviews 3 and 5. November 2011.
\textsuperscript{12} Interview 2. November 2011.
budgeted over periods of 2-3 years. Given the enormity of Cameroon’s road development needs, it is necessary to secure funding from these other sources beyond the World Bank. “The international partners are major financers of road projects in Cameroon. At the same time, the state has to spend money to cover its end of the expenses, and is obliged to find sources of the money it needs. The international partners have the resources and the means.”

Obstacles

The obstacles to transportation infrastructure development in Cameroon fall into the general categories of corruption, the bureaucratic process, workload at the Ministry of Public Works, and funding. When a private contractor construction company is paid to build a road, it is possible for the company to cheat in its construction efforts. If the road is supposed to be paved 25 centimeters deep, the company could only pave 10 centimeters, pocketing the savings and stealing from the government, World Bank, etc. “There is an ethical problem. For example, if you tell a company to pave a road 25 cm deep, they might only pave 10 cm. Because of this, even new roads can be of poor quality. Also, if you are in place A and I am in place B, if I have friends in the system, they might fund maintenance or projects in my zone even if yours has the greater need. The process, then, is not always based on merit or need. With such ethical problems, it is no wonder that transportation is a shamblle.”

The bureaucratic process in connection with road development can at times be somewhat complicated, and the ability of the staff at the Ministry of Public Works to effectively work through this process is hampered by their being understaffed, overworked, and not having the office equipment they would like. “Effectively, we need to develop.

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Without resources, the personnel, expertise, and all that, any large projects such as roads will be difficult. The capacities need to be improved. The problem is effectively the same one facing all the ministries. As a result of the economic crisis, numerous workers were laid off. That harms our ability to get the work done. The same financial difficulties mean that we can’t have the best equipment and work environment." 

Based on this, it would be logical to assume that this Ministry’s work could be streamlined through more staff and better equipment.

3. Entities Involved

The Ministry of Public Works

The Ministry of Public Works is the central actor in road development in Cameroon. Although much funding comes from outside sources, and the projects are actually done by private contractor companies, as the primary agent of the government in this area the Ministry must effectively coordinate the activities of all the other players in order to translate national transportation policy-level decisions into on the ground results. The Ministry of Public Works employs engineers, secretaries, and lawyers who operate as a large interconnected team that organizes road and public building construction projects in Cameroon. In terms of roads, it is tasked with selecting Study Bureaus to review project sites, selecting construction companies to actually build the roads, ensuring that all the private companies involved follow the proper procedures and do not siphon of public funds from such projects, and generally coordinating all road construction activities that take place in Cameroon. The responsibilities of the

Ministry of Public Works are massive, which does much to explain the numerous subdivisions and directorates that together make it up.

For example, the Cellule BAD Banque Mondiale liaises with the African Development Bank and the World Bank on projects that receive funding from such sources. The Cellule is a key part of the Ministry’s operations, because foreign funding often makes up a large portion of a given project’s total funding. It is in turn part of the Directorate of Investments, which plans and deals with the execution of projects.

World Bank

The World Bank has had a strong presence in Cameroon ever since independence, and has been involved in road development projects as part of this presence.

“1.01 The Federal Government of Cameroon has applied for an [International Development Aid] Credit to help finance the detailed engineering, preparation of tender documents and an economic study in connection with the proposed improvement of the following two roads (see map):

(a) N’Gaoundere-Garoua road (285 km) in East Cameroon, and

(b) Tiko-Victoria road (24 km) in West Cameroon.

The estimated total cost of the project, including contingencies, is US$ 770,000, of which US$ 650,000 is for the N’Gaoundere-Garoua road and US$ 120,000 for the Tiko-Victoria road. It is proposed that IDA finance the foreign exchange component which is US$ 550,000 equivalent or 72% of the total project cost.”

Given this historical presence, the World Bank must be seen as a key player in road projects in Cameroon in the present day. Representatives of the Ministry of Public Works

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confirmed this assessment during my interviews with them. It is seen as the premier outside funding source for transportation development projects in Cameroon. “Generally, projects funded by World Bank loans have 100% of the money provided.”\textsuperscript{18} Although it does not actually provide the teams who construct the roads, as a powerful international institution its activities affect development efforts in Cameroon. World Bank funds can be in the category of assistance to a country, or of assistance to regional development more broadly. Roads that allow international trade, for instance, could in part be funded from the category of funds allocated for broader regional development.\textsuperscript{19}

**BAD**

The African Development Bank (BAD) is an alternative to the World Bank that might in some ways be more in tune with Africa-specific factors influencing development. In its assessment of Cameroon’s development needs, the African Development Bank notes infrastructure as lac ing. “The structure of production in Cameroon confirms that the country has high growth potential in the agricultural, forestry and mining sectors, the tapping of which has been impeded by lack of basic infrastructure” Furthermore, the African Development Bank sees transportation as a key infrastructure sector that must be improved. “The rural sector in Cameroon has significant potential including: (i) great climatic diversity; (ii) natural soil fertility; (iii) existence of considerable agricultural land, forests and water resources; (iv) a natural framework conducive to the diversity of agricultural and livestock practices; (v) a young, dynamic population; and (vi) outlets for production in the towns and neighboring countries. It has not been possible to take full advantage of all these opportunities because of the inadequate road and air networks which still do not link up the

\textsuperscript{18} Interview 2. November 2011.  
\textsuperscript{19} World Bank Visit. October 2011.
production and consumption areas, as well as insufficient high quality energy supply for industrial processing purposes. In short, the high growth potential sector in which investment must be increased is undoubtedly basic infrastructure.”

The disadvantage of the African Development Bank is that its projects have only 88% of funds provided, meaning that the Cameroonian government must have a larger financial commitment to take advantage of assistance from this source. The African Development Bank is native to Africa, and is charged with helping to fund development projects, such as roads, in member states of the African Union. The political significance of this is that it represents a homegrown development effort that is not and cannot be dictated by “Western” powers, stereotypical criticism of the World Bank.

Private Contractor Companies

If the Ministry of Public Works is the organizer, and international partners major sources of funding, the private contractor companies are the entities which have to actually achieve results on the construction front. Whether Cameroonian or International, these companies will construct the roads, and it is here that numerous corruption issues can be found. The domestic contractor companies have engineers trained in domestic universities, but also have some personnel who were educated in foreign engineering schools. “The primary source of [road engineers] is [the Advanced National Polytechnic School], which teaches Baccalaureate +3. The Polytechnic School teaches Bac +5. In addition, there are Cameroonian engineers who have studied in foreign universities.” Foreign companies play a role in road construction work in Cameroon, and can sometimes be more competitive due to

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their international setups. This makes it harder for Cameroonian companies to secure as many contracts as they otherwise would be able to, but in the long run will ensure that the domestic companies are just as efficient and capable as their foreign counterparts due to the pressures of global competition.  

*Study Bureaus*

The Study Bureaus are independent of the Ministry of Public Works, and are composed of engineers who examine the project sites before work is begun on a road. Their purpose is to conduct studies on a wide range of factors, ranging from construction methods to environmental concerns to socio-economic considerations. The Study Bureaus are not, however, specifically tasked with combating corruption. “The Study Bureaus are external to the Ministry. They are private companies which are contracted to conduct the studies. It is we who monitor the projects and can propose sanctions in the event we discover foul play.”

*Engineering Schools and Professors*

Cameroon’s engineering schools are institutions that have a long range and long term impact on road development in Cameroon. If it has an effective domestic supply of competent civil engineers, Cameroon will not have to pay foreign companies to step in to do construction work. 

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4. **Successes**

The efforts in Cameroon to develop transportation infrastructure have seen numerous successes. "Notre institution a suivi avec succès l’exécution de plusieurs projets routiers et points jusqu’aux réceptions définitives, continue à suivre plusieurs autres projets routiers en cours d’exécution et l’attribution de plusieurs marchés pour l’exécution des projets routiers.

a) Quelques projets suivis jusqu'aux réceptions définitives sont :
   - Melong-Dschang
   - Melong-Santchou
   - Ambam-Ekim
   - Ponts sur la Lakoundje à Lolodorf.

b) Quelques projets en cours d’exécution :
   - Numba-Bahuo Akagbe
   - Bahuo Akagbe-Mmfe-Ekok
   - Bamenda-Batibo-Kumba
   - Nandeke-Mbere
   - Djoum-Mintoum

Les DAO de plusieurs autres projets sont en cours d’être produits et beaucoup d’autres sont en études."\(^{27}\)

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\(^{27}\) Interview 1. November 2011.

“Our institution has had successes with the execution of numerous road projects, and continues to keep up with numerous other road projects in the course of the execution and allocation of numerous deals for the execution of road projects. Some projects that have been completed are :
- Melong-Dschang
- Melong-Santchou
- Ambam-Ekim
- Bridges on the Lakoundje to Lolodorf.

Some projects currently underway:
- Numba-Bahuo Akagbe
- Bahuo Akagbe-Mmfe-Ekok
- Bamenda-Batibo-Kumba
- Nandeke-Mbere
Information from the Ministry of Public Works clearly demonstrates that there are numerous roads projects completed and in various stages of planning and execution. These successes present an apparent contradiction to the poor state of transportation infrastructure in Cameroon suggested by the CIA Factbook data.

5. Obstacles

The obstacles to roads development in Cameroon fall into the categories of finance and corruption, political/bureaucratic issues, and general capacity of the entities involved to do their jobs. Each of these alone would present an obstacle capable of at least partially explaining the present deficiency in transportation infrastructure in Cameroon.

Finance and Corruption

The financial requirements of road development projects cannot be casually dismissed. Without sufficient funding, projects cannot begin work, let alone ever be satisfactorily completed. While it is true that Cameroon is a developing country, and that it is accordingly difficult to find funds for road projects, the cost of projects with respect to the funds available is not the only factor to consider. Corruption, whether on the part of construction companies or the government, adds to the cost of road development. The Observatory of Companies and Study Bureaus, a component of the Ministry of Public Works, is tasked with monitoring the activities of the construction companies, but curiously they do not seem to have any real

- Djoun-Mintoum
The plans for numerous other projects are being produced and many others are being studied.”
power to intervene when they find malpractice. “We have difficulties with the cooperation of the companies. Specifically, our work is not linked with the other parts of the Ministry that select the companies to use. Given the level of education of the management of the companies, and the culture of withholding information, it is hard to get the data we need. Even if we do get it and determine a particular company should not be used, that does not always translate into the company not being selected.”

Thus, while on the surface there exist measures to prevent inefficiency and resource misallocation due to corruption, a more in depth study of the relevant institutions reveals that the opportunities for corruption exist, and the ability of such institutions to prevent such corruption is limited. This would seem to be a particularly poor oversight by the Cameroonian government; if the entity that is tasked with preventing corruption by construction companies and study bureaus has no real authority, then the fact that such corruption exists is of course no surprise.

**Political/Bureaucratic Obstacles**

The political considerations in the development of transportation infrastructure in a developing country cannot be ignored. The government must play a large role in this sector, and must successfully work in concert with all the other entities involved. Discrepancies between Cameroon’s advantages in resources, political stability, and so forth and the state of its roads suggests that there exists something of a disconnect between the assets available for national development programs and their effective translation into measurable successes.

Although this study cannot claim that the fault lays exclusively with the Cameroonian government and the politics involved, financial difficulties alone cannot be used to explain away development failures. Cameroon’s economic and political advantages over other

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countries in the region, as suggested by the World Bank, preclude any explanation that lies primarily in the financial realm from having complete merit.

Capacity

The capacities of the institutions involved in road development in Cameroon leave much to be desired. All eternal financial assistance that is made available by the World Bank or other sources still has to work its way through the institutions and entities in Cameroon that have roles to play. If the capacities of those institutions are lacking, then ability of such financial assistance to make a difference will be degraded accordingly. The capacity of the Ministry of Public Works to do its job is in part determined by the individual capacities of its personnel. If these personnel feel that it is difficult for them to find the time to get everything done, this suggests a capacity deficiency. “The amount of work is important to consider...All of it must be done at the same time. If something comes up I have to drop what I’m doing, deal with it, and then go back to what I was doing before...I don’t have lots of other secretaries to help me like I did when I started out in the main building where the Minister works.”

An apparently overworked secretary represents a key capacity deficiency that could affect the ability of others to perform their jobs effectively. “I suppose that without me everyone else would have difficulty doing their jobs; I’m the gatekeeper of the Cellule.”

The aggregate capacity of the Ministry as a whole to perform its role effectively is called into question by statements by the Coordinator of Project Management. “We have many demands placed on us; there is a lot of need for infrastructure. Unfortunately, there are little means available...The materiel [is an obstacle for us]. For example, the files could fall on our heads at any time! Look at the state of this office! The financial situation makes things

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difficult...The state must construct more and better administrative buildings.” The difficulties facing the personnel at the Ministry of Public Works are demonstrably considerable. That they are able to perform as well as they do is a testament to them as a workforce. Nonetheless, it is clear that improvements to the capacity of the Ministry to do its job are desirable. In the course of this study, I received numerous responses during my interviews indicating that Ministry personnel feel that improvements should be made to their working environment, the assets available to them, and so forth.

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Conclusion

My hypotheses for this study have effectively been substantiated by the information I received in the course of interviews and reviewing documents from the World Bank and African Development Bank. Roads are a necessary component of Cameroon’s economy and further development efforts. The Cameroonian government’s Ministry of Public Works is the key player, and works alongside international financing partners such as the World Bank and African Development Bank. In addition to the obvious financial difficulties, the capacity of the Ministry of Public Works to perform its functions is significantly less than would be ideal. This capacity deficiency influences each aspect of the many road development projects in Cameroon.

It is clear that effective transportation infrastructure is a necessary prerequisite for essentially all large scale economic and development activities. It is an enabling capital asset that permits other sectors to develop and progress. When a country is planning its development efforts, it is of course necessary to look at all areas of development to ensure that key areas are not forgotten. I do not mean to say in this paper that the Cameroonian government should devote the vast majority, or even all, of its development efforts to road construction. Health care, education, nutrition, and clean water, for example, are other areas that must be considered. What I discovered from my interviewees, however, was a universal belief that roads are necessary in order to have effective development programs in other sectors. “Where roads go, development follows,” was mentioned several times.

Given the importance of transportation infrastructure, and specifically roads, to Cameroon’s development efforts and its economy as a whole, it makes sense to compare its roads with those of its regional neighbors. When this is done, it becomes readily apparent that Cameroon’s transportation infrastructure is grossly inferior. It seems difficult to argue that the
primary or sole reason for this is strictly economic; even the World Bank notes Cameroon’s resource advantages and diversified economy. The African Development Bank suggests that improved transportation would allow more effective exploitation of these resources, further improving the economy. A road deficiency exists, yet there are significant resources and assets at the disposal of the Cameroonian government. The remaining explanation is one of capacities and politics on the part of the government, international financing partners, private study bureaus and construction companies. I find a lack in the capacity of the Cameroonian government, and the Ministry of Public Works specifically, to do its job to be the most convincing explanation.

As the central player in all road development activities in the country, the Ministry of Public Works must effectively manage all aspects of this process, including making sure that everyone plays by the rules. My interviewees at the Ministry agreed with each other that their office environment was not the best, and that it was difficult to get everything done. They suggested that the government of Cameroon should build more and better administrative buildings, and that doing so would improve their capacity to do their jobs. Obviously, part of the reason for the Ministry’s offices being in the condition that they are and perhaps being understaffed with qualified personnel is financial. The necessary improvements would of course take money. However, the Cameroonian government, and its international financing partners, already spends vast amounts of money to plan and execute projects which can then be poorly done. If the Ministry of Public Works had the capacity to adequately monitor the study bureaus and private companies, and had the necessary qualified personnel in sufficient numbers, then it is possible that the large road development projects that are undertaken would be done properly and be correctly priced.

While privatization does result in companies independent of the government that can execute projects, cutting government budgets to the point that the relevant ministries are
unable to effectively perform their functions is a mistake. If the roads in Cameroon are to be improved and brought up to parity with the rest of the region, let alone approaching the level of those of developed countries, it is first necessary that the Ministry of Public Works be given the capacity to perform its job. This would undoubtedly require more government funding, which makes it a larger political issue, both domestically and internationally. As long as Ministry of Public works is denied adequate administrative facilities and is stuck with subpar engineers due to the best ones being snapped up by private companies, it will not have the capacity to truly do its job, and the problem will remain. The Cameroonian government, as well as its international partners, should consider the importance of properly empowered government ministries that, in the long run, would reduce costs due to the dual inefficiencies of wasted expenditure and an inability to police corruption on the part of study bureaus and construction companies.

Further study is needed on the role of the Ministry of Public Works; what is expected of it, how it is empowered to do its job, areas in which additional (or simply reallocated) funding would pay dividends, and so forth. Given the key role played by the Ministry, it would seem to make sense for international financing partners to pay more attention to its internal workings and perhaps focus less on specific projects. This is not to say that the international financing partners should not pay attention to the projects that they fund, but rather that they must take a holistic approach to road development efforts that includes an assessment and monitoring of the Cameroonian government. It may even be advisable for international funding to be allocated to enabling the government ministries to better perform their tasks.
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Appendixes

Standard Interview Questions

Ministry of Public Works Representatives-

1. What is the role of your ministry and division in the development of transportation infrastructure in Cameroon?

2. What successes have you had that make you proud?

3. What are the greatest obstacles that you see to transportation infrastructure development in Cameroon?

4. Why is transportation infrastructure important for the economy of Cameroon?

5. Please describe the political or administrative process by which a road project is created.

6. After a project is created, how is it planned?

7. How are road projects financed?

8. What is your title and position in your ministry and division? What are your responsibilities?

9. What are the difficulties for you in your work?

10. How could these difficulties be reduced?

Ministry Follow-up-

1. What are the differences between the roles of the Cameroonian government and the international partners (World Bank, African Development Bank) in the development of transportation infrastructure?

2. How are the most qualified and effective contractor companies found?

3. Are there problems with companies that give a certain cost for a project, but at the end the project costs more?
4. It is said that “where the road goes development follows”, so therefore roads are necessary for development. What development activities cannot be done without roads?

5. For what other economic activities is it necessary to have roads?

6. Is the team of experts that is sent to a prospective project site to conduct studies a government team or a private team? Explain.

7. What are the differences between the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the Islamic Development Fund… in their roles in road development? Is it easier to work with one of them over the others, or is it equally easy or difficult to work with all of them?

8. Given that the amount of work to do is vast, and it is difficult to get everything done, would it be better to have more personnel employed by the Ministry, or is it more important to improve the quality of the offices and equipment, the processes involved…?

**Civil Engineering Professor**-

1. What is your academic subject?

2. How is a road constructed?

3. What is necessary to construct a road?

4. Are there many road engineers in Cameroon? Are they well qualified?

5. Are there scholarships for students who want to become road engineers?

6. What are the obstacles in transportation infrastructure development in Cameroon?

7. In your opinion, how could these problems be reduced?

8. What kind of work will your students likely be involved with when they complete their studies?

9. Do they prefer to work for the government, contractor companies, study bureaus…?