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The Survival Strategies of Poor Youth in the Metropolitan City of Douala, Cameroon

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Abstract

The question we asked in this work was how young people who are predominantly poor survive in the metropolitan city of Douala, considering their reduced purchasing power. Our main objective was to identify the various coping mechanisms that the poor in the metropolitan city of Douala use to survive. We use the explanatory sequential mixed method to carry out this research: in the first phase, we randomly administered 610 questionnaires constructed using the desired values for living a comfortable life in Douala, and in the second phase, we purposefully selected and interviewed 50 poor youth to understand their survival strategies. We discovered that about 91% of youths are poor and 68.7% of them are the working poor. We discovered that they succeed by being calculative, flexible, and creative, accepting precarious jobs, practicing “long-linked borrowing” and modelling. In the course of struggling for survival, they form various identities of themselves: those of strugglers, helplessness, uncertainty, underachievers, alienated people, etc. We noticed that poverty is situational and not cultural, because they also wish to integrate the main stream values of their society but they are constrained.

Keywords: poverty, poor youths, Douala, flexibility, creativity

1. Introduction

Youth unemployment rates are much higher than adult rates in all regions, Isabel et al. [1]. According to the National Institute of Statistics, in Cameroon, youth unemployment is higher (6%) than that of the whole population (3.8%). The unemployment rate of youth has proven to be more sensitive to that of adults, supporting the “first-out, last-in” hypothesis. Youth face a longer recovery than adults, mainly because of surplus labour competing for a limited number of jobs, youth, with their shorter work histories, will also be the “last in”.

Many youth are stuck in work that does not match their skills level or desired career path, [2]. The high employment-to-population ratios of youth in the poorest regions reflect the fact that the poor must work more vulnerable to poverty and less vulnerable to unemployment. There is a correlation between lower unemployment rates and higher vulnerable employment rates. The lack of social safety nets such as unemployment benefits means the poor cannot afford to be unemployed. Instead, they struggle to earn an income through own-account work or sporadic casual wage employment. Most persons in developing economies do not have access to wage and

salaried employment, where job losses occur, but rather make their living in self-employment (own-account work) or in contributing to family work.

About one third of economically active youth are unemployed. It affects a broad spectrum of socio-economic groups including the less and well-educated youth and especially youth from low-income background and those with limited education. According to the World Bank [3], in 2010 about 92% of young people employed were in the informal sector in Cameroon. Unemployment rate is not the best indicator for measuring crisis impact on young people. Majority of youth in Africa are engaged in informal sector activities. Only a small proportion is engaged in the formal sector. A large proportion of youth are thus under-employed, working long hours under poor working conditions for little remuneration mainly in the informal sector.

Global labour markets have also been increasingly characterized by vulnerable employment, which is strongly related to low-paying jobs and difficult working conditions where wage inequality is high and fundamental worker's rights are likely to be in jeopardy. Vulnerable jobs and informal work can be expected to be widespread. According to the National Institute of Statistics [4, 5], in Cameroon, underemployment was about 12.3% in 2010, it was 12.1% in 2005.

Increasing "labour precarization" is fast becoming a concern. The "precariat" is a class in the making, a growing number of people across the world live and work precariously, usually in a series of short-term jobs, without recourse to stable occupational identities, social protection or protective regulations relevant to them. They are increasingly frustrated and dangerous because they have no voice, and, hence, they are vulnerable to the calls of extreme political parties [1].

Working poverty affects workers of all ages, vulnerability increases at different stages of the life cycle. Youth, in particular, have a higher likelihood of being among the working poor than adults [6]. Large cohorts of poor youth remain trapped in low-productivity jobs, principally in subsistence agriculture. Out of economic necessity, their offspring are, in turn, likely to enter the labour force at an early age, perpetuating the vicious circle of poverty from one generation to the next [3, 6].

Workers who experience unemployment, especially of long duration, have an increased likelihood of being jobless in later years and earning lower wages. These effects, which are known as "wage scars," are observed in both young and adult populations, but the evidence overwhelmingly shows that the impacts are much more acute on young workers [7].

A widespread coping strategy linked to the jobs crisis has been selling household assets and borrowing money. In order to maintain consumption needs during periods of unemployment or reduced or erratic wages, many households have drawn down savings and sold possessions, as well as turned to friends, relatives, membership-based clubs, community groups and banks, where possible, for financial help. While selling assets and borrowing are, indeed, important safety nets for the poor, they are also easily exhaustible [1].

What strategies do the poor youth of Douala adopt to survive in an urban area like Douala where the rate of unemployment, underemployment and own-account workers is very high and especially where everything is monetized?

The main objective of this work is to elicit all the coping mechanisms that the poor youth use to continue living with inadequate income in Douala.

2. Methodology

The questionnaire construction was based on the notion that poverty is relative to a society and epoch. Sociologically speaking, one is poor when one cannot

attain the values of one's society. That is, a sociological description of poverty must take into consideration the values of the society in question. These values are not to be prescribed by the researcher in order to avoid subjectivity. The value must be a general consensus of those living in the society in question at the time of the research, [8].

We carried a pilot studies which is a small scale preliminary study conducted before the main research to find out the psychological and social essentials for ordinary living patterns in Douala in order to improve the design of the research. We asked respondents what they considered to be normal social activities; that is, the psychological and social essentials for ordinary living patterns in Douala. It was administered on 30 respondents having varied social status and then the responses constituted the foundation of our questionnaire.

We used the mixed methods research because the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone [9, 10]. The quantitative methods helped us to establish the poverty-line and the qualitative method helped us to understand the daily struggles for survival of the poor youth of Douala. A blend of both the quantitative and qualitative methods provided a profound picture of what youth poverty is in the city of Douala. The overall intent of this design is to have the qualitative data explain in more details the initial quantitative results.

We used the random sampling method wherein we selected every fifth of the youths in Douala ensuring that everyone had an equal chance in the selection. It is worth-noting that we had a full grasp of the sampling frame. We went to all the sub-divisions and all the neighbourhoods in each division.

The number of questionnaires administered in each of the five sub-divisions was determined by its population. We put the population of each sub-division over the total population of the five sub-divisions and then we multiplied by our sample size 610. We ensured that the number of females or males in the study was equivalent to their percentage in the general population by using the same above mathematical application.

We tried as much as possible too to ensure that the percentage of each sex selected was almost same as its percentage in the general population. In Douala, there are 956,883(49.67%) females and 969,630(50.33) males out of the total population of 1,926,513. Equally, we selected 300(49.18%) females and 310 (50.82%) males out of the total sample size of 610.

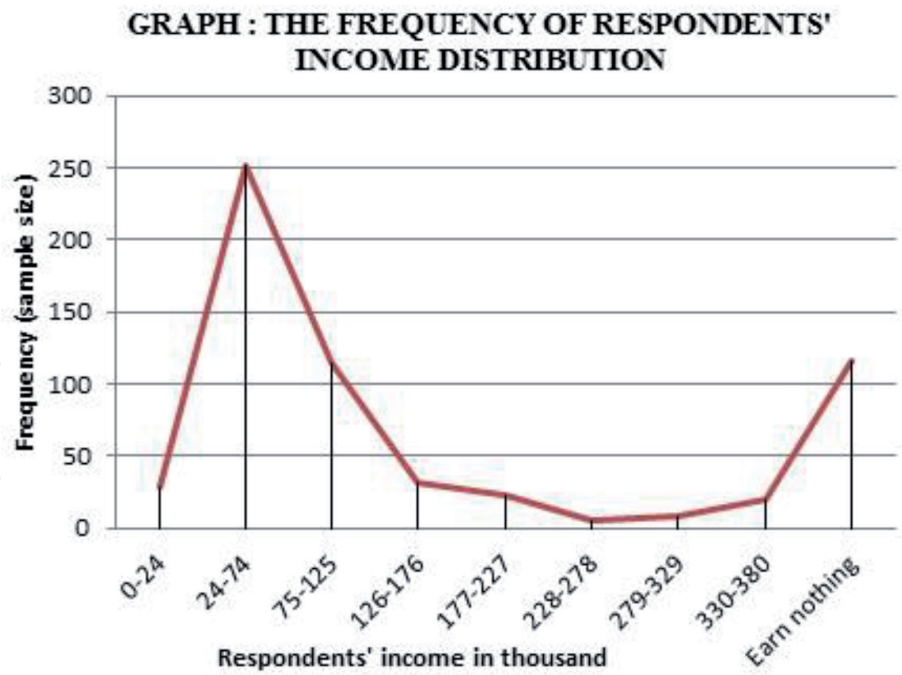
3. Results

3.1 Description of youth poverty in Douala

Youth age difference and poverty-line in Douala.

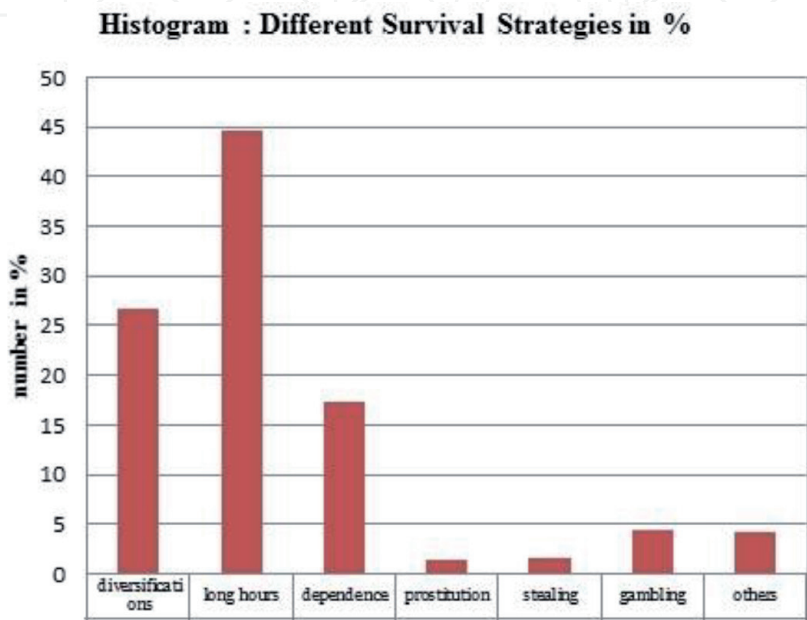
Age range	% Below poverty-line	% Above poverty-line
<21	95	5
21–25	95.3	4.7
26–30	90.2	9.8
31–35	84.5	14.5

The above table shows that as age increases, the number of persons below the poverty-line decreases and vice versa. The graph below shows the distribution of income among the youth in the city of Douala.



From the above it is glaring that that a bulk of the youth in the city of Douala earn between 24,000 and 74,000 frs CFA (41%), 4.8% earn below 24, 000 frs and 19% earn nothing. Only 9% of the youths in Douala earn about 177,000 frs and above which is the amount required for participating in the predominant values in Douala [11–13]. It is quite difficult to cope in the city of Douala using such low salaries. Therefore the youths in Douala are what ILO [2] describes as the working poor who live below the poverty line and are working out of economic necessity. According to it, youth, in particular, have a higher likelihood of being among the working poor than adults. The question that preoccupies us in this work is the coping mechanisms these working poor youth in the city of Douala use to survive. In other words, what strategies do they use to have a good feeding habit, domestic comfort, health seeking behaviour among others?

3.2 Different survival strategies in Douala



The above histogram indicates that 26.6%, 44.7%, 17.4%, 1.3%, 1.5%, 4.3%, 4.2% of the youth in the city of Douala diversify their activities, work for long hours, are dependent, are prostitute, thieves, gamble and do others things respectively to survive. Therefore to survive in the city of Douala, the poor residents work for very long hours because they do a diversity of activities to survive.

3.2.1 Diversification of activities

The poor youth of Douala do many precarious economic activities. When in financial difficulties, they walked out of their zone of expertise and do many other activities whether related to their field of specialization or not. So for the poor youth in Douala to survive, they must be very smart and tactful. They must learn to do several jobs simultaneously and must be willing to sacrifice their resting time to check their private work because it is what relieves them when their masters fail to pay their salaries for months and equally helps them to solve their other problems. As such, they overwork themselves just to survive since they do not have any support network either from their government nor parents because they are either predominantly from a polygamous family, or have lost a parent, or their parents are simply irresponsible or too old or too poor to take care of them. They have to fight on their own while hoping that their future will be better.

Serge who is mechanic lived alone and was independent because his former master had sent him away. Therefore he had to struggle as much as possible to survive in life. He had worked 2000 frs CFA the day we met him which was enough only for saving in the meeting he attended. So he had to do something different as he said “I will struggle elsewhere to live” meaning he was going to do other things to survive which was to change the tyres of vehicles which was not initially his profession.

Mathias a mechanic who did not have enough money to pay his rent, buy dresses, food for himself and take care of his younger ones, had to do other jobs related to his profession such as repairing motorcycle, light panel beating just to survive and help family members.

For a poor youth to survive in Douala, he/she must be very calculative—that is, must try as much as possible to make good use of the little resources that he/she earns as well as do many other things to complement his or her salary. This is the case of Nora who operated a call-box business in Bonanjo—she ensured to save 7000 francs weekly every week-end for her “Pépé-soup business” from which she gained 2000 francs per day which she would use to feed her two children and her unemployed husband. She would give 1000 francs to her husband to prepare food in the house and would add the remaining 3000 to the 7000 francs to buy air-time credit for her call box business.

Alain who earned about 100,000 frs CFA thinks it was insufficient to carter for all his needs and those of his relations. Apart from being employed as a commercial agent he also worked in the informal sector: he had an unlegalised printing press. He was afraid his master would dismiss him if he legalized it in his name. He was doing everything possible to use the names of one of his cousins in order to maintain his job. Whenever he presented the goods of his company, he would tell his customers about his printing press and the services they offer. They would call him whenever they needed his services which he would give to workers he had employed to work in the printing press. He would check it in the evening or during break-time or after returning from his work or over the weekend. He was also a go-between: he was a commercial agent, his customers would call for him to advertise their products which he would sell at an elevated price in order to make some gains for himself. He looked for them too even during working hours.

Romeo who wanted to go back to the university, sold umbrella, schoolbags and others goods over the week-end and even on Sunday in Bonanjo which is normally a resting day in order to make more money for himself. "I am a fighter because I can do all to survive" he had difficult moments but he tried to overcome them in one way or the other.

Poor youth who are teachers did what Bissai, a secondary school teacher symbolically termed to be "prostitution by giving home tuition to rich people's children," for payment. At times their masters would stay for months without paying them but they had no choice but to keep on teaching their children. Bissai equally had a plantation in his village although he did not have enough money to invest in it.

3.2.2 Flexibility and creativity

Most poor youths are very flexible and creative in doing businesses and other activities. When one business is not doing well, they can easily switch to another or do another activity. They equally serve as some sort of reserve labourers for building site; whenever someone has a contract to build a house for example they would employ them and pay them per task or at the end of the day. From the beginning they would give building materials to the builders, later they mix the mould and then learn how to build and even lay the bricks. After having mastered the work, contractors take building contracts and hand them over to them and pay them very low-salary since they do not know the value of work not being professionals themselves.

An interesting example is Djeufack who dropped out of school from lower sixth. He is a builder, a painter, a welder and an electrician, etc. He learned all that except electricity "on the spot" he said, that is in the course of doing them without any formal training. If a contractor goes to the quarter looking for a painter for example, they pretend to be painters just because they are idle and poor. The contractor takes them to the construction site. "We pretend to give him the different types of paints and materials that we need and will go and ask the price from a quincaillerie." This is just for them to get better information from a professional painter whom they will take to the site. After having all the required information, they then return and bargain with the contractor before starting the work. If from the onset the work is not going on smoothly, they will call an expert who will show them how to do it. The expert comes and verifies the work at the end to ensure that they have done it very well.

Sometimes they recruit them and they learn from those who know how to do it already although they all earn the same salary. It is difficult for the contractor to distinguish experts from charlatans. At times those who master the work report them to the contractor and if he notices that the work has been well done, he does not care to punish them. They understand very fast when those who have a mastery of the work teach them on the spot. Although he said such works "suffocate a lot and is dirty" and it is not motivating but "we have no choice because we need it," said Djeufack.

Djeufack who learned electricity at school, would take those idling in the quarter to help him whenever he had a lot of work to do. When he was employed as storekeeper in COMENTAL, he learned welding too on the spot during his free time because they were welders around him. Some of his friends who had welding jobs out of the company gave them to him and he did the works during his free time.

They also do farm work not because they have done it before but because hardship forces them to accept it. They ask farm proprietors who have farms to hire their service. They dump them there just to come back in a week to pick them up. They cut grass and harvest crops. There is no sense of direction when they are working because they have not done it before.

Djeufack also did small business that is, all what he could find: he sold apparatus, motorcycles, etc. He was a go-between if someone wanted to buy or sell something; he communicated it to those who are in need. If he sold it above the cost price, the extra sum will be his gain. He also did the business his dead father left because he did not have any other thing to do at the moment we met him—meaning that at the time we met him if he had had something more fruitful to do, he would have left for it. He was also a caterer because his brother was involved in it and constantly would call for him.

However, Djeufack has got no precise job, just like many other poor youths in the city Douala he does whatever he sees—he is an electrician, a welder, a go between, a painter, and does tapestry when there is an opportunity for him to do caterer, business, clearing people's farm he would not hesitate accepting them.

“Why all this?”, we asked him.

“Because it is not working,” he replied.

“Why?” We asked again.

“The country is not well, we are obliged to juggle like this to survive—because all is expensive and work is rare and it is by knowing someone. It is necessary to fight to have something,” he replied.

The salary is not good all the times but they are obliged to do it because they have got nothing else to do. However it is very competitive because there are many other poor youths in need of them. One could arrive when they had called for other persons.

3.2.3 Modelling

Modelling is learning by imitating others. When we learn how to behave in a new situation by watching how other behave in other words called observational learning. An example is watching someone use unfamiliar tool either live or on film and afterward being able to handle the tool oneself [14].

This is the method that many youths in Douala use to survive. They do not wait to have a proper training in something before doing it. They are daring and very adaptive and some learn very fast on the spot. After all they have no choice, imagine you have stayed for days without eating what will you do when an opportunity comes your way for you to earn some money? Will you refuse it because you have not got the appropriate training? So they have to “juggle to survive.” It gives us a sense of disorder but which saves its purpose.

There is no verification of expertise in such work—painting, welding, clearing a farm repairing a benskin, etc. We see the poor youths of Douala as being creative, someone trying to make maximum use of his environment and not just someone who just sit and hope that things may change on its own. He works while hoping. By so doing they later become professionals in many other fields that they have received no formal education or training. Tchuigoua summarized as follows: “All what I see that I can do, I do it.” They are not out to select jobs after all the jobs are very rare and highly solicited—that is, the poor youths scramble for them. If you are selective you will stay for weeks and even months without doing anything. In short, you will starve to death. How then will you manage your bills, feeding, dressing, and other things?

3.2.4 Accepting of odd jobs

Whenever the youth are pushed against the wall, they often forget their identity: their level of education in order to satisfy their basic needs. They cannot brandish their certificates because it cannot put food on their plates. Although it is often

frustrating but they have got no choice—they have to accept it or suffer the worst pains of poverty.

Anne is a 30 year old unemployed single lady who has a professional degree in touristic industries management and whose parents have been helping her for long. She said “my parents are very tired financially.” Having changed her jobs four times because of too much work and little salary which could not help her to save, she decided to do what she called “small work” such as placing “grafts,” plaiting women’s hair at their homes. She earned about 74000 frs CFA which was not enough to satisfy her basic needs and her objectives in life of returning to school.

Bernard was a BTS holder from the Institute Universitaire de Technologie of Douala who worked as an electrician in a construction site in Makepe. Although he earned about 4000 frs CFA per day, he considered his salary “disappointing, derisory. It cannot even be enough considering the size of the company.” According to him, it did not permit him to express his intrinsic values—that is, it is lower than his qualification. According to him, he ought to study the system, control and conserve it but as he put it “I only execute.” It disturbs him because he cannot express what he wanted to do by anticipating but only have to follow “the dictatorship of the enterprise.” He did not have any job satisfaction and was looking for a job that suited his level.

3.2.5 Second pay check and sacrifice

This means empowering ones wife by enabling her to operate a small business which can increase the household income rather than depending only on the man. According to Aert et al. [15], the inactivity of women is only possible when the other members of the household bring enough resources for the up-keep of the family. In a situation of insufficient resources, women contribute to the household comfort by working in the informal sector: doing petty business or operating a call box business.

Romeo who earned about 90000 frs CFA per month considered it insufficient to pay rent, bills and feed his family. To ameliorate his household comfort, he opened a shop for his wife where she sold Chinese sandals. He would invest about 7000 frs CFA every week in her business which help her to buy more food for the household. She saved 5000 frs CFA every week in a meeting in order to increase the size of her shop. Romeo had four trucks on rent managed by his wife which yielded her 1200 frs CFA per day which she would use to buy her personal and household needs such as detergents and their child’s needs, etc. They made a lot of sacrifices by eating twice rather than thrice in order to invest more money in their business.

Equally at times too Romeo like many other petit traders would sell their goods at a loss in order not to fail their contribution or to give food money at home. They are bound to do this because such gatherings do not have pity on the poor. Failure to contribute is often sanctioned by a fine. That is the little the poor has is further extorted by the association which will be later shared as accrued interest at the end of the year or session. Therefore the poor who join such associations do everything even to their own detriment to have their *Njangi* money.

They are also conscious of the fact that they equally have to feed their family and will do everything possible to have money for food. “What will you tell a child when he is hungry; it means you have failed as a father,” said Romeo—so they are conscious of their parental role. This is an indication that the poor youths have not developed the culture of poverty because they are conscious of the mainstream value of handwork which they think could bring them success. They are very hard working because they believe or are convince that they will make it 1 day in life. The question is whether they can develop the culture of poverty if failure comes after continuous struggles to survive—the sign of learned helplessness.

Some despite their slow-paced business do not have any other activity that they could do to earn extra money because they have just started. Some said if their business declined, they would be obliged to be motor-taxi drivers in the evening—they would rent it because they did not have enough money to buy one. Similarly Ayissi was raising money for her husband to start an ambulant second-hand shoes business. It was quite a reversal of role for the woman to be the one fighting for the man and not the reversal.

3.2.6 Long linked borrowing

Since the amount the poor make from their business is so insufficient, they borrow from friends to buy their goods such as cigarettes, biscuit, air-time credits, chips, bonbons, cool water, etc. to retail them. If it happens that they have not got the money yet and their creditors want the money, they will borrow from another friend to pay the creditor and the chain continues until they have made some profits from their business to pay back. Survival for the poor is really an uphill task and a lot of risk-taking. They keep on juggling while hoping that 1 day they will make enough money in order not to take credit but it is often difficult because the amount they gain from their business is often very little as compared to the problems they have to solve: paying children's school fees, feeding them and even taking care of them. At times some of the women even use their business capital to feed the family because their husbands are not working. What a reversal of role!

3.3 Sharing the same room

About 10% of friends live together in order to save money by jointly paying their rents. They share the bills together and help each other whenever one of them is hard-up. When one is agonized, the other put a smile on his face by telling him stories—he helps to communicate with him thereby breaking the silence. He shares his problems with him and gets his advice. However, others consider living with an unemployed friend a disadvantage because they pay the bills alone. Their friends may lack the means although he may work as a petit trader in the market or do other petit jobs. Most often they do not have any choice because they have taken the decision to live with them. Mathias did not initially want to live with his friend because he wanted a quiet life to read the Bible and understand it due to his low education. His friend distracted him but he could not send him away. He prayed that God should provide his friend the means to rent his own room. He said things were always in disorder—he did not care about the house. Mathias did everything alone. His friend did not do the washing up. Living with him was not helpful to him—it instead brought him down. He hardly would switch off the television and hardly closed the door allowing rats to enter the house. Whenever he told him he thought he hated him. His friend did not care because he did not pay the bills.

3.4 The management of psychological problems

Many things disturb the youths of Douala because they have limited resources to satisfy their needs. We asked them what they have done or were doing to solve them and their answers vary from total resignation to their fate to some actions taken to ameliorate their situation. The fact is that if they were more prosperous, they would solve their problems and as a consequence liberate themselves from psychological tortures.

Seigni was doing nothing to solve his psychological problems except his mechanic work where he was making maximum effort to succeed. He concluded by saying “what will I do?” Tchuigoua did not allow himself to be disturbed psychologically

because of lack of means. “I am happy with my situation and I live with it. What ought I have done? Go and steal? I don’t have any choice ---I am obliged to accept. After the death of my father, I have understood that life is not easy ... I am happy with my situation. I cannot go and break a bank because I need money.” Djonfack added that he was disturbed because his activity was stagnant and he needed to survive. He said “What will I do? I have not yet undertaken a solution.” Nineteen years old Kamdem did not diversify his activity to make money and did not often have enough money to live on, he said “Whether money suffices or not I am already used to it, if I have my two hundred francs, it is enough for me.”

Mbengate on his part said “in my life when some problems confront me—I have the means to solve. I will solve and if I do not have the means I will stay because I am tired of begging.” Michou added that “I struggle with what I have” which still means he does not have any option and cannot expect more than he can afford. Therefore he put the little he had in maximum use. Without any other option, the 27 years old Northerner said “At certain month, I don’t have money. I just have to work. I can’t go and borrow money from people. At a given time I took 10 000 frs CFA and pay back 16 000 frs CFA from a brother.” However, Mokoro said “it just worries me and I have to borrow money from friends to meet-up.” Twenty-eight years old Romeo put it as such “What does not kill us make us stronger.” He is in a way valorizing poverty—since poverty cannot kill them it instead empowers them. He concluded by saying “I am mentally very strong—if I had not been psychologically strong, I would have fallen in the River Wouri.” He accepted his situation which was full of battles since his childhood and acknowledged that he was already used to it—some sort of overcoming it and is no longer afraid of it although his daily battle for survival was still a very tough one.

Another category of youths are very combative. They do not want to accept their situation. “I say to myself, I must do all to change my situation,” Herman added by saying “I am a struggler—I can do all to survive.” He always had difficult periods in his life and had always tried to overcome them in one way or the other.” “I must work,” Doumbé confirmed “I have struggled as I could.” This means he did not give in to psychological torment; he went out there and worked as much as he could. He acknowledged that “When I am in need, I put all in the hands of God.” Mathew too confirmed that work alone was insufficient “I always struggle to resolve my problems. I always ask God and He always answers my prayers.” Ngantchieu too said “I try to multiply the sources of revenue to pray to God that He gives me His grace and that find a good job.”

Alain solved his psychological problems by trying to have more money and to have jobs elsewhere. They even revolted at their place of work to force their master pay their 4 months arrears. According to Bissai the 31 years Old Catholic secondary school teacher, he permanently made sacrifices; revisited his management skills by economizing in order to manage spontaneous problems. “I am foresighted,” he concluded in the same light. Nora ensured to pay her rent and on time. She informed her debtors before time that she may not pay them on time in order to avoid problem with them.

Equally 26 years old Thierry who was a teacher said that students disrespected him and he would feel useless in front of them and as a result decided to be very hard on them and not to smile with them. One of our respondents decided to ameliorate his social relation by often visiting his friends and relations in order to communicate with them. Others are struggling not to miss death celebration which they do not often attend because of lack of means.

Others manage their psychological problems by being violent Mathias put it as follows: “I do that because I think if I don’t react they may walk over me because

they always want me to fulfil their plan first and not mine. I will become angry and will speak rudely and maybe someone will come out from them and say that I should stop. Whenever I speak they will hah only at that moment and stop, realizing that I also have right somewhere. I have tried many ways not to be hard but they always try to provoke me. I have prayed God not to speak to them hardly but I have noticed that when I speak to them hard they cool down their temper.” How frustrating it is for these poor youths with limited resources, who are unable to take care of themselves and whose family members are also pressuring them for help. In order to make them understand their hardship, they tend to be hard on them.

Bernard is also trying to “reactivate” himself, hoping and searching because he believes in the adage which states that, “if you search without finding, you will find without searching.” He said he is not lazy and he has hope. In a way, one should keep on working hard for one will not go empty handed, one will end up finding something. What optimism!

Most of the female folks receive help from friends and family members. This indicates women’s dependence on others unlike their male counterparts who resign to their fate although they do not give up working.

3.5 Strategies to improve feeding habit

One of the questions we asked our respondents is what they were doing to better feed themselves considering that they were poor and could not feed themselves appropriately. We still repeat some of them for clarity sake and to better perceive and analyse it. There are four categories of poor youths: those who try to vary their meals, those who make an effort to consume fruits, those who cannot determine their feeding habits because of lack of means and those who think they feed themselves very well.

Ngantchieu said “I try to vary meals—to consume fruits.” “I vary meals” Ngo Hiol confirmed “I balance my meals,” Pierre added. Romeo explained this further by saying “I try to vary my nutrition but it is not of the best quality since it is cheap in the market—it is the second class and not the first quality. For example good tomatoes cost more than cheap tomatoes but because of lack of means one is contented with the rotten ones.”

However, taking a variety of meals does not necessarily mean that one feeds very well because they may be of very bad quality as Romeo put it or the same class of food. Since the poor eat to fill their stomach, they mostly eat carbohydrates and hardly will they take protein and vitamin because they are expensive. Only 15% of the respondents said they vary their meals.

About 19% will take the substitute of meat and fish which are the source of protein. Nasser said “I buy cheap food like beans which replaces meat” A good number will take soya beans. Ouembe said he tried to ameliorate his feeding by consuming fruits. Alain confirmed this by saying “from time to time one buys fruits.” The 8% of respondents who take fruits buy them from the roadside for about 100 francs or so and as Alain put it, it was not consistent and heavy.

About 15% are very calculative in the number of meals they eat considering that they do not have enough resources and the next day meal is a mystery. As a result they have to make sacrifices in order not to stay hungry. This is neatly put by Calem by saying “I cannot go out of the house knowing that I am going to work, one juggles. If I eat a lot tomorrow what will I do. I eat on calculation much reflection before eating.” Their eating habit is determined by the amount of money they have worked that day. If it is good they eat vegetables too if it is not they go without and even spent days without eating. They do not have a fix eating calendar.

Nora said she eats one type of food for about two to 3 days. “I can’t use food for three days in one day. How can I buy pufpuf for 300 frs CFA whereas I can use the three hundred francs to buy three cups of rice to feed the whole family for the whole day?” The problem here is not trying to ameliorate one’s feeding habit but trying to avoid hunger. This category of respondents do not have enough to feed themselves with, even their daily meals are uncertain so they ensure that the little resources that they have are well-used in order to avoid hunger the next day.

Although Mathias is planning to better feed himself he considers other things more important, he said he can sacrifice feeding in order to buy a phone. Bissai said he sacrifices money or send money to the village so that they can buy him food there because they are natural and cheaper. Some make an effort to eat a good meal “I am happy with a good meal once a week.” Others careless of whatever thing they eat Mathew put it thus: “It is necessary to have money. If I eat banana nobody will disturb at the end of the month.” Those who are living in a family house do not know whether they feed themselves very well or not because they eat only what is eaten—what is available.

Mbengate said he did not feed himself very well because he did not eat what he liked. He ate what he saw or what he could afford with the little money he had. He was not making any plan to better feed himself because his system was already adapted to his type of food so it did not disturb him. Kamdem said he ate whatever pleased himself according to the amount of money he had. Therefore he was contented with his feeding habit. Those who said they fed very well said so according to their standard meaning that there is another standard which they cannot attain. Some sort of resignation to their situation. Serge thought he worked very hard to feed himself and Tcheugoua ate a heavy breakfast everyday at home and tried elsewhere during the day.

3.6 Strategies to possess durable goods

Youth poverty is situational and not cultural because they also wish to integrate the main stream values of their society but they are constrained—They equally wish to live like others and are making efforts either by economizing money or are saving in the course of their daily struggles. We can put them in two categories those who are already making an effort and those who are dreaming about it.

As concerning owning a home about 34% are thinking of making an enormous sacrifice in the future to own a home that was why Oumbe called it a long term project because they did not have enough money to become a homeowner. They could not have them then because the little money they had was for their daily needs even if they bought them, they would have problems paying the bills. Nora further added that what was necessary at the moment was to feed herself, educate her children and she would only own a home if her life changed. She considered it a far-fetched project because she was making no effort.

So, those who are not working do not dream of owning neither a home nor any durable goods. Those who are living with their parents especially female youth do not have the project of renting but to either buy or build a house because they are at ease at their family house and nothing is pushing them to leave. After all they do not have enough resources to rent. Although they do not have any short term project to own a home, they neither do not have projects to buy some durable goods because their houses are small and they lack the resources. That is why Mathew said “It is enough for me on rentage like this.” He meant that the things that he had were sufficient for him so far as he continued renting. So what he had was sufficient for him not because he did not want to have more but because they cannot do otherwise.

The others are making desperate efforts to be homeowners and it is common to hear them say: “I am struggling as I can,” “I try to keep some money aside or to economize,” “I economize but it is not easy for I often lack to keep aside,” “I work in

order to economize,” “I work a lot and I try to save,” “I put them in future projects,” “I am saving now to be a home owner. It needs a lot of money so I will take more time to have. I will have to; it is not always good to copy from others.” “Saving from time to time even when problems come and ravage all.” “What disturbs me the more is to have my own house. It is a real problem more than having other goods,” “we struggle to economize.”

The above are good testimonies of desperate youths who are making effort to be like others they see in the city of Douala—homeowners with homes full of durable goods. They also dream and as a result are working very hard to change their fate. Serge says “I am thinking of buying a land. I know that one day God will give me.” What a sign of hope. It is such a hope that forces them to work harder especially the Bamileke youths. Some are just let by the wind without any sense of direction. Some are saving money quite alright but building a house is a difficult task, that is, they do not have any precise idea of building a house. Tchuigoue said “I live with it like that.” The *like that* means a lack of precision although he is saving money. Only 3% of them have bought a house in a swampy area and certainly most of them also will end up buying houses in such areas because of lack of means to buy land in good areas. They have not constructed yet, however, they are saving money to do so.

4. Theoretical implication

4.1 The individualistic approach

It is true that the poor suffer from low-income because they are unable to provide for their needs but they are not unwilling to provide adequately for their own well-being as the individualist theory states. If the youth of Douala were lazy, they would not be working so hard to change their fate. This theory erroneously states that neither the society nor the social groups to which individuals belong are accountable, and therefore should not help the poor. This is wrong because the poor youths in the city of Douala are victims of circumstances. They did not choose to be born in the third generation of a polygamous family, nor poor monogamous families which failed to empower them socially and economically, nor in the region or harsh area where they were born.

They are not lazy as such: a good number of them are quite hard working to change their lot. They are very hard working and creative; that is the reason why they diversify their activities in the informal sector and take advantage of every least opportunity that comes their way to make some money for themselves. This theory also states that, by increasing public expenditures they take money away from investment in industry and thus hinder the production of wealth. This is not the case with Douala where public investment and job creation is very low. Most of this youth would not have suffered from chronic poverty if the government had invested in the productive sector that could help employ them. Therefore the individualistic theory is not an appropriate theory that can be used to explain youth poverty in the city of Douala. Youth poverty is more a characteristic of a social group: a family or a community and not a characteristic of individuals.

4.2 Symbolic interactionism

The youth in the city of Douala go about their everyday activities interpreting the harsh world in which they live. Their symbolic environment mediates the physical environment so that they do not only experience a stimulus, but rather a definition of the situation. A definition of the situation is the interpretation or meaning

we give to our immediate circumstances. Berger states that a person finds out who he is as he learns what society is ([16], p. 78). According to Zenden facts do not have an inherent or uniform existence apart from the person who observes and assigns meanings to them. Real fact is the ways people define various situations. The youths of Douala form various identities in the course of struggling to survive.

First of all they acknowledge the fact that they live in a very difficult environment where the prizes of basic goods are very high and at the same time most of them are low-salary earners. More so, they are school drop outs, or have just halted their education in order to save some money that they are even unable to raise because their salary and the little profit they make from their petit businesses is used to satisfy their immediate needs. Their families have abandoned them to their fate because they are not the only children or because they are too poor to take care of their children. They therefore have formed various concepts about who they are, what sociologists call the self which emerges in the course of interacting with other people.

The concept they have of themselves is one of the strugglers who is fighting to break the iron bars of poverty which is independent of their will, because they did not choose their family nor the order of their birth, they are just victims. There is nobody neither from their family nor the society in which they live ready to reinforce their capital building. Instead they are being exploited by those who have the least opportunity to do so. Therefore they must have the stamina to look for a way to survive. They often say: "I am a struggler because I can do all to survive." They have difficulties in getting the required satisfaction however, they must live by creating other means the society may consider illegal. They deceive the vigilance of the gatekeepers those who restrict them from getting certain favours, in entering in certain neighbourhoods, etc.

The concept they have of themselves is that of helplessness in getting the mainstream values of their society. Just like any other person in their society they will also like to be homeowners and own durable goods but they do not have the means. They seem resigned to their fate as they see their fellow friends and countrymen of their generation possessing what to them is far-fetched "It is difficult, one juggles only to live. What will I do?" "I am happy with my situation and I live with it, what ought I have done, go and steal? I do not have choice. One cannot do things that other people do, one is obliged to accept." "What will I do, we know already that there is nothing," etc.

The third is that of uncertainty. Their future is very blur; there is no clarity of what will happen the next day. As a result they have to be cautious because if the worst comes to the worst, their poor parents nor the government will not be able to help them neither will they go to the tontines which exploit them by giving them loan on interest basis. "I cannot go out of the house knowing that I will work—one juggles. If I eat a lot tomorrow what will I do?"

Thus with low educational level they define themselves as underachievers because they think they do not have the necessary academic backing them to pursue higher studies. Ayissi said "For my level what type of job can I have where I no get book. My job is equivalent to my level, I don't expect more." Alain meets people who can help him have a better employment but he has is not even a *Probatoire* holder.

After struggling to live by managing the little resources that they have, they may alienate themselves from what obtains in the outer world. They are always spontaneously awkward when they come in contact with it. Some confuse breakfast and lunch because they are not used to it not because they do not want it but because they do not have the means to have one. They are so used to not taking breakfast so much so that it has lost its importance. To them the perception of a meal is different from that of the rich. All what they care for is to fill their stomach and not to take light meal for taking sake.

5. Conclusion

The poor youth of Douala do many precarious economic activities. When in financial difficulties, they walked out of their zone of expertise and do many other activities whether related to their field of specialization or not. So for them to survive, they must be very smart and tactful, flexible and creative in diversifying their businesses and other activities. When one business is not doing well, they can easily switch to another or do another activity. They do not wait to have a proper training in something before doing it. They are daring and very adaptive and some learn very fast on the spot because they have no choice. It is some sort of disorder but it saves its purpose. Men also diversify by empowering their wives to operate small businesses which increase the household income.

Survival for the poor is really an uphill task and a lot of risk-taking. They keep on juggling while hoping that 1 day they will make enough money in order not to take credit but it is often difficult because the amount they gain from their business is often very little as compared to the problems they have to solve: therefore they engage in long-linked borrowing.

Many things disturb them because they have limited resources to satisfy their needs. Their solution is that of total resignation to their fate although they take some actions to ameliorate their situations. The fact is that if they were more prosperous, they would solve their problems and as a consequence liberate themselves from psychological tortures.

Poor youth try to vary their meals, some make an effort to consume fruits while others cannot determine their feeding habits because of lack of means. Their eating habit is influenced by the amount of money they earn daily. If it is good they eat vegetables too if it is not they go without and even spent days without eating. They do not have a fix eating calendar. Those who said they feed very well said so according to their standard meaning that there is another standard which they cannot attain. Some sort of resignation to their situation.

In the course of struggling for survival, they form various identities of themselves: those of strugglers, helplessness, uncertainty, underachievers, alienated people, etc. Youth poverty is situational and not cultural because they also wish to integrate the main stream values of their society but they are constrained—they equally wish to live like others and are making efforts to save in the course of their daily struggles.

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