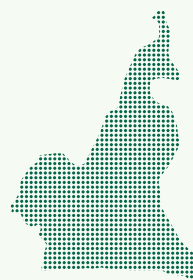
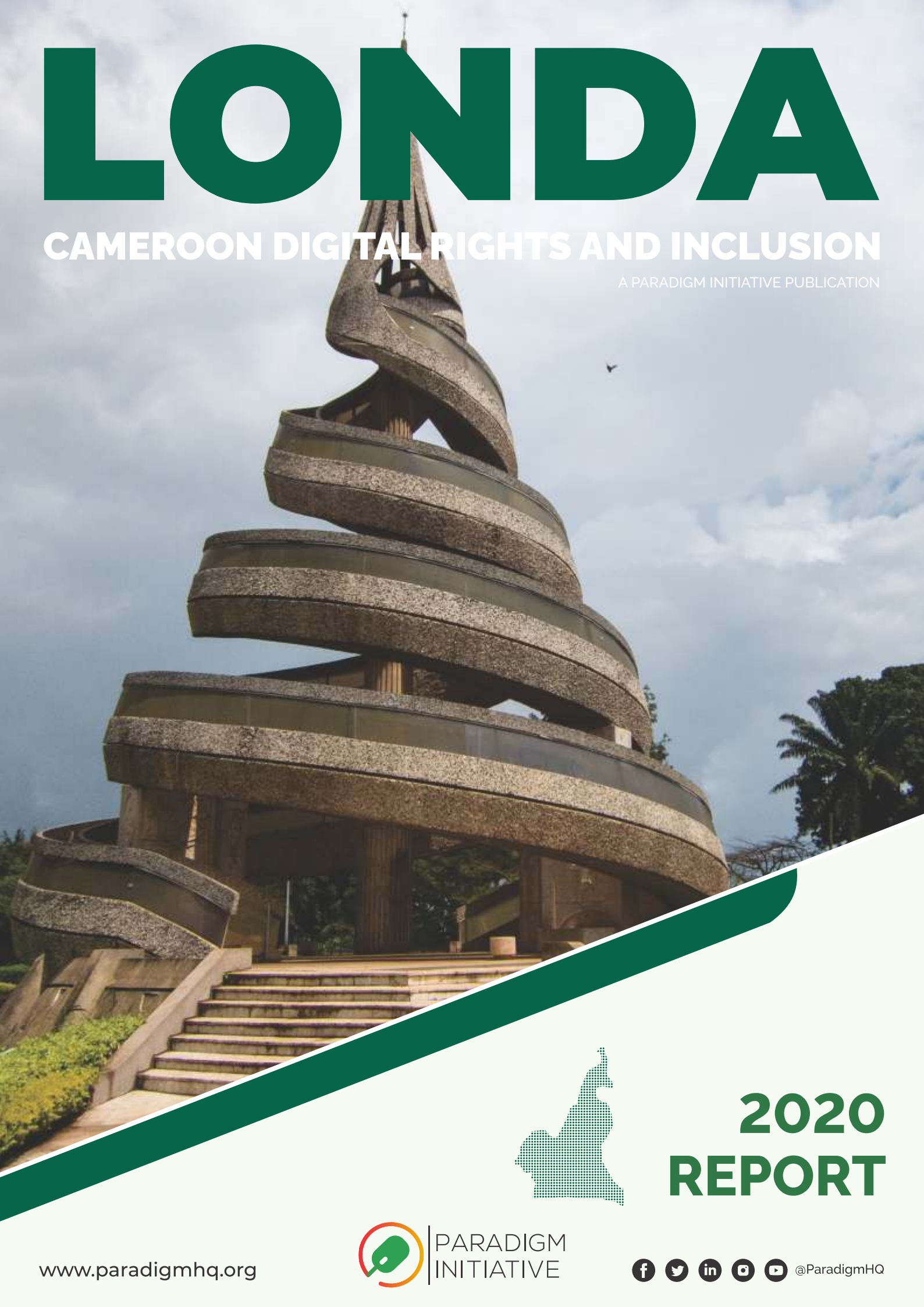


# LONDA

CAMEROON DIGITAL RIGHTS AND INCLUSION

A PARADIGM INITIATIVE PUBLICATION



**2020  
REPORT**

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## CAMEROON DIGITAL RIGHTS AND INCLUSION 2020 REPORT

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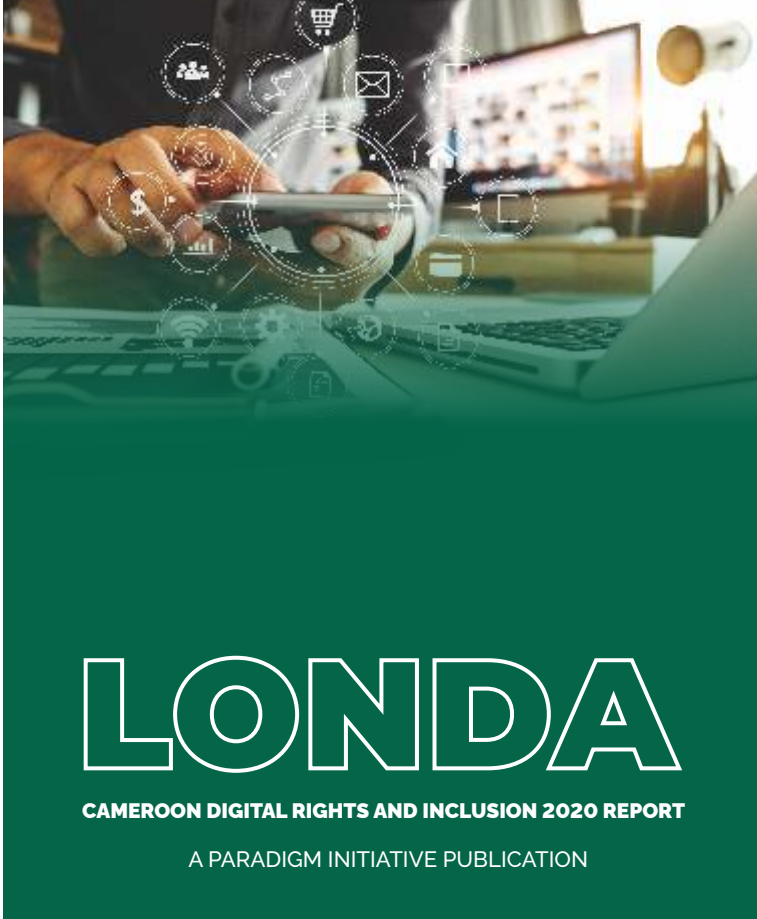
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# LONDA

CAMEROON DIGITAL RIGHTS AND INCLUSION 2020 REPORT

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Civil society organizations continue to work to advance digital rights and inclusion in Africa, ensuring best practices are adopted into policy and legislation. This report analyses the state of digital rights and inclusion in Cameroon, examining violations and gaps, investigating the use and application of policy and legislation, highlighting milestones and proffering recommendations for the digital landscape in Cameroon. This edition captures among other issues, the digital divide worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic and unearths infractions on different thematic areas such as privacy, access to information, and freedom of expression with the legislative and policy background well enunciated.

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Cameroon, a bilingual country in Central Africa, has an estimated population of 27 million inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> The country has an estimated gross domestic product (GDP) of 479 billion FCFA over three years, including 180 billion in 2020.<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

# DIGITAL RIGHTS AND INCLUSION IN CAMEROON

## ICT SECTOR AND POLICY

Over the past 20 years, Cameroon has adopted various laws and actions in the ICT sector. In 2016, the government adopted a strategy document for digital growth called the Cameroon Digital Strategic Plan 2020.<sup>3</sup> The document identified the following eight strategic axes on which the government would base itself on in order to develop internet coverage in Cameroon:

- develop broadband infrastructure;
- increase the production and supply of digital content;
- ensure the digital transformation of administration and businesses;
- promote digital culture through the widespread use of ICT in society;
- strengthen digital confidence;
- develop a local digital industry and encourage research and innovation;
- ensure the development of human capital and digital leadership;
- and ensure the improvement of governance and institutional support.



## CAMEROON DIGITAL STRATEGIC PLAN 2020

1. [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C3%A9mographie\\_au\\_Cameroun](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C3%A9mographie_au_Cameroun)

2. <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Pays/CM/ind%C3%A9t%C3%A9s-et-conjoncture#:~:text=Le%20Gouvernement%20a%20pr%C3%A9sent%C3%A9%20un,interm%C3%A9diaire%20de%20la%20tranche%20inf%C3%A9rieure>

3. <https://localhostkmer.xyz/2020/08/18/plan-strategique-numerique-du-cameroun-2020/>

Several objectives were not achieved for cyclical and structural reasons. One of the priorities of the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications set out in the 2020 Finance law<sup>4</sup> is to increase qualitative and quantitative access and at a lower cost throughout the country. The indicator for this objective is the development of ICTs in Cameroon.

In Cameroon, 3G mobile coverage is estimated at a satisfactory rate of 69% with individual internet usage at 23% since 2018.<sup>5</sup> Operators provide different network coverage including 5G. 5G coverage, the most popular one, covers less than a million users nationwide.<sup>6</sup> According to a report published by Hootsuite and We Are Social as of January 2020, Cameroon had 7.8 million people connected to the internet. Cameroon's internet penetration rate reached 30% in January 2020,<sup>7</sup> with an increase of 7.8%, estimated as 570,000 new internet users.

The country has four mobile operators, therefore three in the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM), namely

- MTN,
- Orange,
- Nexttel
- and Cameroon Telecommunications (Camtel), the public mobile operator and the main intermediary provider of telephone and internet services.

MTN and Orange are the market leaders in terms of mobile subscribers, internet services, mobile transfer service and revenue. According to its latest report, MTN has more than 10 million subscribers in Cameroon, with a turnover of 5.6 billion in 2020.<sup>8</sup>

As part of the development of technological infrastructure, Cameroon has two internet exchange points, called CAMIX. The sale of internet services is carried out by around 20 internet access providers. In October 2020, the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications appointed CAMIX,<sup>9</sup> an association therefore the members are operators and Internet Services providers as manager of exchange points in Cameroon, under the supervision of the Telecommunications Regulatory Agency (ART) and the National Agency for Information and Communication Technologies (ANTIC), two regulatory bodies for the ICT sector in Cameroon. Internet connectivity is provided by telephone operators and internet service providers of which 20 are privately owned.

Regulatory actors are at the centre of digital policy in Cameroon. The Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications coordinates all activities in the sector and is the main government institution responsible for ICT in the country. The Telecommunications Regulatory Agency (ART) is the regulator of the mobile telephony sector and internet connections. It has the power to sanction operations in case of violation of regulations. The National Agency for Information and Communication Technologies (NAICT) is also responsible for the promotion of ICT, the management of domain names (.cm) and fighting cybercrime. Digital legislation specific to the sector is described in the 2010 law on Electronic Communications.



**7.8 Million**  
People connected  
to the internet

4. <https://www.dgb.cm/news/consulter-loi-de-finances-cameroun-lexercice-2020/#>

5. <https://www.nperf.com/fr/map/CM/-/-/signal/>

6. <https://www.nperf.com/fr/map/CM/-/449.MTN/signal/?ll=4.71877551249867&lg=9.953613281250002&zoom=6>

7. <https://www.investiraucameroun.com/economie/2402-14084-le-taux-de-penetration-de-l-internet-au-cameroun-atteint-30-en-2020-grace-al-arrivee-de-570-000-new-internet-users>

8. [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uJG-ZRCY6MsyXOB\\_NidENHijSfV8s4jhj3jld\\_JvvTo/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uJG-ZRCY6MsyXOB_NidENHijSfV8s4jhj3jld_JvvTo/edit)

9. <http://www.camix.cm/>





## ONLINE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In 2017, Cameroon recorded the longest internet shutdown of 93 days. The 2017 internet shutdowns were requested by the government to quell claims and the spread of hate speech at the start of the crisis in the North and South West, the two English-speaking regions in conflict. Heavy economic and social consequences were recorded. These closures were the most serious digital rights violations. During this internet shutdown, Cameroon suffered significant financial losses estimated at \$38.8 million.

Further, on January 17, 2020, Cameroon Telecommunications (Camtel), the public telecoms operator in Cameroon<sup>10</sup> responsible for managing optical fiber, issued a press release to announce the disruption of the internet network following an accident on the cable under - marine West Africa Cable System (WACS). Prior to this release, the NetBlocks Internet Observatory had already shown that social media and messaging services had been disrupted.

## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DIGITAL RIGHTS AND INCLUSION

As part of collective actions to fight the coronavirus pandemic, the opposition party, Mouvement pour la Renaissance du Cameroun (MRC), initiated fundraising actions to support those in need. On May 4 2020, the Minister of Territorial Administration considered this action as illegal and sent letters to the CEOs of MTN and Orange, demanding the closure<sup>11</sup> of the accounts Mobile Money and Orange Money for fundraising.

Additionally, during the crisis, the use of social media rose. In April 2020, a letter from the office of the President of the Republic instructed the Director of the National Agency for Information and Communication Technologies (NAICT), to monitor all accounts by technological means and users disseminating fake news as well as the presence of fake news on platforms like Facebook.

On June 23, 2020, the Facebook page and the Cameroon election website (ELECAM), the organ for the organization and control of elections in Cameroon, was hacked for a period of 24 hours. This attack targeted the databases of registrants.

On September 17, 2020 Facebook announced a VAT of 19.25% will be paid on any advertising in Cameroon from October 1, 2020. According to the provisions of the 2020 Finance law, the educated tax is expanding to other platforms like Google and Amazon for online shopping.

10. <http://www.camix.cm/>

11. In Cameroon, the government wants to stop a fundraiser against the virus launched by the opponent Kamto, Le Monde, April 30, 2020, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/04/30/in-cameroon-the-government-wants-to-stop-a-fundraiser-against-the-virus-launched-by-the-opponent-kamto\\_6038237\\_3212.htm/](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/04/30/in-cameroon-the-government-wants-to-stop-a-fundraiser-against-the-virus-launched-by-the-opponent-kamto_6038237_3212.htm/)

Article 127, paragraph 15 of the 2020 finance law stipulates that:



“

***The sales of goods and the provision of services carried out on Cameroonian territory or through foreign or local electronic commerce platforms; commissions received by operators of online commerce platforms.***

Further, on September 22 2020, the country recorded the presence of low internet disruptions. At the announcement of the elections of regional advisers for December 6, 2020 in Cameroon, the opposition party, MRC invited its activists to demonstrate throughout the country. It is likely that the internet was disrupted to stifle the mobilizations.

Cameroon has various legal instruments on digital use. One in particular is the law on electronic commerce adopted in 2000, the law on consumer protection, law n° 2010/012 of 21 December 2010 on cybersecurity and cybercrime is the law no longer used to regulate cyberspace.

In general, this law “governs the security framework of electronic communication networks and information systems, defines and punishes offenses related to the use of information and communication technologies in Cameroon”.

On March 13, 2020, the Ministers of Finance and Posts and Telecommunications signed a joint decision setting out the modalities for the electronic collection of customs duties and taxes on phones, tablets, terminals and software. This widely criticized joint decision on the possibility of digital rights violations was overturned by a letter from the President of the Republic.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The year 2020 in Cameroon has recorded several news stories on digital rights. Slight cases of digital rights violations have been recorded. In the context of the Coronavirus crisis, the rights of users have been influenced by the barrier measures to combat the pandemic.

New mechanisms of intimidation and violations have developed in the context of Covid-19. Although the government and sometimes telephone operators and internet providers use these new mechanisms to violate digital rights and restrict freedoms, the role of local and international organizations has remained dynamic in addressing non-compliance through various advocacy actions and campaigns.

In view of the digital rights situation in 2020 in Cameroon, the following recommendations should be made to improve digital rights and digital inclusion in the country for the coming year;

- An audit of Cameroon's 2020 digital strategic plan before setting up new strategies plan;
- Adopt a law on the protection of personal data;
- Adopt a law on social media platforms with the definition of government responsibilities;
- Initiate decisions on the ICT sector by involving all the key stakeholders in the internet ecosystem;
- Request an annual transparency report for data privacy from all telephone operators and ISPs in Cameroon on digital inclusion and digital rights.

***One of the priorities of the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications set out in the 2020 Finance law is to increase qualitative and quantitative access and at a lower cost throughout the country.***

”





## Case Study: COVID-19: What turned my life upside down

Compiled by Rigobert Kenmogne

In April 2020, when my aunt, Suzanne, went to the Djoungolo Health Center, in the city of Yaoundé, she did not know that she was going to experience some moving moments in her life. 50 years old, she went to the Health Center for a COVID-19 test. Four days, Suzanne had been reluctant to go to a Health Center for the test. Reassured to have made the right choice, under the advice of her cousin, she finally decides to go there one morning. Once in the Health Center, she is shy, because she has already started developing seizures after a few days of her onset of cough, external signs of a potential COVID-19 contamination.

Once at the Health Center, those in charge of the service will make arrangements to take the necessary samples. But the service is slow, due to many patients who want to know their health situation. In addition, the test kits are not in great numbers; the service is saturated; the cousin comforts Suzanne and they wait. Around the middle of the day, Suzanne gets her results, as the signs indicate her status is positive. She is visibly in shock and fears losing her life. Suzanne becomes blade, bruised and lives into silence for a few minutes. She was probably wondering if she could live with this contamination that is so scary. Suzanne must begin quarantine immediately. "Madam, your result is positive, you must go into quarantine, everything will be better with care" indicates a person in charge of the Center. She holds her breath and listens to the doctors' instructions. To avoid any outbreak of the disease, Suzanne's cousin must also be tested. She does not refuse. Fortunately, her status is negative, she has not contracted the disease, but the barrier measures, distancing and quarantine are necessary for her.

A week after the start of treatment in quarantine, Suzanne discovers that her COVID-19 status with her photos and those of other infected people in the Health Center are published on social media, in particular the Facebook and WhatsApp platforms. She was deeply disappointed, upset and lost a lot of weight in a few days. This situation caused other illnesses in her life context. Fortunately, she survived these difficult situations.

According to a young influencer who worked with Plan International-Cameroon, "Suzanne went into a rage when she saw her information online,



which in fact made her situation worse". Suzanne confided that she was back in her forties thanks to the support of Plan International and the work of young influencers of the organization and partners. As in similar cases, as part of its activities, Plan International, sensitized populations on the dangers of COVID-19 by distributing protection kits. Advice was given to Suzanne to help her health balance her moral. Campaigns on the ethical responsibility of physicians have also been initiated directly in targeted health centres or on social media.

Since March 2020, at the start of the crisis, more than 10 cases of personal data breaches have been reported to Plan International through the activities of young influencers. More women than men have complained about posting their health status on social media.

On the prospects of protecting personal data and limiting violations as it has been for Suzanne and many others, the young influencer recommends: " we must adopt a law on the protection of personal data, make Internet users aware of the notion of personal data, encourage Internet users to read the confidentiality policies of social network companies, and draft and make available to the public a personal data protection charter for better impregnation".

Plan International works in 4 areas: health, education, protection and defense of the rights of vulnerable people. The actions of the organization in raising awareness against the spread of COVID-19 and its impact on populations have been significant. For more information on Plan International, please visit <https://plan-international.org/>



## Case Study: COVID-19: Between personal data breaches and disinformation in Cameroon

Compiled by Rigobert Kenmogne

At the beginning of 2020, Bernard (name changed), 60 years old, went to Europe as usual. But this visit would not be like the others. His stay in April 2020 coincides with the start of the Coronavirus lockdowns. Originally from the western region of Cameroon, Bernard plans his return to Cameroon to avoid the worst. Once in the country, via Douala International Airport, Bernard must undergo tests as indicated in the health protocol in times of crisis.

Several other passengers like Bernard are waiting for their tests to be carried out with long waits as health services are saturated and are still adapting. Bernard is a well-known personality in the country. Given his age, he must be attended to as a high risk patient as is the case with other elderly passengers.

Bernard tested positive for COVID-19 and went into quarantine. During quarantine, he did not survive and his death left his friends and colleagues in shock. He was an emblematic figure of his community. Despite receiving assistance from healthcare workers, as well as friends and family, Bernard died from COVID-19. During his quarantine, several family members and friends came into contact with him, most of whom did not have a real knowledge of the dangers of the virus yet.

Bernard's funeral was organized in strict compliance with barrier measures away from his native village. A few days later, after Bernard's funeral, friends and relatives became aware of a publication on social media brandishing his COVID-19-related personal data. The news is received with doubt given the denial amongst many Cameroonians of the virus' existence. The announcement with the photo of Bernard a few days after his funeral created a panic in the community. There are mixed sentiments from some refusing to be tested to others seeking home remedies to treat the virus. There is also anger following the publishing of the deceased's personal information.

Other COVID-19 cases that have been disclosed on social media have also created shock in the community as noted through the work carried out by Merveilles du Monde through the International Foundation for Development, Education, Entrepreneurship and Environmental Protection (FIDEPE) in



Cameroon. A team member says: “The second case for me was even more stigmatizing. After Bernard's death, a false announcement spread about the contamination of his private secretary. This situation plunged the whole community into turmoil a second time, with the fear for everyone to approach a member of the different families. It was later that the private secretary of the deceased arrived in the village a few weeks later and in good health, very angry, after having published a post in advance on Facebook to express his dissatisfaction to all those who disseminated this false information of a positive test for COVID-19 with his photo.”

The messages of support enabled Bernard's private secretary to organize awareness-raising campaigns alongside Merveilles du Monde. “He organized an anti-COVID-19 awareness and response campaign in his community,” indicates a member of Merveilles du Monde. For the third case, the member adds that, “This was a man who had health problems for a long time before the COVID-19 crisis. After his death, images were broadcast on social networks announcing a subsequent death from COVID-19 when his test was negative.”

In each case, Merveilles du Monde provided psychological and social assistance as part of the campaign. To limit such violations, in similar crises, Merveilles du Monde recommends “setting up wider platforms for discussion and awareness of the risks of personal data exposure in times of crisis”. In general, awareness training on the consequences of these violations during the crisis is necessary.

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