



Cameroon



The United Republic of Cameroon is located in the western coastal region of central Africa. Its name comes from Portuguese sailors, who, upon their arrival in 1472 noticed a large number of a certain type of shrimp in the waters. They called the place *Rio dos Camarões* (*Shrimp*



Preschoolers enjoy recess at their MCA supported school.

River), which became *Cameroon* in English.

The country covers an area that is just a bit larger than the state of California. Cameroon's population is a little more than half the size of California's. The capital city is Yaoundé. (Say Ya-oon-dey).

Most people who live in Cameroon are Christian (about 70%). Close to 20% of the people are Muslim. The remaining 10% practice traditional or animist faiths or say they have no faith at all. At present, most Christians live in the southern and western regions of Cameroon. There are six main tribes of people who call Cameroon home with many smaller ones sharing the country as well. Between them, they speak 24 different major African languages, although English and French are the official national languages with most people (83%) speaking French. This is a cause for a great divide and power struggle within Cameroon.

Although education is free in Cameroon up to the twelfth grade, many children, especially girls, do not go to school. A third of all children in Cameroon ages 5-14 are actually working full time to help support their families.

Health care is also a problem for the average Cameroonian. There is about one doctor for every 12,500 people in the country. Many of the diseases that are a constant problem in the country are the result of drinking or playing in contaminated water.

MCA and Education in Cameroon

While most people in the cities (about 95%) have access to clean water, many people who live in the rural areas do not. Throughout the country, only about half of all Cameroonians have indoor plumbing. Almost 15% of Cameroonian children are underweight.

Fr. Gaspard Mengata Nka, former National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in Cameroon, parent organization of the Missionary Childhood Association, feels very strongly that children are the future of his country.

On a visit to schools supported by MCA in the Diocese of Bafoussam, he was very happy to point out all the improvements made possible by our members' sacrifices, including a new building on one educational site.

Though it may seem strange to us, one of the first places that a visitor to a school in Bafoussam may be proudly shown is the bathrooms. Indeed at the School of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, girls and boys restrooms are the newest addition, thanks to Missionary Childhood.

Indoor plumbing means cleaner, healthier children; it means less missed school time due to illness and less financial hardship on poor families seeking costly medical care. It allows them to focus more on living life according to the motto of their school:

Pray, Work, and Play!

It was also clear that the needs are still great. Preschoolers have no paper and pencils—they do their lessons on sheets of plywood using chalk. Students of all ages share the few books—the need for textbooks is great in most schools. The few schools that have computers use very outdated technology.

Despite some of the physical hardships, education in an MCA supported school can be quite advanced when it comes to curriculum—even preschoolers learn their lessons in English AND French.



Writing lessons on slates of wood, these children are learning in two languages at once!

At last report, members of the Missionary Childhood Association from around the world sacrificed \$15,000 to help the school children of the Diocese of Bafoussam. Because of MCA members' prayerful generosity, these little ones in Cameroon are learning (in two languages!) how much God loves them!

Missionary Childhood Association

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