

Diplomatic Relations between Cameroon and Saudi Arabia: A Win-Win Cooperation

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Abstract

Diplomatic relations between Cameroon and Saudi Arabia dates back to a very long period of time. That is to say during the pre - colonial and colonial periods. However, real or official diplomatic relations began in 1966 with the two countries establishment or opening of diplomatic missions or consular service, with resident Ambassadors appointed to each other's administrative or political capitals. Beginning from that period, Cameroon Saudi Arabia relations has been so beneficial on both side up till date. This study examines the role Islam and hajj in the dynamics of Cameroon - Saudi Arabia relations, which are hajj-driven and how the constant movement of pilgrims to and from Saudi Arabia intensifies the relations between the two states. Islam and Hajj remains the main issues around which Cameroon - Saudi Arabia relations revolve; Saudi Arabia happened to be one of the first states with which Cameroon established diplomatic relations in 1966. Hajj prepared the ground for a link between colonial Cameroon and emergent Saudi Arabia, meanwhile hajj holds a great potential for trade relations between the two countries culminating into enhanced economic diplomacy. This practice originated from hajj being the basis of the first diplomatic mission. The hajj has rubbed positively on the duo relations for enhanced South - South relations and is relevant to the global concern for terrorism, peace and security. The study demonstrates how the role of Islam and hajj in Cameroon - Saudi Arabia relations can opens a new vista in South - South relations. It shows how cultural events involving two or more states can draw them closer diplomatically.

Keywords: Diplomatic relations, Saudi Arabia, Cameroon, Hajj, Islam, South Relations.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Some important events in history have shaped and continue to shape the pattern and manner of relations between and amongst nations in the international system. Such events range from the historic Westphalia Treaty of 1648, to the Vienna Convention and the establishment of the League of Nations and so forth. These events have the propensity of changing global affairs and have recorded tremendous success in the growing interdependence amongst nation-states. Partly, this is what has corroborated in bringing about the robust shades of diplomacy as a tool of interaction amongst nation-states, which is by far and wide driven by economic diplomacy which has shrunk the world and created space for collaboration between and amongst nations in the international system. This relationship according to Akinsanya (2010:2-10) has been enjoyed at state level, regional, continental and global scale. Cameroon has had its fair share of relations between her and other numerous countless countries including the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It goes without gainsaying that

on a continental level, Africans and Arabs have maintained contact through trade, pilgrimage, and scholarly exchange since before the arrival of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa. Beginning in the colonial era and accelerating after independence, however; technological, political, and economic changes increased the intensity and diversity of contacts between dwellers of the continents, Cameroon and Saudi Arabia in particular. Especially after the 1950s, elites Muslims from Cameroon studied at Islamic universities in Sudan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, while hundreds of thousands of ordinary Cameroonians performed the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. In the Mid 1960s, the Cameroon government under President Ahmadou Ahidjo established diplomatic relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. That was the beginning of a fruitful cooperation ties that will last for a very long period of time. (Hasan Y. 1985:2-28)

This article examines the diplomatic relationship between Cameroon and Saudi Arabia. The issues that are important to Cameroon-Saudi Arabian

relations are numerous ranging from Hajj, education, building of Islamic infrastructures, economic aids and health. However, Hajj remains the most crucial issue in Cameroon's relation with Saudi Arabia. As Eulalia Amabo (2019:2-10), put it, this was the basis for the establishment of diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia in 1966. The diplomatic ties or cooperation proceeded with the creation of permanent diplomatic missions on either side. In this study, we are going to dwell on the origin, evolution and outcomes of Cameroon-Saudi Arabian relations. Before that, let us present Cameroon and Saudi Arabia, geographically.

Geographical and Historical Presentation of Cameroon

Cameroon is situated in Central Africa, at the juncture of the Gulf of Guinea. It is bounded on the North by Chad, on the East by the Central African Republic, on the South by Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea and on the West by Nigeria.

Cameroon is a country with Ten Regions and several major towns, amongst which are Yaounde, the political capital of the country, with about one million or more inhabitants. Douala, which is the major economic city has more than two million inhabitants. The other major towns are Garoua, Bafoussam, Maroua, Bamenda, Ngaoundere, Ebolowa, Buea and Bertoua. Cameroon has more than 240 tribes and two official languages which are English and French: Cameroon is a secular state. Two major religions have followers; Christianity and Islam. Animism is also widely practiced. The country has two major seasons which are the dry and rainy seasons.

Historically, Cameroon was administered by the Germans from 1884 to 1916. According to V.J. Ngoh, when the Germans were ousted from the country by the joint British and French forces during the First World War, there was a joint administration of the territory by the British and French referred to as the Condominium. From 1922 to 1939, Cameroon was a Mandated Territory of the League of Nations still administered by Britain and France. From 1945 to 1960/61, British and French Cameroons were Trust territories of the United Nations. French Cameroon got her Independence on 1st January, 1960, while British Cameroons got her own Independence on October 1st, 1961. On that very date of October 1st, 1961, Reunification of British and French Cameroons took place under the United Nations supervision.

Geographical and historical presentation of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is an independent state occupying most of Arabia; area 927,000sqm. It has a population of about 34.14 million following the 2019 population census. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest country in the Arabian Peninsula. The capital city is Riyadh. Saudi Arabia comprises of the Hejaz (an area of

112,500sq.m. with a coast line of 800 miles on the Red sea, and the towns of Jeddah and Mecca). Nejd, which means "plateau" (an area of 800,000sq.m. to the east and south of the Hejaz), and Aziz, on the Red sea coast between the Hejaz and Yemen. These three areas were unified to form the Saudi Arabian kingdom by Ibn Saud (1880-1953), whose family had once rule Nejd but been deposed. The United Kingdom recognized by treaty the complete independence of the Kingdom in 1932. The major source of revenue was once the tax imposed upon the Muslim Pilgrims to Mecca, the holy city. The discovery of oil in 1936 at Dammam, in Nejd, transformed the Saudi economy. (Eliot Florence, 1973:10-110)

The role played by Hajj in strengthening Cameroon-Saudi Arabian relations

Hajj or Pilgrimage to Mecca is one of the pillars of Islam. As a matter of fact, it is the fifth pillar of Islam. It is an important annual ritual in which Muslims worldwide in general and Cameroonian Muslims in particular have been engaged since time immemorial. Fombina or old Adamawa, Northern Cameroon and the colonial administration, all were involved and engaged in Hajj operations, more or less, to cater for the pilgrims who were intent on going on the annual pilgrimage. Following the analysis of Hasan Y. (1985:2-28), the Cameroon government has been involved in the organization of Hajj even prior to its independence in January, 1960. Since Hajj operations and management involve consular and aviation activities, they require bilateral cooperation on the part of the two states. The French and British, aware of the potentials of hajj in forging global solidarity among Muslims, wanted to curb the flow of pilgrims in order to protect their own interests in Cameroon. Rigid rules restricted the number of pilgrims while good conduct was ensured through surveillance by escorts and at strategic posts along the pilgrimage land routes up to the Sudan. Colonial policy was to discourage contact among the various national segments of the Islamic community. Some of the measures introduced by the French and British colonial governments were modern travel requirements such as passports, immigration control, health regulations and some payment of deposits for services in the holy land (Hino, 1986:150-109).

A positive aspect of these measures was the introduction of motorized trucks buses and, finally, aircraft. As the pilgrims transportation facilities were improving to the point where a quick trip was possible, the French and British came to regard the pilgrimage as less threatening. New travel formalities, combined with modern travel facilities, brought revolutionary changes in hajj organization in Cameroon. The first fully organized hajj journey by road undertaken by a group from Maroua, Garoua, Ngaoundere, Douala, Yaounde, Bafoussam and Bamenda Regions occurred in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The prosperous modern business

of hajj by air went on side by side with the hajj by road option through the 1950's. However, hajj by road must have begun to decline by the end of the decade as air travel was becoming popular, safer, faster and cheaper. Moreover, some Muslim leaders stationed in Khartoum, Sudan made it known of the considerable obstacles that intending Cameroonian pilgrims encountered in the Sudan (Hino, 1986:150-109).. Thus, during this period, the overland route for the pilgrimage was discouraged in favor of the air route. Pilgrimage by air also received a boost in the late 1950's as Cameroonian Muslim leaders began to visit Europe more frequently for constitutional talks. It became possible to stop in Saudi Arabia on the way home to Cameroon for the Hajj or the *Umrah* (a shorter, voluntary visit to Mekkah that can occur at any time of the year, also referred to as the lesser hajj). (Ahmed M, 1951:88).

The National Hajj Commission (*la Commission Nationale du Hajj*)

The Hajj Commission was created by the government in the early 2000 to organize and better manage the modalities of Cameroonian Pilgrims traveling to Mecca for the Pilgrimage. The Cameroonian government created this commission because of the numerous problems Cameroonian pilgrims faced when travelling to perform their pilgrimage in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Previously, management and organization of pilgrimage to Mecca in Cameroon was more or less left in the hands of private companies and individuals. Whenever there were any organizational problems, the government steps in to restore order. The Cameroon government with the aid of the Saudi Arabian government used to give subvention for the organization of the Hajj sector financially, especially as what concerns the to and fro movements of the Cameroonian pilgrims. Private individuals with Air lines companies gave priority to their profit, this was to the detriment of the traveling conditions of the pilgrims. Added to the above problems faced by Cameroonian pilgrims were the exorbitant prices of Hajj fee, disappointment by some Airline companies to respect date of departure, because of lack of available or enough planes to accompany the pilgrims to Saudi Arabia. Apart from the problem of high fees and failure to respect date of departure, we also had other problems such as deplorable traveling conditions, poor loading facilities, loss of pilgrims luggage's as well as poor lodging systems while in the Holy City of Mecca, Saudi Arabia. (Interview with Mallam Gambo Ibrahim).

Taking into consideration the different problems enumerated above, the Cameroon government decided to step in to restore order and improve the general organization of pilgrimage to Mecca. Beginning from the early 2000, the Cameroonian government started discussing the modalities of creating a commission called the Hajj commission to take care of the whole management of the Hajj Pilgrim's journey to Mecca, from Cameroon hitch free. After some

discussions and consultations with some Muslim Associations and Muslim dignitaries in Yaounde, the Hajj Commission saw the light of day in early 2000. It was placed under the supervision and direct control of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINATD). (Interview with Imam Gambo Ibrahim).

With the creation of the Hajj Commission, Cameroonian Muslims were very happy that problems hampering the effective functioning of the Hajj sector will be a things of the past. During the first years of the existence of the Hajj Commission, everything was done by MINATD to see into it that Cameroonian pilgrims travel to Mecca normally with little or no problems. The Cameroonian government alongside Cameroon Airlines Company did everything to facilitate the traveling modalities of Cameroonian pilgrims to and fro without any delay or disappointment. The second year, MINATD still did everything to avoid organizational problems as far as the Hajj Commission was concerned. During the two first years of the existence of the Hajj Commission, MINATD did everything to improve the traveling and lodging conditions of Cameroonian pilgrims to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Unfortunately, these improved conditions were not going to last for long. (Interview with Mallam Adamu Musa).

Beginning Mid 2000, the mission of the Hajj Commission started experiencing some problems. Travelling conditions of Cameroonian Pilgrims and lodging facilities started moving from bad to worse. The same problems faced by Cameroonian pilgrims before the creation of the Hajj Commission resurfaced again. MINATD decided to increase the Hajj fee from one million to almost two million. More to that, pilgrims traveling conditions became deplorable. Most especially, the pilgrims traveling and lodging conditions were not the best. Most of the pilgrims complained of missing luggages or belongings especially when travelling back to Cameroon from Mecca, Saudi Arabia. What was even more deplorable was the fact that MINATD had to monopolize the Hajj sector. No private individual or company was allowed to venture into the Hajj sector or business. Demands and applications for licenses to private individuals or companies to organize the Hajj journey were forbidden by the government through the MINATD boss. (Interview with Imam Gambo Ibrahim).

Private Islamic groups and Associations still determined to take over the work of the Hajj commission so as to improve the Hajj sector were strongly opposed by MINATD. By late 2000, some private individuals with the backing of some Islamic Associations took the challenge of organizing the pilgrimage to Mecca. The private individuals began by touring the Ten Regions of the country, meeting all Muslims and explaining to them how they intend to improve the Hajj sector. The private individuals laid emphasis on the fact that their own Hajj

fee will be reduce as compare to that of MINATD. They also promised to improve the transport and lodging conditions of Cameroonian pilgrims in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. They also assured would be pilgrims that planes or aircrafts to transport them will be available in time without any delay. No pilgrim who has met up with his financial modalities or requirements will be left stranded in Yaounde. (Interview with Mallam Adamu Musa).

MINATD being aware of all the above proposed ameliorations made by the private individuals and companies decided to strengthen her monopoly as far as the Hajj commission was concerned. Private individuals and companies willing to organize Hajj journeys to Mecca were warned by MINATD not to go against her rules, and the sanctions await any defaulter or individual who ventured into the Hajj sector. The communiqué of MINATD frightened most of the private individuals who had the intension of organizing Hajj journey to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. MINATD also did everything to discourage private individuals and companies. They were being branded as dupers wanting to collect pilgrim's money and vanish or escape with it. Any Cameroonian pilgrim wanting to travel to Mecca, Saudi Arabia for pilgrimage was warned against falling in the hands of those they called dupers. By 2011, MINATD remain the sole organizer of pilgrimage trips to Saudi Arabia. Her monopoly was maintained much to the dissatisfaction of some Muslim and Islamic Associations in Cameroon. By 2018 to 2019, the amount to be paid by each pilgrim for pilgrimage to Mecca increased to slightly above two Million Francs CFA. The government had to intervene with subventions. (Interview with Mallam Adamu Musa).

However, in 2018, the Cameroon Government through the Minister of Territorial Administration was more than ever before determine to ameliorate the travelling conditions of Cameroonian pilgrims to Saudi Arabia. The government of President Biya began by reducing the Hajj fee or price to be paid for pilgrimage to Mecca. This was done in the form of subventions. Money was made available by the President to the MINATD boss to compensate for extra expenditures and part of the reduced fee. The Biya government through the Minister of Territorial Administration also provided travelling bags and *Zam Zam* water to all the Cameroonian pilgrims for free in order for them to better accomplish their pilgrimage. Following the word of the Minister of Territorial Administration, Atanga Nji, this was a good will gesture from the President of the Republic, Paul Biya to the Cameroonian Muslim pilgrims to better carryout their pilgrimage in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. According to the Minister, the government was still determine to continue ameliorating the travelling conditions of the Cameroonian pilgrims to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. (Interview with Mallam Adamu Musa). In 2019, the Cameroon government decided to subsidies again the Hajj fee and other travelling charges

of Cameroonian pilgrims to Mecca. The Biya government also provided the pilgrims with some basic materials and travelling items that will enable them better accomplish their pilgrimage or Hajj in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It should once more be emphasis here that the Hajj is a strong binding force in the diplomatic relations in between Cameroon and Saudi Arabia. (Interview with Mallam Adamu Musa).

The advent of Islamic Brotherhood in Cameroon thanks to Saudi Arabia's Influence

The brotherhood phenomenon had become so rampant in Cameroon. They are more than five Islamic Brotherhoods Movements existing in the Ten Regions of Cameroon. Each of them has a great following. Just as Saudi Arabia is the seat and cradle of the Islamic faith, so too are most of these brotherhood who traced their origin from the Arabian Peninsula. Major ones in Cameroon include the Tiganiyya, Wahabiyya, Sunni and Shia Muslim brotherhoods movements. (Abdul M.O.A., 1982:121).

Tiganiyya Islamic Brotherhood movement

The largest and oldest Islamic Brotherhood Movement in Cameroon is the Tiganiyya Brotherhood. It was founded by Cheikh Amadou Tigani of Laghounat in the South of Algeria at the end of the XVII Century. It arrived Cameroon in the 19th century. It should be noted that the Tiganiyya Brotherhood is not as strong in Cameroon as in other African countries such as Algeria, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali and Niger. Nevertheless, their presence is heavily felt in the country. As a matter of fact, it was the dominant Brotherhood in Cameroon in the 70s and 80s, before the advent of the Wahabiyya Brotherhood from Saudi Arabia. Members of the Tiganiyya Islamic Brotherhood always interact among themselves. They usually came together in Small gatherings and discuss the wellbeing of their movement. The movement was boosted in 1949 with the arrival or maiden visit of one of their spiritual leader, Cheikh Sidi Benamor, from Algeria to Cameroon. (Interview with Gambo Ibrahim).

It became a tradition for members of the Tiganiyya brotherhood to organized prayer sessions in various mosques in Cameroon with members sitting round each other and evoking the name of God, "Allah" and his Prophet Mohammad. During those prayer sessions, the Quran was recited and special prayers organized with Islamic singing and dancing. A white piece of cloth was place on the floor of the mosque and members sat round it. (Abdul M.O.A., 1982:121).

The Tiganiyya brotherhood is gradually loosing grounds in Cameroon with the advent of the Sunni-Wahabiyya Muslim Brotherhood Movement. The loss of popularity became eminent in the late 1980s early 1990s when young Cameroonian Muslims travelled to some Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia to study Islam

and the Arabic language. Most of them returned to Cameroon with advanced Islamic knowledge and a good mastery of the Arabic language. According to them, they discovered some wrong doings with the Tiganiyya Brotherhood, especially in their method of worshipping Islam. This new Cameroonian intellectuals wanted to reform the Islamic faith and how it was being practiced. As Imam Gambo Ibrahim put it, they started preaching against some unorthodox practices observed by the members of the Tiganiyya brotherhood. They introduced a new branch of Islamic ideology known as *Izalatu Bidiah*. According to them, this new order, Wahabism was the most effective and perfect way to follow the teaching and actions of the Prophet Mohammad (Pbuh), as well as better practiced the Islamic faith. (Abdul M.O.A., 1982:121).

Wahabiyya Islamic Brotherhood Movement

The Wahabiyya Brotherhood is not just a religious movement, but also politico-religious in nature. Part of its ideology has to do with method of leadership or governance. It was founded in Saudi Arabia in 1740 by an Islamic scholar called Mohammed Abd Al-Wahhab (1703-1792). This was with the assistance of the Emir of Dai'yya (Located around Riyadh) called Abd Al-Aziz Ibn Saud. After achieving some successes in it, the movement extended to almost all towns of Mecca and Medina. The Wahabiyya Brotherhood with the help of some local rulers succeeded in toppling the ruling class in the Saudi Kingdom and putting another one. Wahabism finally became the main doctrine of the Saudi government. The reason why this Brotherhood is often called Wahabism or Wahabiyya boils down to the name of one of their leaders; Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahab. According to Mallam Ibrahim and Mallam Musa, they are of the opinion that Abdul Wahab started the "Crusade" against the Sunni Muslims, but was not at the origin of the movement. Some Islamic written sources also attest to this fact. To them, the movement started in the time of Ali Radi Allao-Unho. Whatever the controversy, one thing is certain that the Wahabiyya Movement gained full momentum with Abdul Wahab. (Abdul M.O.A., 1982:121).

Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahab was born at the 12th Century (Hijra) in Jazeera Tul Arab, the name given by the Prophet (Pbuh) to which has been changed by the Saudi Royal family to that of their grandfathers to Saudi Arabia. The precise town where he was born is Najd. That is why he is often referred to as Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahad Najd in his time. He was educated in the Najd, and later, Basra and Damascus. His brothers and parents were of the Aqeedah of Ahl-e-Sunnah but, through reading Ibn Taymiyyah's books, he chose to differ in belief with the rest of his family, who were not pleased with him. He destroyed the Shrines (Graves of Companions), Companions who were in the Najd. Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahab died on the 22 of June

1792 (Arabia-Wahabi-Conquest of Mecca, Voyager Pressbook). (Abdul M.O.A., 1982:121).

The main objective of Wahabism is to return to the practice of Islam as it was done in the days of the Prophet. Wahabism condemns the worship of some falling Islamic figures or so called Martyrs, including idol worship. They also condemn vehemently pilgrimages undertaken to some Islamic shrines and graves in memory of the people buried there. Members of the Wahabiyya Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia had often assassinated some rulers who try to go against their principles and doctrines. Attacks are also organized by members of this brotherhood against Muslims who often visited and pray on the Side of some buried Prophets of Islam. To them, these are practices that need to be condemned. (Hitti, 1970:108).

After its foundation and full installation in Saudi Arabia, it started extending to other parts of the Middle East, North Africa and Africa south of the Sahara. Followers of the Wahabiyya Movement were so critical about the Shia yearly celebration of *Ashura* in Baghdad, Iraq. They regarded those ceremonies as contrary to the Islamic teachings and Principles. In order to counteract those practices, they rallied some of their members in Baghdad, attacked and destroyed the grave of Imam Hussein in Karbala, and that of Ali in Najaf. Also, each year when *Ashura* is celebrated in Iraq, and Iran, assassinations are carried out by the Wahabists against the Shias. Most of those suicide bombings and assassinations end up registering huge human casualties. (Hitti, 1970:108).

In Cameroon, the Wahabiyya Brotherhood hasn't got a lot of following as compared to the Tiganiyya. It is mostly made up of young revivalist and reformist. Muslim intellectuals alongside their followers. The advent of Wahabism in Cameroon ushered in some religious reforms in the Islamic faith. It should be noted that all Cameroonian students who studied Islam in Saudi Arabia had the obligation to spread the faith through the Wahabism doctrine or ideology greatly practiced in Saudi Arabia. As a matter of fact, sometimes economic aids from Saudi Arabia to black African countries depended on your ability to apply or fully practice Wahabism in your country. (Interview with Mallam Adamu Musa).

The Wahabiyya Muslim Brotherhood is gradually gaining grounds in Cameroon, especially in the late 1990s and early 2000, with the return of Cameroonian students from Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabian government also determined to help promote Wahabism. This is by giving further scholarship to Cameroonian students to study in Saudi Arabia, building of Mosques, schools and helping some vulnerable Cameroonians. (Interview with Mallam Adamu Musa).

As concern the Shia-Sunni brotherhoods, Caliph Ali is the Central figure at the origin of their Split that occur in the decades immediately following the death of the Prophet (Pbuh), in 632 AD. Shia regards Ali as the rightful successor of the Prophet while the Sunni recognized but Abu Bakr, who became the first Caliph. Later on; Hussein, the youngest Son of Ali in his ambition to take over the Caliph was Killed by the armies of Yazid and buried at Karbala, in modern day Iraq. Since then, the Shia and Sunni became two different Islamic brotherhood Movement with different ideologies. However, the differences in ideology did not mean that they deviated from the original meaning or teaching of Islam which is submission to the will of God, "Allah". Follow the Quran, respect God's rules and commandment. The slight differences between the Shia and Sunni is at the level of practice and interpretation. Nonetheless, all their members remain Muslims. (Abdul M.O.A., 1982:121).

The reformist Islamic tendency in Cameroon is broad, complex and difficult to grasp. In the field, many Islamic activities claimed to be working towards pure Islam but apart from their origin and their external connection, it is not always easy to distinguish them. Like the brotherhood that had Shaped Islam in Cameroon for decades, most of the new Islamic reformist movement appear to be local branches of foreign organizations, with the Arabian Peninsula sponsoring most of them. Beside their institutional affiliation, most Islamic activist' behavior reduces the philosophy of their former training institutions. Broadly speaking, the reformist Islamic trend started in Cameroon as far back as the beginning of the seventies when Cameroonian students trained in Arab institutions came back home. The pioneers of the reformist movements, according to Imam Gambo Ibrahim, took advantage of the Arab proselytism movements in the Seventies and the oil crisis, and international context characterized by growing sentiment of Islamic fraternity to pave their way. If this was only a little group of jobless people back from Arab institutions with degree that could not fit into the local job market system, it was to gain root during the eighties but mainly the nineties with the building of the mosque Alhu-Sunna Wal-Jamaa and Al-Rahmah in Briqueterie neighborhood, Yaounde and New Bell neighborhood in Douala. These mosques served as focal spiritual and social points for their people without western education. (Interview with Imam Gambo Ibrahim).

Many of these young followers were either facing problem of integration in the local Islamic setting and were jobless even if well trained. Funded by Saudi Arabia, the *Alhu-Sunna Wal-Jamaa* and *Al-Rahmah* Mosques became symbols of contestation of the local religious establishment. These mosques attracted new followers and started reducing the number of adherents to local Islamic practices. This generated a conflict

between the reformists and the leaders of traditional Islam or Tiganiyya Movement. As Mallam Adamu Musa put it, the reformist's leaders rapidly gathered a small and dynamic community that was culturally influenced by the Arabs and started developing new dress code and many other new Islamic practices that differ from ongoing common practices. The *Cabdou* was introduced as their prayer style: during sermons, their hands were crossed on their chest.

Reformist in Cameroon were looked upon by traditional Muslims as people who were corrupt during their stay in Saudi Arabia, who do not pay respect to their elders as required by local African traditions and who have deliberately decided to oppose practices like the *Wird* and the *Maouloud* celebrations. They saw them as people disturbing the statusquo. On the other hand, reformers accused the traditional aristocracy of being Islamically illiterate, especially because they could not write, understand nor speak Arabic well which is the sacred language of their religion. Reformists strongly believed Islamic practices were not to be mixed with local non-Islamic customs and that women should veil themselves. (Hitti, 1970:108).

Traditional Muslim leaders in Cameroon felt frustrated by the new trends and behaviours of reformist activists. They watched the reformist activists progressively seizing an important part of their constituency. As they lost more and more grounds, traditional leaders saw the reformist as responsible. The later were seeking legitimacy and in order to do so they had to challenge the so called traditional aristocracy by increasing their relative number of followers. In Cameroon, the local aristocracy was created by the colonial administration. The Cameroonian government saw the straggle between the reformist and traditional Muslims in the country as a treat to the local Islamic and political landscape, especially because it was reminded of the Pan-Islamic and Pan-Arabic movements of the colonial period that had posed a veritable problem of high magnitude. There was no legislation limiting foreign funding and it was difficult for local authorities to tract down the origins of the funds that were used to build new mosques, Franco-Islamic Schools or carry out Islamic non-Governmental organizations' activities. (Interview with Imam Gambo Ibrahim).

Thanks to money received from donors, reformist leaders constructed mosques in most of the towns in Cameroon. The new mosques' architecture was mostly inspired by the style of the architecture in their donor country, Saudi Arabia. Young Muslim leaders were authorized to lead prayers in these reformist mosques. Some of them were even appointed Imams despite their young age. A generational conflict ensued which reframed the social landscape of Islam in Cameroon. Islamic dynamics became broad with new actors on the field. Saudi Arabia gave more aids to the

reformist Muslims in almost all the ten regions of Cameroon to construct mosques and Islamic schools. (Interview with Imam Gambo Ibrahim). The Saudi government also organized Quranic reading competitions annually in Cameroon, and the best readers or memorizers of the Quran who won were awarded scholarship to study in Saudi Arabia. Of course, most of those Cameroonian Islamic students, once completed their studies became Wahabi inclined and propagated the Wahabist doctrine or ideology in Cameroon. Whatever the differences between those brotherhoods, one thing stands out clear, Cameroonian Muslims thanks to the presence of the Wahabiyya Movement in the country that was Saudi inclined, also benefited from the numerous Islamic projects, aids and infrastructures finance by the Saudi Arabian government. A glaring example is the Tsinga Islamic complex in Yaounde, Cameroon that was built by the Saudi Arabian government and offered to Cameroon. (Benky Achunda, 2020: 1-12).

The Tsinga Islamic Complex

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Cameroonian Muslims requested for funds from the Saudi Arabian government to build an Islamic Complex in the Capital city, Yaounde. It is important to note here that Hausa and Fulani Muslims in Yaounde, Cameroon were at the origin of this request. Saudi Arabia being the seat or center of Islam in the world also had that mission to promote the spread and propagation of Islam through the building of Islamic worship sites. The Saudi government took some time to study the request. By the early 1990, the Saudi government through her diplomatic mission in Cameroon inform the Muslim Community in Yaounde, Cameroon that Funds were already available for the building of the Islamic complex they requested. The Saudi government has made available those funds. The only problem then was to get the site or land where the complex will be built. (Interview with Imam Gambo Ibrahim)

After some negotiations between the leaders of the Muslim community in Yaounde and the administrative authorities in Mfoundi Division, it was finally decided that the Tsinga Islamic Complex will be constructed within the Tsinga neighborhood. Worth noting is the fact that the Muslim Community in Yaounde earlier wanted the complex to be built around Carrefour Golf neighborhood (Ntugu), on a land given to the Muslim community by the former president, Ahmadou Ahidjo. Unfortunately, the 'Ntugu' or Carrefour Golf site was confiscated from the Muslim community after the resignation and demise of the former President. In the early 1990s, the then Government Delegate to the Yaounde Urban Council reallocated the land to the Tsinga neighborhood. This was not without serious confrontation between the forces of law and order and the Muslim youth in the Briqueterie neighborhood. According to the Muslim community at the Briqueterie neighborhood, even the land allocated to

them for the building of the complex in Tsinga was almost being confiscated by some so called indigenes of Yaounde. They had to stage some protest for the complex to be restored to them, for the building of the complex to begin. (Interview with Imam Gambo Ibrahim)

Worth noting is the fact that ACIC (Cameroon Cultural and Islamic Association) played a very important role for the acquisition of the land. The land was so vast extending up to the Conference Center (*Palais des Congres*). Before the construction began, some Yaounde indigenes often called "autoctone", in collaboration with the Government Delegate wanted to seize or reduce the size of the land. It was then that the Muslim faithful or community in Yaounde woke up like one person to defend the land. Clashes as earlier said ensued between the Muslims and forces of law and order. The clashes ended up registering some casualties, especially on the part of the Muslim youths. The government finally intervened authorizing the building of the Mosque to continue on the Tsinga site. The Tsinga Islamic complex was completed in 1997. The same year, the complex was inaugurated. (Interview with Imam Gambo Ibrahim)

President Paul Biya personally inaugurated the Islamic Complex Center in 1977, in the presence of the Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister who came for the occasion as well as Saudi Ambassador to Cameroon. Cameroonian Muslim elites from various ethnic backgrounds attended the inaugural ceremony. President Paul Biya called for tolerance among the different Muslim communities and groups in Cameroon vis-à-vis one another. He warned against extremism and Islamic fundamentalism in the country. He also thanked the Saudi government for financing and offering Cameroon the magnificent edifice. According to President Paul Biya, that was a sign of good diplomatic ties that has come to stay and will continue between Cameroon and Saudi Arabia. (Interview with Mallam Jibrin Umarou)

The President of ACIC representing the Muslim community in the person of Ahmadou Bello was handed over the key and given the responsibility of controlling the Tsinga Islamic Complex by the Saudi authorities. To them were added some Hausa and Fulani Islamic Clerics base in Yaounde. The role of the principal or Central Imam was given to the grand Imam of Yaounde. He had his assistant from the other Muslim Clerics base in Yaounde. (Interview with Imam Gambo Ibrahim)

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, leadership and management of the Tsinga Islamic Complex experience some problems. The Hausa and Fulani Muslim faithful that were given the mosque to managed and controlled never did their work well as was expected by the Saudi government. Most of the water and light bills were not paid in time. Workers in the complex were

not well paid or treated well. Irrespective of the fact that the Saudi government always made available money for the wellbeing of the Islamic Complex at Tsinga. Most of the funds were mismanaged, misappropriated or embezzled. Added to that was the fact that some unorthodox practices were being carried out inside and within the complex premises. The Saudi government had to intervene so as to serve the Tsinga Islamic complex from collapsing. (Interview with Imam Gambo Ibrahim)

In mid 2000, the Saudi government decided to take over control of the Tsinga Islamic Complex. The first step taken by the Saudi authorities was to appoint a Saudi Arab trained and qualified Imam to manage the complex. The Saudi Arab Imam was to be base or resident in the Tsinga Islamic Complex, Yaounde. He was in charge of leading prayers in the Mosque as well as management and coordination of the whole complex, including the personnel or workers working there. New personnels and workers including security guards were recruited to work in the complex. All of them were entitled to a salary paid by the Saudi government or the Saudi Ministry in charge of religious affairs. By late 2000, the Tsinga Islamic Complex was completely reorganized and restructured. The Saudi government continue appointing Arab trained Imams to lead and manage the complex. (Interview with Mallam Jibrin Umarou)

Extension structure of the Tsinga Islamic Complex

The extension of the Tsinga Islamic Complex structure was finally inaugurated on the 15th of February 2019. The structure planted on a 408 meter square in the neighborhood of Tsinga, Yaounde was presided over by visiting Saudi dignitaries alongside some Cameroonian authorities. Preparation for the inaugural actually began on the 14th of February 2019.

The adviser to the King of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and member of the Higher Council of Ulemas, His Eminence Cheickh Dr. Sa'ad Bin Nasser As-Shithri chaired the ceremony to inaugurate the Tsinga Islamic Complex in Yaounde. The imposing edifice located beside the Tsinga Mosque is the fruit of win win cooperation ties between Cameroon and the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (Benky Achunda, 2020:1-12)

Presentation of the Tsinga Islamic Complex

According to the report of the journalist Benly Anchunda, the Tsinga Islamic Complex is a multi-purpose educational Centre planted on a 408 metre square. The structure coated in yellow, white and green, colours of the flag of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a gift from the king of Saudi Arabia, king Salman Bin

Abdulaziz Al Saud, custodian of the two holy Mosques. The Islamic Multi-purpose Complex comprises of the Following

- A modern refectory
- A nursery and Primary School (with an accommodation space of 600 pupils)
- A conference Hall (Amphi theatre), with a capacity of five hundred (500) seats.
- A prayer ground for Women, added to those of the men that earlier existed.
- An infirmary
- A computer laboratory
- Media Hall
- Muslim TV Centre.

The construction of the extension took some two years and few months. The Tsinga Islamic Complex should be noted was inaugurated in 1997 by the President of the Republic of Cameroon, Paul Biya. Adding to the Multi-purpose Islamic and educational Centre, the complex has a modern mosque, a residential area and an administrative unit, not forgetting a library. (Benky Achunda, 2020:1-12)

The Inauguration ceremony

The high profile event was chaired by the adviser to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and member of the Higher Council of Ulemas, His Eminence Cheickh, Dr. Sa'ad Bin Nasser As-Shithri. Speaking during the inaugural, His Eminence, wish to extend the cooperation ties with Cameroon to other domains like technology, energy, road infrastructure, health and communication. (Benky Achunda, 2020:1-12)

The Minister Delegate to the Minister of External Relations in charge of relations with the Islamic World, Adoum Gargoum, the secretary of state at the Ministry of Basic Education, Dr. Asheri Kilo, members of the diplomatic corps, special guests and Muslim faithful witnessed the inauguration ceremony of the extension of the Tsinga Islamic Centre in Yaounde. (Benky Achunda, 2020:1-12)

The Delegation of Saudi Arabians led by the Imam and speaker of the Holy Mosque of the Prophet of Medina, His Eminence Cheickh Abdullah Bin Abdul Rahman Albaeijan was on a four day visit to Cameroon. During their sojourn, the team were received in audience by President Paul Biya and they later travelled to the Far North Region to inaugurate the Maroua Grand Mosque. (Benky Achunda, 2020:1-12). Below can be seen a table showing the different structures of the Tsinga Islamic Multi-purpose Complex Centre.

Table 1: The different structures found in the Islamic Multi-purpose Complex Center in Tsinga-Yaounde

n°	Names of different structures
1	A modern mosque
2	An administrative unit
3	A library
4	A residential area
5	A modern refectory
6	Nursery and primary school
7	A conference hall
8	Prayer grounds for men and women
9	An infirmary
10	A computer laboratory
11	A media hall
12	A Muslim TV Centre

Source: Author's compilation

Inauguration of New Saudi Arabian Embassy in Yaounde

The new Saudi Arabian Embassy was inaugurated in Yaounde on the 29th of October 2020, by the Saudi foreign Minister, Prince Faical Bin Farhan Abdullah Al Saud. The Saudi delegation was received by the Secretary General at the Presidency of the Republic, Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh, on Thursday, 29 of October 2020. (Benky Achunda, 2020:1-12)

The edifice is said to be one of the biggest in Africa South of the Sahara. The embassy is located at the Bastos neighborhood of Yaounde. It covers a surface area of 7 000sq. meters. Some Cameroonian dignitaries attended the inauguration ceremony among whom were; the Cameroon Minister of External Relations, Mr. Mbella Mbella le Jeune, alongside Mr. Mvondo Ayolo. During that occasion, Saudi Arabian investment in

Cameroon was estimated at some forty (40) billion. The new Saudi Arabian Ambassador to Cameroon his Excellency Abdul Ilah Al-Suaibi was also part of that inaugural ceremony. According to the Saudi Arabian dignitaries, the cost and size of the new embassy goes to show the fruitful relations or cooperation ties that exist between Cameroon and the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The Saudi foreign Minister, Prince Faical Bin Farhan Abdullah Al Saud assured the Cameroonian authorities present at the inaugural that this was to strengthened the diplomatic ties that exist between the two countries that will be extended to other fields in the near future. (Benky Achunda, 2020:1-12)

Below can be seen a table presenting some Saudi Arabian ambassadors on diplomatic mission to Cameroon since 2012.

Table 2: Saudi Arabian Ambassadors Accredited to Cameroon from 2012 to Present

Names of Ambassadors	Year of Service or Mission
MOHAMMED HUSSEIN QATTAN	2012
MOHAMMED BIN SULIMAN AL MUUSSHER	2019
ABDUL ILAH AL-SUAIBI	2020
Dr. FAISAL BIN SAUD AL-MEJFEL	2023
IBRAHIM AL-GHAMDI	2024 To Present

Source: Author's Compilation

NB: It should be recalled that Cameroon-Saudi-Arabian diplomatic relations date as far back as 1961. The Cameroon Embassy was created in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the 6th of October 1966. In 1968, a Resident Ambassador was appointed in Jeddah, former capital of the kingdom. The embassy was transferred to Riyadh in 1985. (Interview with Mallam Jibrin Umarou)

In February 1990, Mohamadou Labarang was appointed Cameroon Ambassador to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He served as Cameroon Ambassador to Saudi Arabia for 17years, six (6) months. That is from February 1990 to February 2008. During that period, he served as permanent Ambassador of Cameroon to Saudi

Arabia and non-permanent Cameroon Ambassador to Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Lebanon and Iran, with Resident in Riyadh. (Interview with Imam Gambo Ibrahim)

Mohamadou Labarang was later replaced by Ambassador Iya Tidjani who has been serving as Cameroon ambassador to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia up till date, 2021. In two separate presidential Decrees, signed, April 18, 2016, the Head of State Paul Biya appointed a single person, Iya Tidjani, to head the two newly created Cameroon embassies in Kuwait and Qatar simultaneously, with resident in nearby Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. This goes further to show how important

Cameroon and the kingdom of Saudi Arabia diplomatic relations had grown and strengthened. (Interview with Imam Gambo Ibrahim)

Of recent, some renovation were carried out in the Tsinga Islamic complex, all finance by the Saudi Arabian government. Beginning with the Mosque itself, another floor was added or constructed to add to the earlier one that previously existed. Two conference centers were also erected in the complex. One other important innovation that took place in the complex was the Tsinga Islamic Primary School that was erected and made available to the Yaounde Muslim community to enroll their children. All of the staff members of that primary school are paid by the Saudi government. Apart from the normal subjects taught in primary schools such as: Reading, writing, Mathematics, among others, Arabic and the mastery of the Quran are also taught to the Pupils of the Tsinga Islamic primary school. Thanks to the fact that the teachers in the school are professionals, competence, well trained and discipline Muslim individuals; and taking into consideration the type of training giving to the pupils, their performance in the First School Leaving Certificate and Common entrance Exams had been so encouraging. In a knot shell, the Tsinga Islamic Complex had been and will continue to be the bedrock or an important tool for the strengthening of diplomatic relations between Cameroon and Saudi Arabia. By late 2000, Cameroonian base assistant Imams were also appointed as Imams to lead prayers at the complex. The case of Bouba Goigoi was a clear example. (Benky Achunda, 2020:1-12)

Cameroon-Saudi Arabian Relations Strengthened and Reinforced

Just as President Amadou Ahidjo established and strengthened bilateral relations between Cameroon and Saudi Arabia in the 1960s and 1970s, so too did President Paul Biya when he took over power in 1982. New diplomatic missions were appointed by President Paul Biya to Saudi Arabia in the 1990s and 2000s to represent Cameroon in that oil rich nation. In the early 2000s, the president did everything to reinforced Cameroon-Saudi Arabian relations. This was in the political, economic, social and cultural domains. President Paul Biya granted audience to the vice Minister in charge of foreign affairs of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Prince Adbul Aziz Bin Abdul-Lah Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud. This was on the 21st of June 2012. The visit according to Monda Bakoa of the Cameroon Tribune Newspaper fall within a context of friendship and exchanges which began in 1966 with their diplomatic ties embodied by the creation of permanent diplomatic missions on either side. The economic cooperation between the two countries has not sufficiently covered all its potentials, with regard to the mutual will to reconcile the financing capacities of Saudi Arabia, whose wealth is mostly based on petroleum development. (Benky Achunda, 2020:1-12)

According to sources close to the Ministry of external relations, Saudi Arabia, through the Saudi development Fund, funded in Cameroon the construction works of the Foumban Manki-Magbe Bridge on the trans-African Mape, to link the West Region to the North Region of Cameroon, amounting at 5.16 Billion CFAF. (Eulalia Amabo, 2019:1-12)

Still, according to Cameroon Tribune of 21st June 2012, the Ayos-Bonis road in the East Region, funded to the tune of 4.3 Billion CFAF is a fruit of the same cooperation framework between Cameroon and Saudi Arabia. In addition, Saudi Arabia equally funded projects like wheat cultivation in Wassande, in the Adamawa Region and the Tchontchi Guider road, in the North Region. Other fruits of the financial cooperation with Saudi Arabia, which also need to be recalled here include the Douala School of trade, the Song-Loulou Dam, Douala-Yaounde railway line (the Eseka-Maloumé road Segment) in 2017, the University Center of Ngaoundere, Primary Schools and many Mosques in the Ten Regions of Cameroon. Finally, the construction works of housing equipment and other structures within the Tsinga Islamic complex as earlier seen, the Al-Madinah Sports Academy, a vocational Training Centre in the Yaounde V Sub-division as well as the cancellation of Cameroon's debt, which amounted at 3. 480,000 US dollars, by Saudi Arabia at the Islamic Summit in Dakar. (Benky Achunda, 2020:1-12)

On the occasion of the inauguration of the new Saudi Arabian embassy in Yaounde, Cameroon, the Saudi Ambassador to Cameroon revisited cooperation ties between Cameroon and Saudi Arabia. Mohammed Bin Suliman Amussher talks on diplomatic relations between the two countries. According to the Ambassador, the relations were solid and practical. Eulalia Amabo of Cameroon Tribune recounted the words of the Ambassador that Cameroon-Saudi Arabia relations or cooperation ties was also aimed at improving commercial exchange, possibilities of increasing investments, subvention or aids to be given to Cameroon as well as exchange of security intelligence.

According to Eulalia Amabo again of Cameroon Tribune, reporting on the 2nd of August 2019, she was of the opinion that bilateral review of the relations between Cameroon and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was brought under review. A seven men delegation led by Saudi Arabian Deputy Minister of Defence, Mohammed Bin Abdullah Alaayesh was at the Unity Palace on November 19 2018 to pay visit to the President of the Republic of Cameroon, Paul Biya. Prior to the audience, the Saudi Arabian vice Minister of Defence was at the Cameroonian Ministry of Defence during which he had a working session with the Cameroon Minister Delegate at the presidency in charge of defence, Beti Assomo Joseph.

In the yesteryears, cooperation ties between Yaounde and Riyadh had centered on socio-economic and cultural development. Affairs between both nations will henceforth surpass these confines to embrace security and defence matters, reasons one could understand why the Saudi Arabian emissary open over 120 minutes discussing security issues with Cameroon defence minister. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia reputed in fighting against terrorism. It is sure that they wish to share some of those skills with Cameroon which is presently facing incursions from the Boko Haram terrorist group in the Far North of the country and in the restive South West and North West Regions with the socio-political crisis. Cameroon therefore stands to benefit from their experience in managing asymmetric threats. (Benky Achunda, 2020:1-12)

Relations between Cameroon and Saudi Arabia is gradually taken an upper trend. The relation that started in 1966 has blossom in leaps and bounds. One of the most prominent investment of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Cameroon as we earlier mentioned is the Yaounde Tsinga Islamic Complex that the kingdom constructed and retroceded it to Cameroon in June 1997. The Saudi government have equally participated in the socio-economic development of many sectors of the Cameroonian economy. In 2009, they contributed some 6 Billion that was part of finances to tar the Fouban-Tibati road. We also cited the financial contribution they made to construct the songloulou Hydro-electric power dam and the Eseka-Maloume rail road and it should be recalled that since 2017, Yaounde and Riyadh are directly linked by air transport. (Benky Achunda, 2020:1-12)

In the domain of health, a humanitarian center region, the first to be built in Sub-Saharan Africa also saw the light of day. This center in the Lekie Division of the Center Region, stands unique in black Africa. The center provides the population with quality health care at a very cheap cost or affordable prices.s

According to Cameroon Report, the laying of groundwork for a fruitful security cooperation between both nations will be a booster in strengthening what the people of Cameroon and the kingdom of Saudi Arabia already share. The cooperation henceforth will be multifaceted and Multidimensional. As the Saudi Assistant Minister Mohammed Bin Abdullah Al-Ayesh, put it: Diplomacy, economy, religion, Industrial health, education, technology, infrastructure and of recent defence cooperation, are some of the areas where Cameroon and Saudi Arabia have been partnering and will continue partnering for a more better and fruitful diplomatic relations in future. (Benky Achunda, 2020:1-12)

Saudi Arabia also help in promoting Islamic education through Islamic organizations like the World Assembly of Muslim Youth, abbreviated as WAMY.

The head quarter of this Islamic organization is base in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. However, to better enhance its activities worldwide, it has representatives and local headquarters in each member country. In June 28, 2012, the Saudi ambassador to Cameroon, Mohammed Hussein Qattan, visited the Cameroon office base in Yaounde to help boost the activities of that Islamic international organization. (Interview with Imam Gambo Ibrahim).

The Saudi Fund for development recently signed an agreement with the Cameroonian government to finance the construction of the Mbalmayo Regional Hospital Project, by providing a 2 million Dollars soft development loan. According to Cameroon Tribune, the agreement was signed by Saudi Fund for Development abbreviated as SFD, Alamine Ousmane Mey. The agreement will help to build and equip the hospital 200 beds and develop specialized medical departments centers and buildings spanning a total area of 14000 square meters. The project will also include an area for operational services covering up to 800 square meters.

The development plan also comprises rehabilitating the roads that connect the hospital to the main roads to ensure easy access. The project is expected to serve thousands of people, from the Cameroonian Capital as well as neighbouring cities and villages, providing access to quality health care services. It will help tackle chronic disease and reduce mortality rates. The hospital will also alleviate overcrowding in Yaounde and Douala. The signing ceremony was attended by Dr. Manaouda Malachie, Cameroonian minister of public health, Abdulraman Azebn, charge d'affaires at the embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. To the Republic of Cameroon, and several officials from both nations. Al-Marshad said that the project will be co-financed by SED, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic development, and the Arab bank for economic Development in Africa, with a total value of 38.8 Million dollars.

He reiterated that the project is a vital undertaking that will positively contribute to the social development of the Cameroonian people and will provide the necessary support for basic infrastructure services, enabling society members to access all their daily needs to improve their social and economic living conditions. Al-Marchad expressed his appreciation for the efforts exerted by both nations to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. He said the project is of great importance to safeguarding Cameroon's future and ensuring the development of its burgeoning and thriving sectors.

Minister Mey praised the important role played by Saudi Arabia, through STD, in supporting development projects and improving the Health sector in Cameroon. The minister further underlined that the

Mbalmayo Regional Hospital project will be essential to people and communities across Cameroon, offering greater access to quality care and modern, specialized medical centers. The Kingdom realizes the importance of supporting the development sectors in Cameroon through SFD-Funded Development Projects and programs, SPA said, since 1977, SFD has provided- in addition to this agreement- development loans to finance nine projects in Cameroon worth 109 Million dollars to enhance the growth and prosperity of the infrastructure, water transportation, education, and health sectors to help achieve the UN's SDGs. Worth noting is the fact that the Saudi Arabia government through its Ambassador in Yaounde always donates Dates Palms fruits to Cameroonian Muslims especially during the Holy Month of Ramadam. This is to enable the Cameroonian Muslims to break their Fasting with Dates during sun set. The Dates fruits are also of good nutritional quality. Cameroon also import from Saudi Arabia Polymers of Ethylene. (Interview with Imam Gambo Ibrahim).

CONCLUSION

To round up, it should be noted that diplomatic relations between Cameroon and Saudi Arabia are beneficial to both countries. The paper tries to elucidate expressly the imperativeness of the hajj operations to Cameroon and Saudi Arabia economic diplomacy. It shows that Cameroon just like other countries of the world has had its fair share of diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia at bot state, regional, continental and global levels. The paper goes further to tackle headlong the bone of contention of the discussion which is to x-ray within the academic context the relations between Cameroon and Saudi Arabia which most at times have often more than not being shrouded in sentiments. The paper tries to also reveal the fact that the conventional wisdom in examining the issue of hajj operations which views it from an angel of being a cultural cum spiritual act alone is not necessarily correct owing to the fact that statistics have revealed that there is a tremendous and significant amount of material benefit that accrues from this operation. One that is indeed enjoyed and reinforced by the religious or Islamic doctrines and injunctions.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the hajj operations has a very significant place in both spiritual and cultural life of the citizens (Muslims) of Cameroon and the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The research maintains however that the spiritual and economic benefits of the hajj operations are often intertwined but the conventional wisdom in making the analysis on hajj operations often tends to discard or neglect the economic importance of the pilgrimage, therefore reducing it to a spiritual and cultural affair only. What should however be noted is the fact that verily the material undertone in this relation is glaring and must not be ignored. On the

Contrary, the tremendous benefit therein should be allowed to come to public knowledge thereby enhancing and deepening not just cultural relations but improving economic diplomatic ties between the both countries. The imperativeness of this economic relation can be further consolidated if improved upon.

As such, in the form of recommendation, first, we need to bay in mind that diplomatic relations between Cameroon and Saudi Arabia are highly beneficial to both countries in the political, economic, social and cultural domains. We also need to recognize the economic significance in the hajj operation in relation to that diplomatic cooperation. It is imperative that we begin to consider and reckon with the reality that the hajj operations are of immense and significant economic benefit to both Cameroon and the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This is in direct contrast with the conventional analysis and narrative that the hajj operation is limited to the spiritual and cultural benefit alone. Making Hajj operation a national policy is also of prime importance, owing to its tremendous benefits to people of all divide. It is important that the Cameroon government begins to consider the possibility of adopting a national policy statement that will make the hajj operations a matter of national interest as the country and her citizens stand to benefit immensely from the relation, for example airlines that airlift pilgrims are not necessarily Muslim owned, so will the technology overtime required to get people to process their travel documents and so forth. It is important to note at this juncture that Cameroon must reinforce the process of deepening diplomatic ties and cooperation with the kingdom of Saudi Arabia in a bid to create for smooth relations and ease of access between the both countries, considering the economic and social viability of that cooperation.

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