

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Submission to the Universal Periodic
Review of the United Nations Human
Rights Council

4th Cycle – 44th Session

Country Review: Cameroon

March 2023

By Sara Ahmed



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Broken Chalk is an Amsterdam-based NGO established in 2020 that monitors and minimises worldwide human rights violations in education. We aim to promote universal and equal access to education for all.

We encourage and support achieving societal peace with our international sponsors and partners by advocating for intercultural tolerance, preventing radicalism and polarisation, and tackling educational inequalities.

Content

0. Introduction	3
I. Main issues in Education	3
Quality of Education	3
Discrimination against Indigenous children	4
Sexual Violence in Education	5
II. Recommendations	6

0. Introduction

1. Broken Chalk drafted this report to contribute to Cameroon's fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Since Broken Chalk is specifically concerned with human rights and inequalities in education, this report focuses on the right to education in Cameroon.
2. This report first explores the main issues with the right to education in Cameroon. It also reflects on the recommendations Cameroon received in the 3rd cycle UN UPR review in 2018 and its progress since. Finally, Broken Chalk offers some suggestions to Cameroon on further improving and protecting the right to education.
3. In the 2018 review, Cameroon received 196 recommendations and accepted 139 submissions at the adoption of its UPR outcome. Those were related to the legal and general framework of implementation, universal and cross-cutting issues, civil and political rights, economic, social, and cultural rights, women's and children's rights, and rights of other vulnerable groups and persons.¹
4. Regarding education, those recommendations focused on guaranteeing equal access to education (ensuring that primary education is free and accessible to all children), paying particular attention to children living in remote areas and minorities, enhancing literacy rates (especially among women); and promoting the education of indigenous children.
5. Cameroon has stated that efforts to guarantee the most comprehensive coverage and highest possible quality of education at all levels have been intensified. The 2013-2020 Strategy Paper for the Education Sector was approved.² This programme is structured around three main areas: access and equity, quality and relevance and management and governance. Furthermore, as part of the effort to reduce disparities where they exist as a means of boosting school enrolment rates, emphasis is being placed on ensuring that education is entirely free at the primary level by doing away with school fees.³ Additionally, Cameroon stated in its 2018 national report that it had made efforts to raise the school enrolment rate for girls (as was recommended) by including the organisation of awareness campaigns and the provision of incentives in the form of scholarships and instructional kits for girls.⁴

I. Main issues in Education

Quality of Education

6. Although Cameroon's educational system has achieved impressive results since the end of the colonial era (increasing literacy rates and extending free elementary education to nearly all its growing youth population), serious issues remain. Quality concerns and

¹ United Nations Human Rights Council. (2018). *Universal Periodic Review – Cameroon*.

² United Nations Human Rights Council. (2018). *Universal Periodic Review – Cameroon*, National Report, Para 58.

³ Ibid, para 59.

⁴ Ibid, para 63.

corruption continue to plague most levels of the education system. In contrast, secondary and higher education access remains out of reach for many of the country's most indigent communities.⁵

7. In 2019, UNICEF reported that 855,000 children in Northwest and Southwest Cameroon were still out of school, some for even three years.⁶ More than 80% of schools in the two regions had been shut, and 74 schools were destroyed.
8. Displaced families had been moved to refugee camps where classroom sizes of more than 200 students were average. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data, nearly 450,000 refugees taken in from the Central African Republic and Nigeria were also added to these camps.
9. Violence in other regions has also impacted the country's schoolchildren. Since 2014, attacks in northern Cameroon launched by the terrorist organisation Boko Haram have led to the closure of hundreds of schools. Kidnappings carried out by Boko Haram in Cameroon also continued in 2022.⁷
10. Primary school has become free since 2000, but families must still pay for uniforms and book fees. Furthermore, tuition and fees at the secondary and university levels still need to be affordable for many families in Cameroon.

Discrimination against Indigenous children

11. In Cameroon, Pygmies, Mbororo and Kirdis are considered indigenous people. Indigenous people said the rebels target their peers in English-speaking western regions. The conflict has prevented thousands of their children from obtaining legal birth documentation and access to education.⁸
12. The rights to education and citizenship are closely linked: a birth certificate is needed to register a child in public school, yet indigenous families often need help to obtain this document. Access to public services in general, including birth registry and education, is very difficult for indigenous families due to the cost of administrative procedures and the long distances between the public service centres and the indigenous villages.⁹
13. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), in its 3rd cycle UPR publication, was concerned about the discrimination against indigenous children and the lack of strategy to ensure appropriate curricula for minorities. It urged Cameroon to ensure

⁵ WENR, 'Education in Cameroon' (2021), <https://wenr.wes.org/2021/04/education-in-cameroon>

⁶ UNICEF, UNICEF calls on all parties to protect children and their education (2019) press release. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/more-855000-children-remain-out-school-north-west-and-south-west-cameroon>

⁷ ADF, 'Boko Haram on kidnapping rampage in Cameroon' (2022) <https://adf-magazine.com/2022/11/boko-haram-on-kidnapping-rampage-in-cameroon/>

⁸ Moki Edwin Kindzeka, Cameroon indigenous people say rebels kill, deprive them of education and livelihood (2021), https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_cameroon-indigenous-people-say-rebels-kill-deprive-them-education-and-livelihood/6209370.html

⁹ Well-Founded, Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Cameroon: Challenges and Issues, <https://well-founded.org/indigenous-peoples-rights-in-cameroon-challenges-and-issues/>

that children of minority groups had equal access to education without discrimination and introduced curricula recognising their way of life and culture.¹⁰

14. The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) made similar recommendations, urging Cameroon to allocate adequate resources for the implementation of the national action plan for indigenous peoples and to accelerate efforts to promote the education of indigenous children and counteract the highly high illiteracy rate of the indigenous peoples through the construction of adequately resourced schools in their communities and the delivery of culturally appropriate curricula. The same Committee also stressed the need to ensure indigenous peoples' access to social services and benefits by facilitating birth registration and issuing national identity cards.¹¹
15. Indigenous children and children with disabilities still face difficulties in this field. It is tough to enrol them in mainstream schools. They are often enrolled in special schools run by NGOs and private stakeholders. Not including children with disabilities in mainstream schools makes it difficult for them to integrate socially and professionally. Finally, autistic children are still not accepted in mainstream schools.¹² This poses a significant challenge of lack of inclusiveness in Cameroon's educational system.

Sexual Violence in Education

16. Sexual harassment continues to exist in Cameroonian schools and university milieus today, and the attendance rate in secondary education is relatively low among girls in Cameroon.
17. In its last UPR report, the CRC was concerned about the closure of schools owing to insecurity in the far North, North, East, Adamaoua, Northwest and Southwest regions; and the low school enrolment rate of girls and, exceptionally, the high dropout rates in secondary schools owing to the prevalence of sexual harassment by teachers, child marriage and adolescent pregnancy.¹³
18. Cameroon reformed its Penal Code of 2016, aiming to combat early and forced marriages, which obstruct the right to education. UNESCO welcomed the reform of the Penal Code of 2016. It recommended that Cameroon continue to step up its efforts to eliminate child marriage and child labour, which are significant obstacles to realising the right to education.¹⁴
19. The Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation recommended eliminating school fees and taking action to raise the rates of secondary school attendance, particularly among girls.¹⁵

¹⁰ United Nations Human Rights Council. (2018). *Universal Periodic Review – Cameroon*, Report of the UNHCR, para 57.

¹¹ Ibid, para 78.

¹² UNESCO, 'Cameroon, inclusion', (2021) <https://education-profiles.org/sub-saharan-africa/cameroon/~inclusion>

¹³ N (10), para 53.

¹⁴ Ibid, para 61.

¹⁵ United Nations Human Rights Council. (2018). *Universal Periodic Review – Cameroon*, Stakeholders Report, para 43.

20. The school enrolment rate for girls has been promoted through awareness-raising campaigns and incentives, the awarding of scholarships and instructional kits to girls, the provision of snacks and the establishment of school cafeterias in priority education zones, the construction of separate latrines and a range of measures for combating gender-based violence in schools and child marriage.¹⁶
21. Cameroon still needs to implement a national education monitoring report. There should be some oversight and control on teachers and staff to provide a haven for girls and, at the same time, promote the rate of girls' education in the country.

II. Recommendations

22. Based on the above analysis, Broken Chalk would like to congratulate Cameroon on its progress in improving human rights in the past years and encourage the country to continue its efforts to increase the quality and accessibility of education further, fully implement recommendations received in the previous cycles and address the new challenges.
23. Broken Chalk recommends that Cameroon continue to focus on implementing inclusive education in schools and fight against discrimination against indigenous children in their access to education.
24. Broken Chalk also recommends that the infrastructure of schools be better equipped for students with physical disabilities and indigenous people who have to travel from their villages.
25. Better teacher training programs must be provided to make girls feel safer in schools and universities. Also, more control has to be placed on teachers to avoid the sexual harassment of students. Good oversight is needed, which will increase the rate of female participation in education.
26. Broken Chalk also recommends that school curriculums include information about the history of the indigenous population of Cameroon. Their record should be accurately taught in the classroom, and their culture should be discussed with the class. Doing so will make it possible for other children to learn about their own history and, ideally, reduce the perception that indigenous children are below them.
27. There needs to be a zero-tolerance policy for acts of violence in schools. Students and teachers should be encouraged to report any cases of violence or discrimination inside the educational system and sexual harassment.
28. Broken Chalk recommends that legislation, together with education and awareness-raising programmes, should be implemented to combat all forms of violence against women and indigenous people in their quest to access education in Cameroon.

¹⁶ United Nations Human Rights Council. (2018). *Universal Periodic Review – Cameroon*, National Report, Para 63.



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