

## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT IN THE FUTURE ORIENTATION OF EMERGING ADULTS IN CAMEROON

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### ABSTRACT

Growing up adult in Africa appears to be an arduous task necessitated by very difficult life conditions which have left most emerging adults hopeless about the future of their adulthood. Caught up in situations where services are unevenly distributed, young people languish in abject poverty, unemployment, under-scholarisation, and a difficult labour market economy. As such, their future orientations seem to be quite uncertain, contestable and mixed between hopes and fears; and pathways marked by both resources and challenges. This paper presents data on the future orientation of emerging adults in Cameroon, collected with the Hopes and Fears Questionnaire among 137 university students. Content analyses of the qualitative data show orientation towards diverse future identities: hopes for schooling or continuing education, marriage and family formation, work and career development, and so on. Among others, they also fear not continuing their education, losing sponsorship, becoming poor, becoming unemployed, not getting married and having children of their own, and so on. Of great significance to this paper is the fact that young people's future orientation towards a dependable, functional and productive future in Cameroon is more or less a collective than an individualistic project. When they were asked if there were any resources or challenges in their way to adulthood, they reported the need for partnerships, networks and lasting social support systems as resources and which they fear to lose. In particular, they pointed to family support, supportive peer relations, community support programmes like scholarships for continuing education, opportunities for professional training and employment and national agencies for productive youth development. These findings are consistent with the culturally accepted collective pattern of growing up African, where "self-focus" is less emphasised than "other-focus". And future orientation research has shown that it is not just about where one wants to get and the way he/she ought to go, but also about destinations one fears to reach and pathways he/she should avoid. We maintain that the way to go is through collective efforts, with young people looking up to others in forming dependable identities; and transitioning into functional and productive futures.

**Keywords:** Social support, Future orientation, Emerging adult.