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# The Impacts of Education: A Case Study of Muslim Women in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon

Margo Brookfield  
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# The Impacts of Education: A Case Study of Muslim Women in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon

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## Abstract

This paper is the product of a study on the ultimate impacts that education can have on the lives of Muslim women in the city of Ngaoundéré, Cameroon. Women in the North of Cameroon have been confined within traditional gender roles that have been in place for generations, due to deep ties with culture and religion in the region. This research explores Muslim women's opinions on the impacts of the modern education system in place in the city. In addition it looks into the impacts that this education can have on different aspects of a woman's life, including her relations with her husband, her economic impact and independence of work, the advantages and disadvantages she has faced in life, as well as her plans for the future education of her children, particularly her daughters. I conducted this research by surveying fifty women of all different age ranges and varying levels of education. What I found was that regardless of a woman's level of education, she emphasized its importance and had high hopes for the education of her children. Furthermore, the importance of work and financial independence was stressed by nearly every woman I spoke with. Finally, I found that mentalities are changing in Ngaoundéré. Young marriage for girls is slowly phasing out, and many husbands were in fact the ones encouraging their wives to work and continue their education.

## Résumé

Ce document est représentative d'une étude sur les impacts ultimes de l'éducation sur la vie des femmes musulmanes dans la ville de Ngaoundéré au Cameroun. Les femmes dans le Nord du Cameroon étaient confinées dans les rôles traditionnels qui ont été mis en place pendant les générations à cause de l'influence de la culture et le religion dans la région. Cette recherche explore les opinions des femmes musulmanes sur les impacts du système d'éducation moderne dans la vie économique, sociale et familiale. En plus, la recherche essaie de comprendre les impacts que cette éducation peut avoir sur les aspects différents de la vie d'une femme: ses relations avec son mari, son impact économique, son indépendance, son travaille, les avantages et les désavantages qu'elle a rencontrés dans la vie, ainsi que ses projets pour l'éducation de ses enfants, en particulier ses filles. J'ai effectué cette recherche en interrogeant une cinquantaine des femmes de tous les âges différents et avec un niveau d'éducation varié. Ce que j'ai trouvé était que, malgré son niveau d'éducation, la femme a souligné l'importance de fréquenter et elle a des grandes espoirs pour l'éducation de ses enfants. Les femmes interrogées dans le cadre de cette étude pensent que la scolarisation est un levier important contre la dépendance financière. Enfin, j'ai trouvé que les mentalités évoluent à Ngaoundéré. Le mariage précoce des filles supprime progressivement et beaucoup des maris encouragent leurs femmes à travailler et à poursuivre leurs études.

## Acknowledgements

To Christiane and the Amazing SIT Staff: Thank you for giving us the opportunity to really see Cameroon. Your advice and constant encouragement are what made this experience what it was, and I cannot imagine my time abroad with anyone else in your place. You helped us understand the realities of living here, and acted as the best support system I could have asked for.

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## I. Introduction and Background

*“Éduquer une femme c’est éduquer toute la nation...une femme éduquée est une famille qui est éduquée. Le mari, et même les enfants. Et ces enfants, chacun, constitue toute une autre famille, donc c’est comme un arbre qui est éduqué”.*<sup>1</sup>

### Importance of Girls Education in the World

*“Les femmes et les filles représentent 70% des 1.3 milliard de personnes vivant dans l’extrême pauvreté. Signifie l’extrême pauvreté vivant avec moins de 500 FCFA (1\$) par jour”.*<sup>2</sup>

The education of girls and women in society is crucial for any country. As stated here, to educate a woman is to educate the nation. A woman will educate her children, who will in turn raise educated families as well. This education sets off a chain reaction of improved livelihoods and opportunities for generations to come. *“Indeed, extensive research confirms that investing in girls’ education delivers high returns not only for female educational attainment, but also for the maternal and children’s health, more sustainable families, women’s empowerment, democracy, income growth, and productivity”.*<sup>3</sup> The education of women is one of the most important ways to achieve sustainable development and benefit the entirety of a nation. Education for girls has also been seen as one of the most effective ways to lift families out of poverty.

Unfortunately, the education of girls as a whole in sub-Saharan Africa has been scarce over the years. *“In sub-Saharan Africa, more than half of girls - 54% - do not complete even a primary school education”.*<sup>4</sup> Many of these girls who are attending school are only keeping up with their studies through an elementary level, after which many of them drop out either due to

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<sup>1</sup> Formal Interview with Oumoul. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>2</sup> Corps, Peace. *Forum National des Filles: “Éduquer Une Fille C’est Éduquer Une Nation”*. Page 3.

<sup>3</sup> “What Works in Girls Education”. Herz and Sperling. Page 1.

<sup>4</sup> “What Works in Girls Education”. Herz and Sperling. Page 2.

marriage, poverty, or being needed in the home or to make money. *“After primary school, girls’ participation plummets further - only 17 percent of girls in Africa are enrolled in secondary school”*.<sup>5</sup>

The education of girls and women has been proven beneficial in a number of different aspects of life. An educated woman is more likely to have fewer children, who will most likely be healthier and escape child mortality. According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), each extra year of a mother’s schooling reduces the probability of infant mortality by 5% to 10%, and a child born to a mother who can read is 50% more likely to survive past the age of five.<sup>6</sup> For example, when a woman has more education and the ability to read and write, she can understand directions on medicine labels, read prescriptions from doctors, as well as read any documents given to her by a doctor regarding further check ups or instructions, which all greatly improve the health of her and her children. In addition, women who have been through schooling are more likely to educate their children and can help them with their education within the home. *“...women with more education have smaller, healthier, and better-educated families”*.<sup>7</sup>

The education of women can also have significant economic impacts for them, as well as their families. *“Providing girls one extra year of education beyond the average boosts eventual wages by 10-20 percent.”*<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, when women have these higher wages and incomes, more of the families money is likely to go towards the health, wellbeing, and education of the family. *“Educated women spend a greater proportion of their resources on the health and*

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<sup>5</sup> “What Works in Girls Education”. Herz and Sperling. Page 2.

<sup>6</sup> “Key Messages and Data on Girls’ and Women’s Education and Literacy.” UNESCO, April 2012. Web.

<sup>7</sup> “What Works in Girls Education”. Herz and Sperling. Page 4.

<sup>8</sup> “What Works in Girls Education”. Herz and Sperling. Page 3.

*education of their families*".<sup>9</sup> The education of women is a crucial element for the development of a nation, as well as poverty alleviation. If girls in low-income countries were to learn basic reading skills, 171 million people would be lifted out of poverty.<sup>10</sup> This is a very weighted statement that shows just how important the education of women can be in a society.

Though there is much previous research on the benefits of education, it is also important to look at these issues contextually. Each community and each society is different, and therefore the needs of the people in these areas are relevant as well. Though overall, education can open up opportunities and improve the wellbeing and livelihoods of entire communities.

### Reasons for My Interest/Justification

Ever since I began my interest in the international world and the studies of development, the topic of women has been one of great importance to me. Having grown up in a household with a single mother who had raised three daughters all on her own, I have always known the power and strength of women. They are the bearers of life, and in most of the world they are the ones in the household who are raising the next generation. As has been emphasized in most of the reading and classes I have done throughout my studies, women are a crucial part of development. Particularly in the realm of education for women, which is highly emphasized in almost all studies I have done on the subject. It has been a huge point of interest in international studies, and something which I have focused on for many years now. Having read many books and articles, including Barbara Herz and Gene Sperling's *What Works in Girls' Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World*, on the importance of this education, I also learned of the struggles, oppression, and suffering that so many women around the world face.

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<sup>9</sup> "What Works in Girls Education". Herz and Sperling. Page 6.

<sup>10</sup> Chabot, Genevieve. "Sir: An American Woman's Stories of Pakistan". TED Talk. 31 May 2013.



After having been interested in girls' education for quite some time, I became involved with an organization that works with girls educated in rural regions of Pakistan. I developed an even deeper interest in the topic of girls' education, and its importance for the empowerment of women and the development of a country. I also began to learn more and more about the position of women in Muslim societies, and wondering why it were that these regions of the world were those with some of the lowest levels of girls' education.

I knew from the beginning that I wanted to do my independent research on something involving women and possibly even women's education. But in doing preliminary research on Cameroon, I realized that Cameroon is a country with relatively equal levels of education for both girls and boys. But overall, only 38% of girls in the country are continuing into secondary school.<sup>11</sup> With further research, I realized that the Grand North of the country, which is the region with a predominantly Muslim population, has significantly lower levels of girls' enrollment in schools. I realized I wanted to know why the education rates were lower in these areas, what this relationship has to do with religion and cultural traditions, and what benefits an education can provide for a woman in the North of Cameroon, as well as women's opinions on all of these topics.

Throughout the course of this semester, we have learned much about the development world and the phenomenon of western ideas and ways of being which are influencing people in all regions of the world. I began to question much of what I thought I knew about development, and what exactly education is. I know that education is important, but is the western model of education really what is right for every culture and every region of the world? What are the other effects that the imposition of this education is having on the world? In addition, what are the struggles that women who are educated face in these societies where women's purpose is seen as

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<sup>11</sup> "Cameroon." *UNICEF*. Web. 01 December 2013.

being only in her home? I began to question everything I knew and had previously researched about this subject, and wanted to see the ultimate impacts that the formal modern education system is having on the lives of Muslim women here in Ngaoundéré.

## Research Questions/Hypotheses

### Hypotheses

An education will give women more knowledge of how to find jobs, how to manage money for their household, and the importance of education for their daughters, but will also cause them many difficulties and obstacles socially in life.

Women who have been through formal education will have more independence and authority in their home and in their relationship with their husband, will have more say in the distribution of family income, and will be more likely to encourage the education of all of her children including her daughters.

### Research Questions

What are the advantages and disadvantages of an education for Muslim women in Ngaoundéré?

What are the differences between the lives of women who have been educated and women who have not been educated?

## Important Terminology

It is important for the purposes of this study to understand that when speaking of education, I am referring to the modern, formal system of education here in Cameroon, and not to the Koranic or Islamic schools in Ngaoundéré. I also want to mention that though this is the modern system of education, and what we would consider as an education from a western perspective, I

in no way mean to imply that women who have not attended modern school are “uneducated”. Traditional education and what is learned within the home and throughout ones life is also an invaluable education that I do not wish to dismiss.

## Objectives

My objectives with this project were to see what the true impacts of the modern education system are on Muslim women in Ngaoundéré. I wanted to see what influences this education had on certain aspects of their lives, including their economic impact, their relations with their husbands, their independence and overall happiness, and the future education of their children. I wanted to see if having been educated affected a woman’s opinion of the future education of her daughters, and what impacts culture and religion had on these decisions as well. From former knowledge of the impacts of education, I had some hypotheses already formulated regarding these aspects of their lives. But I also knew very well the importance of culture and tradition in Ngaoundéré, and had a feeling that there would be women who preferred for their daughters to get married and have children instead of continuing their education. I also hypothesized that since education is not seen as equally important for women, that these women who had continued with their education may feel a bit ostracized within society due to their level of schooling, and that they may face difficulties socially, or maybe in finding a husband. I also thought that many women would say that many of these things, such as marriage, future education, and financial decisions, were solely up to their husbands, or maybe that they did not have a say in these aspects of their lives. I was hoping to find what women thought was most important in life, and if there were ever any negative feelings towards formal schooling or women obtaining an education, from the point of view of the women themselves.

## II. Methodology

## Project Inspiration and Evolution

### Site Selection

After looking into the rates of education in Cameroon, it was clear that the Grand North was the region with significantly lower attendance rates. In addition, this was the region of the country that was predominantly Muslim, which sparked an interest in me to see whether or not these two facts were in correlation with one another. After visiting Ngaoundéré for a week with the group, I developed a strong connection to the city. I loved the different culture which I had not before experienced during my time in Cameroon. The men in their boubou's and the women in their beautiful pagne<sup>12</sup> dresses with henna on their hands and feet, I was immediately enthralled. Not to mention the wonderful family which I was placed in for my home stay who immediately took me in and began introducing me to the culture here, having me watch *Adamaoua* music videos in Fulfulde and feeding me massive amounts of “couscous” and “sauce de Baobab”<sup>13</sup> every night. In addition I found the place of women in society to be absolutely fascinating here, and knew that I could very happily live here for a month. Furthermore, when it came to studying education and Islam in the North, this was really one of the only places that would suffice to stay for the month as we are not allowed to travel to the North or Extreme North during our time here due to safety reasons. There was really no other place to be that made sense for my project, and I could not wait to get back to Ngaoundéré.

### Process

#### Sample Population and Data Collection

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<sup>12</sup> African cloth used for making clothes.

<sup>13</sup> “Couscous” is a large ball of maize meal which we would typically eat with a green sauce, often made with the leaves of the Baobab tree.

For this project, my target population was women in Ngaoundéré, while my sample population consisted of Muslim women in Ngaoundéré all having completed different levels of education and with varying work habits. Within this population I was able to find a large variety of women, all of different ages and background, and all women of Islam. I wanted to see what different factors have an effect on the lives of women, and how their backgrounds have had an influence on different aspects of their lives. I decided to do surveys with some simple questions on these different aspects which I was looking to know more about. I was hoping to look into their level of education, their economic impact, their relationships with their husbands, their relationships with tradition and Islam, as well as their aspirations for the future education of their children, particularly their daughters. I received very interesting answers to many of my questions, and was able to select women whom I believed would shed light on some truly compelling information to conduct interviews with.

### Strengths and Limitations/Ethical Considerations

#### Strengths

One of the major strengths of this project is that there is already a lot of literature on the subject of Muslim women and the education of girls, which provided a wonderful background to my study. In addition it was very easy to find informants, and many women seemed surprisingly open to talk to me about their lives. In addition I think that being a female myself helped women feel comfortable to talk to me, and I tried very hard to make sure they knew that my research was solely for the purpose of my project, and that if they did not wish to respond to a certain question they did not have to. In addition I made sure they knew that their identities could remain anonymous if they so chose, and that I was not there to pass judgements on any aspects of their lives.

## Limitations

My biggest limitation during this study was by far the language barrier. Not only did I just start my study of French a year ago, and am currently working to improve my own level of fluency, but many of the women I was speaking to spoke very little, if any, French. This proved quite difficult for me as I hardly speak a word of Fulfulde. I was very fortunate to have the help of Dia, my translator throughout the ISP period who is herself a highly educated Muslim woman. But even though I had a wonderful translator who was very helpful, there were times when she was not with me as I was trying to ask women the questions to my survey and write down their answers for them, which I am sure affected my data.

When I went to visit a small women's micro-finance organization, I was told that all of the women there would speak French. Unfortunately upon arrival, I realized that hardly any of the women spoke French, or were possibly nervous to try to speak to me. Therefore one of the women there was helping to translate my questionnaire questions, and I am not certain of the quality of those translations. Overall throughout my project I am afraid that a lot of important information was, inevitably, lost in the translation. Be it the women not quite understanding what I was asking, or possibly things were lost in the translations from Fulfulde to French, this language barrier was a great challenge for me.

In addition there were times when I thought that a woman could understand me if I did an interview in French, and the reality was that many of my questions were simply not understandable. Sometimes my research had to be put on hold to meet the schedule of the female informants, as well as that of my translator, as I realized the importance of having her there for the purposes of my research. In addition, particularly when the women could write and filled out the surveys themselves, many of the questions were simply left blank.

My language barrier also posed difficulties for me when it came to transcribing interviews and processing and analyzing all of the information I had gathered. Though I did my best, it is inevitable that some of my quotes might not be precisely what the woman had said. I worked very hard to stay true to what my informants had wished to convey, but want to acknowledge the likelihood of my mistakes in this portion of the research process.

Another difficulty, and one of the more frustrating ones, that I faced during my research was technological malfunctioning. Technology and I have never been the best of friends, which was a definite downfall for me as this technology can be fairly crucial to the research process. Unfortunately, my voice recorder decided not to cooperate at all times, and I lost two recorded interviews because of this malfunctioning. In total I interviewed ten women, one of which I lost completely, and the ninth interview I had to do twice. I was fortunate to have very understanding informants, but it definitely put a setback in me finishing my research!

## Ethical Considerations

A very important ethical consideration was to make sure I was respecting the identities of my informants and the confidentiality of their responses. In addition I wanted to do everything I could to make sure that no woman felt that I was judging her based on her level of education or any of her responses to my questions regarding different aspects of her life. I did not want any woman to feel uncomfortable or embarrassed at any point in time. In order to assure these ethical considerations, I did my best to explain my intentions with my project before beginning, and letting them know that they did not have to answer any questions if they did not want to. I also never assumed that they could write, and would offer first to write for them for the survey unless

they said they wanted to write, or if I knew they had completed a higher level of education beforehand.

## Qualitative Data

Overall I am using nine interviews which I completed during my research. I tried to choose women of all different ages and varying levels of education for my interviewing. The first woman I interviewed was Hadiga, who is thirty-one years old and works at a restaurant in town. She never attended modern school, only a little bit of Islamic school, due to her marriage at the age of thirteen. She is a widow with six children working very hard to provide a living for them.

The next woman I interviewed was Adama, who made it to high school with her education before getting married and now has four children. She has a very understanding husband who has agreed to allow her to continue her education when the children are old enough, and has also encouraged her to open up her own sewing shop.

Hawaou is a thirty-eight year old woman who only completed primary schooling, but studied a lot in Koranic schools. She now has six children and does not have a job or any form of personal income.

Hawaou Sabo is a twenty-two year old girl who attends the University of Ngaoundéré, studying Sociology. She is not yet married and is not currently working, only continuing her studies.

Oumoul is a thirty year old woman who has not only attended University for an undergraduate degree but has continued on to get her masters in Geoscience and Environment. She is married but does not yet have children, and she works outside of the house as well while continuing her education.



Siradja is an eighteen year old girl who is about to complete her final year of high school at an anglophone school. She is not married and does not yet have children, and has very high hopes for the future of her education, including University and hopefully even studying abroad.

Umul is an eighteen year old who has been married for a year and already has one child. She finished her schooling in Cinquième<sup>14</sup> and is not currently working.

Suada is a thirty year old woman who never attended any form of schooling. She was married at sixteen, and has five children. She does not have a job or any form of personal income, and expressed the struggles she has faced due to her lack of formal education.

Rougayatou is a forty-seven year old woman who attended Koranic school but finished her education in modern school at the primary level. She was married around fourteen or fifteen years of age, and has seven children. She is currently working at a sewing shop making clothes.

### How I'm Going to Use This Research in the Future

As the topics in this study are ones which have been of much interest to me for quite some time, I am hoping to use this research in the next year and a half as part of a senior thesis. I am also hoping to share my finding and the things I learned through this process with people at home to open their eyes to the realities of Cameroon, and particularly the impacts of culture and tradition on the position of women here and within Muslim societies in the North of the country. I think it is very easy for people to stereotype many aspects of both Africa and Muslim societies in the world, but I think it is very important to bring light to these issues and spread the knowledge I have acquired and the experiences that I have had during my time in this beautiful and welcoming country.

### III. Part I: Context

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<sup>14</sup> Cinquième is the equivalent of one's Sophomore year of high school in the United States, or their second year.

## Ngaoundéré, Culture, and Religion

Ngaoundéré is a city of nearly one hundred and sixty thousand inhabitants, and is the largest city and capital of the *Adamaoua* region of Cameroon. “Ngaoundéré or N’Gaoundéré is the capital of the Adamaoua Region of Cameroon. It had a population of 152,700”.<sup>15</sup> Though the city has a number of different ethnic groups and religions, as the construction of the railway opened up the city to traffic and people moving from all over the country, the population is predominantly Islamic, with about sixty percent of the population being Muslim. “There re approximately 60% Muslims...There re further 30% Christians f various denominations”.

The primary language used in the city is Fulfulde, which is also the most commonly used language in the region. The city has deep cultural traditions that often preceded the coming of Islam, and still influence the lives of many people in Ngaoundéré today. Also within this tradition are very hard set gender roles which have continued for generations. Women are supposed to rest within the confines of their homes to cook and take care of the children, while men are supposed to work and provide for the family. “*A woman’s obligation in a traditional marriage is to stay in the house to prepare for her husband, have babies, and educate her children in the ways of the Koran*”.<sup>16</sup> These are very much generalizations of these traditional gender roles, and though much of this tradition holds true for many, what I found during my research was that much of this tradition is changing. The perspective of many traditions is slowly changing, and women are finding a new place and role within society.

### Education of Girls in Ngaoundéré: The Barriers

The Grand North of Cameroon is a region which sees far fewer girls and women attending school than in the Grand South, where education rates can be seen as relatively equal. “The

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<sup>15</sup> “Ngaoundéré”. *Tripoto*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 December 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Regnier, Corrina. *Reproductive Realities: Fulani Women and Contraception*. SIT Cameroon Fall 2011. Page 24.

country's three northern and eastern regions with the poorest girl-child school attendance rates have been targeted as priority zones in need of strategies to improve young girls' attendance. In the Far North Region on the fringes of the Sahara Desert, the situation is particularly troubling with fewer than 17 of every 100 girls in school".<sup>17</sup> This occurrence of unequal education rates is typical of the region, and the North in general, but there are a number of cultural factors that contribute to this lacking of schooling for young girls in the *Adamoua*. In Cameroon as a whole, the attendance rate for girls in primary school is 77%, but sees a drastic decrease with only a 38% attendance rate for girls in secondary school.<sup>18</sup> These rates are averaged for all of Cameroon, but the rates of girls' education in the North are significantly lower than that of the Grand South. Though it can be easy, especially when often seeing heavily biased media on the subject, to assume that the reason for this lack of education must be religion. It is also easy for many to make the assumption that women in Islamic societies are "oppressed" and forced by misogynistic men to cover themselves and stay in the house. But what is often overlooked is the actual opinions of these women on how they feel on many of these issues. And specifically in the case of Ngaoundéré, the cultural background of the ethnic groups here, which plays a crucial role in the education of girls, can as well often be overlooked. It is important to understand the full explanation as to why there is an under schooling of girls here and the true position of women in this society in order to comprehend the inner workings of the Muslim female in Cameroon.

Sometimes it is perceived that it is the Koran which condemns the education of women. But in fact, the Koran emphasizes the importance of education and knowledge for all people, not just men. "*Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is those who are*

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<sup>17</sup> Divine, Ntaryike, Jr. "Cameroon's Girl-Child Education Efforts Limping." *Voice of America News*. Web.

<sup>18</sup> "Cameroon." *UNICEF*. Web. 01 December 2013.

*endued with understanding that receive admonition” (Al Zumar, 39:9. page 305).*<sup>19</sup> What is often misunderstood about Islam, is that according to the Koran the education of women is important as they are the ones who stay in the house and raise the children, and are therefore in charge of educating them. This is a common misunderstanding of Islam and a misinterpretation of the Koran. *“Donc c’est pour cela que c’est mieux d’étudier. Et la religion n’a jamais interdit de ne pas faire l’école. Oui. Elle n’a pas empêché”.*<sup>20</sup>

The education of girls in the North is a topic which has been thoroughly researched, and there are a number of key reasons why girls have such a low attendance rates in school here. There are a number of cultural factors which have led to the lower rates of education for girls here. Much of this has to do with the traditional gender roles that have been followed here for generations. Women’s place is seen as in the home, taking care of the children and cooking, whereas men are supposed to work and provide for the family. There are very specific tasks that are seen for the women, and specific tasks that are only for men. The education of girls is therefore not as highly valued in life as it important to know how to cook and run the household. Therefore, many girls must learn these ways in the home with their mothers while waiting to find a husband. The benefits of an education are therefore not as easily visible in these scenarios. *“Less clear and more distant benefits: where daughters traditionally “marry out” of their families and join their husbands’, parents may doubt how much they will benefit from having more-educated daughters”.*<sup>21</sup> Therefore the cost of an education is seen as not worth the benefits, and there are opportunity costs that the family will lose by sending their daughters to school when a traditional education in the home is often seen as more beneficial.

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<sup>19</sup> Ali, Abdullah Yusuf. *The Glorious Qur’ân: Final Revelation from God*. Hicksville, NY: Islamic Book Service.

<sup>20</sup> Formal Interview with Adama. 21 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>21</sup> “What Works in Girls Education”. Herz and Sperling. Page 7.

Whether or not a girl goes to school depends a lot on the decision of their parents, and particularly that of their fathers. *“C’est son père qui ne l’a pas l’amené. Parce qu’avant, les parents...surtout son père, ne voulaient pas que leurs filles aillent à l’école”*.<sup>22</sup> If a father wishes that his daughter does not attend school, then she most likely will not. *“Premièrement, c’est les parents. Ils ne payent pas les études. Ils ne donnent pas aux filles les moyens nécessaire pour continuer leurs études... c’est la faute des parents”*.<sup>23</sup> Sometimes it may depend on the education level of the parents as well, whether or not they see the value in education. *“It is very difficult, because you know, Muslims, sometimes, mostly the girls are not going to school. Mostly because their parents were not educated, they don’t know the importance of education”*.<sup>24</sup> All of these factors have a great impact on whether or not a girl will attend school.

One of the most prevalent of these culture traditions is the young age at which it is normal for girls to get married. *“Le mariage aujourd’hui, c’est vrai que c’est une tradition dans notre religion: l’Islam. C’est une tradition forte dans l’Islam...”*.<sup>25</sup> It has been the tradition for many generations that once a girl has hit the age of puberty, she is to be married. In Cameroon, there is a very high rate of child marriage as many girls get married just after hitting puberty. *“According to UNICEF’s Cameroon Operations Chief, Daouda Guindo. ‘31% of girls [in Cameroon] get married before the age of 15’”*.<sup>26</sup> Once a girl has been married, the responsibility of her education is passed on to her husband. Unless her husband is keen on her continuing her education, her schooling will usually stop at this point. In many scenarios it is the girls themselves that do not wish to continue their education. Since marriage and having children are such a crucial part of culture and life here, that is often a girl’s aspirations in life. Siradja, an

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<sup>22</sup> Formal Interview with Suada. 24 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>23</sup> Formal Interview with Hawaou. 22 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>24</sup> Formal Interview with Siradja. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>25</sup> Formal Interview with Hawaou. 22 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>26</sup> "Getting Girls into School: Cameroon's Ongoing Struggle." *Think Africa Press*. Web. 01 December 2013.

eighteen year old young Muslim girl who has continued on to secondary school and has high aspirations for the future of her education, discussed the scenarios she has seen with her friends throughout the years. *“Yes some of them were influenced by their parents, but some of them never wanted to school. They just wanted to get married, they never had this initiative to continue their education”*.<sup>27</sup> In addition, children are a very important part of society in Cameroon as a whole, and therefore getting married and beginning a family is one of the most important parts of a girl’s life and a well kept tradition. Due to these factors, you see many girls who were married as early as thirteen years of age and who began having children and starting their families soon after that.

In addition, poverty can be a very important reason why families choose not to send their daughters to school. If money is tight, and there is only enough to send one or two children to school, parents are more likely to send their boys to school as their education is seen as more highly valued than that of girls. *“I mean it’s only sometimes poverty...Their parents cannot afford their education. So at a certain age they will just say no, stop school and just get married because they don’t have money just to continue. Just go to your husband’s house and stay there”*.<sup>28</sup> Since girls are supposed to get married and start families as an important part of their culture and lives anyway, when the money is not there to send all children to school it makes more sense to parents to send their boys to school, and send their daughters to marriage.

#### IV. Part II: The Women’s Voice

##### Difficulties to Being Educated

When beginning this study, I had a feeling that due to the strength of the culture and traditions in Ngaoundéré, women who had continued their education may face some difficulties

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<sup>27</sup> Formal Interview with Siradja. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>28</sup> Formal Interview with Siradja. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

within society. I thought that they may be ostracized within certain social circles, or that they may be looked down upon by some for not following the tradition. Though in my research, I found that none of my original hypotheses held true. The only hypothesis I had come up with that held true was the difficulties that education can pose for girls in terms of marriage prospects. When a girl reaches a higher level of education, many men may fear her as a potential wife. *“It depends, because sometimes if you are educated, I mean, you go to a higher level. Even getting married for you will be difficult because all of the men will be shivering to come near to you and ask your hand...they will think that, how can I say, you are more intellectual...you are more than them. They will be afraid of you”*.<sup>29</sup> In addition parents may fear this potential difficulty that comes along with education, for if a young girl does not get married or her marriage ends in a divorce, then usually she must return to the home of her parents. They will then be responsible for supporting her, and any kids she may have had in the meantime, until she finds another husband. *“In some cultures, just an appearance of impropriety can affect girls’ marriage prospects and leave parents concerned about supporting unmarried daughters”*.<sup>30</sup>

This higher level of education can typically lead to more independence and a higher likelihood of having a job or a career, which can also pose problems within a marriage as it is changing these traditionally held gender roles. Men may fear that women will no longer respect them if they are educated as well. *“Elles ne vont pas vite se marier car la plupart des hommes se disent que si une femme atteint un certain niveau d’éducation...elle ne va plus le respecter”*.<sup>31</sup> In addition the fact that an educated woman may have a job or career poses issues within the household as well, as her absence from the home is not the typical way for women here and it will be harder for her to continue her traditional duties of watching the children and cooking for

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<sup>29</sup> Formal Interview with Siradja. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>30</sup> “What Works in Girls Education”. Herz and Sperling. Page 43.

<sup>31</sup> Formal Interview with Hawaou Sabo. 22 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

the family. When speaking with Oumoul, a woman who is highly educated and is currently working while continuing her studies, I asked whether or not her work creates issues in her marriage. *“Ça c’est sûr. Parce que déjà, à chaque fois quand il a besoin de toi, toi tu es au travail... C’est absence là de la maison là qui pose des problèmes. Tu rentres tard... Ça pose des problèmes”*.<sup>32</sup>

Though the issues of marriage prospects for married girls are valid, there are also many girls who do not mind that and are determined to wait until after finishing their studies to find a husband. And an understanding husband at that, who will want for her to work and have independence. *“I will choose the best man. I mean a comprehensive man who will leave my children to go to school. Because we are in the modern time, time is changing... I will also find a comprehensive husband who will let me to work”*.<sup>33</sup> The other difficulties that I believed educated women would face in society here did not hold true whatsoever. When I asked women what difficulties educated women may face, nearly all of them said nothing, and that life is easier when you are educated.

### Difficulties to Not Being Formally Educated

There were a number of women who I spoke to during my research who had completed a very small amount of formal schooling, some of them none or only primary school. In addition, nearly every woman said that the reason why she stopped going to school was because of marriage. According to my surveys, all of the girls who were married at ages thirteen or fourteen had only completed primary level schooling, which implies that they were not able to continue their education after the time of marriage or did not choose to.<sup>34</sup> When asked how their level of schooling affected their lives or if it created any difficulties for them, many of them said yes.

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<sup>32</sup> Formal Interview with Oumoul. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>33</sup> Formal Interview with Siradja. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>34</sup> Appendix: Survey Statistics.



There were a number of reasons why this lack of schooling made life more difficult for them, and why having more education would be highly beneficial. In addition almost every woman I interviewed who had not been able to continue her schooling said that the one thing she would like to change in her life if she could, would be to have completed more schooling and been allowed to continue with her studies.

In addition, when women have not completed as much schooling, it can be harder for them to find a job and have their own income. This is a critical point in the independence of a woman as with her own work and money she has much more freedom. *“Si j’avait fréquenté l’école, ça serait beaucoup plus facile. Je pourrais résoudre mes problèmes... Maintenant, c’est mon mari qui résoud ses problèmes”*.<sup>35</sup> Without having a job, women often must leave the decision making to their husbands, which puts them in a cycle of dependency within their homes. *“Si tu as étudié tu vas travailler, mais maintenant je n’ai pas étudié, je ne peux pas travailler hors de la maison”*.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, and probably one of the most important reasons why having some education can benefit a woman in her life, is for her personal health and the health of her family. When girls do not have the opportunity to go to school, they often do not learn French as most people here speak Fulfulde. Since Fulfulde is a commonly used language and is often the way of communicating within the home, there may not be any necessity growing up to learn French. But knowing French can be crucial for a number of medical purposes. If you cannot read the instructions on a medicine bottle for your children, you may not know how much medicine to give them. Furthermore, if you cannot communicate with the doctor at the hospital, then you have no way of explaining any issues you are having or understanding a diagnosis or advice from

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<sup>35</sup> Formal Interview with Umul. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>36</sup> Formal Interview with Umul. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

the doctor. *“L’école c’est bien. L’école c’est bien parce que si une femme ne part pas à l’école, elle est comme une aveugle. Hier, je suis allée à l’hôpital pour ma grossesse, tout ce qu’on parlé, je ne comprenais pas. Je suis rentrée et j’ai dit à ma mère que: si je suis allée à l’école ça ne devrait pas être comme ça”*.<sup>37</sup> Suada, who never received any form of formal schooling and barely speaks a word of French, went to the hospital to discuss her pregnancy but could not understand the doctor. She explained that a woman who has not gone to school is basically blind, and that after her hospital visit she had to come home and tell her mother that if she had gone to school it would not be like this. If she had gone to school, she could have communicated with the doctor about her health and her pregnancy.

Particularly in the increasingly modernized society of present day Ngaoundéré, there are a number of reasons why a lack of schooling creates numerous difficulties for a woman. This education is crucial, which is a point highlighted by nearly every woman I spoke with, educated and not formally educated alike.

### Marital Relations

Through my research, I found a wide variety of answers to my questions regarding a woman’s relationship with her husband. It is apparent that a woman’s husband has a great impact on the overall trajectory of her life, but it seemed that many men were beginning to see eye to eye with the wishes of their wives.

Though very few women seemed unhappy with their relationships with their husbands, there were many who had little things they wished to change in order to improve their position in the home. Women who had not been able to have a job seemed much more tied to the wishes and desires of their husbands, without much say in the decision making process. *“C’est mon mari qui*

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<sup>37</sup> Formal Interview with Suada. 24 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

*s'occupe des dépenses. Voilà notre relation... Mais si j'avais fait des études, et que j'avais mon travail, j'aurais les dépenses pour mes enfants...Donc, si j'avais eu un peu plus d'éducation, moi même, je serais parvenue à faire mes besoins seule. Sans demander rien à mon mari. Je serais indépendante*".<sup>38</sup> Being able to be financially independent and not having to ask you husband for money was a theme that held true for most women that I spoke to. Especially those who had not received as much education and did not have their own sources of income. This gives men the upper hand in the relationship, following the traditional gender roles, and makes women subservient to the wishes of their husbands. *"Mais sans l'éducation, qu'est-ce que tu peux suggérer à ton mari? Rien. Peut-être le nom que tu vas donner à ta sauce"*.<sup>39</sup> A very interesting example of this lack of power is presented here. Without education, you have no control within your marital relationship. You can suggest maybe the name you are going to give your sauce.

But from what many women told me, times are changing. Now, girls have more of a position to express themselves, both with their husbands and their parents. *"L'école...je dirais que ça n'a pas changé la tradition, mais ça a changé le perception de cette tradition. Ça a beaucoup changé, chez nous, avant, lorsqu'on parlait du respect, le respect était la soumission totale...avant entre le mari et la femme, même les parents, il n'y avait pas de dialogue, ils prennent les décisions et tu appliques. Mais maintenant, on prend les points de vue des jeunes filles. Toi, qu'est-ce que tu veux?"*.<sup>40</sup> Whereas before a young girl was just to submit to whatever she was told to do, today women have more of a place to voice their opinions. Today there is a dialogue, and girls are asked what they want in life and can discuss their point of view. Especially as women are more and more having their own jobs and forms of income, regardless of their level of education, many women are finding that voice. And others are respecting it.

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<sup>38</sup> Formal Interview with Hawaou. 22 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>39</sup> Formal Interview with Oumoul. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>40</sup> Formal Interview with Oumoul. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

A wonderful example of this is Adama. She is a married woman with four kids, who as is the case with so many other girls, had to leave her education behind in order to get married. She made it to the high school level, which is farther than many, but still did not get to study as long as she would have liked. But today, she has many aspirations for her future. Furthermore, her husband has been the one encouraging these ambitions and offering to help her along the way to reaching her goals. *“Non. Avec mon mari on s’entend très bien. C’est lui même qui m’encourage...à trouver quelque chose à faire. De ne pas rester seulement dans la maison, et s’occupe des enfants. Il m’encourage à faire quelque chose... Il dit oui...tu va continuer et je vais chercher peut-être une femme de ménage qui vient traiter de la maison, et pour garder les enfants, pour le temps que tu pars à étudier. Il a accepté. Il a dit oui, il m’a demandé encore qu’est-ce qu’il faut pour ouvrir l’atelier de couture...il va m’aider à faire ça”*.<sup>41</sup> Her husband not only wished to help her return to school, encouraging her to do so and offering to help her pay for these studies, but was also willing to help her open her own business. He wished to help her find a woman to work in the house and watch the children while she studied, but had only asked that she wait until the children have grown a bit to begin following her ambitions in life.

Regardless of what a woman’s situation was in life, every woman seemed very happy in her current circumstance. It seemed that though there is still much tradition within the relationship, many men are beginning to be more comprehensive and understanding of the ambitions of their wives, and respecting their decisions and desire to work. What seemed the most important above all for their relationships with their husbands, was this presence of work and having their own income. Even though it is clear that work such as this can create difficulties in the marriage as well, it gives women a feeling of independence and control over their lives that is not present if they are not working.

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<sup>41</sup> Formal Interview with Adama. 21 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

## Advantages to Education

To educate a woman is to educate a nation. This was one of the most common responses I got from women when I asked what their opinions were on the education of girls. Every woman I spoke to highly valued education, and thought it brought numerous benefits to a woman as well as her family and society. *“For girls, it is very important, because educating a girl is educating the whole nation. Because if a girl is educated...all of her children will be educated. She will take care of her family and children. An educated girl is the mother of the nation”*.<sup>42</sup> Women valued this education and were very adamant about what it can bring to the life of a woman. Many believed that she would live better within society and know better how to interact with people. In addition, being able to speak French and communicate with people was an advantage highlighted by many. *“Je pense que l’éducation des femmes musulmanes est une bonne chose...car tout le monde est indispensable”*.<sup>43</sup> Education is indispensable for everyone.

In addition, studies have shown that women with more education are likely to have smaller family sizes, making it easier to care for each child’s health, wellbeing, and further education. According to my surveying, all but one of the women with five children or more only finished primary level schooling, or had not ever attended school or only a bit of Islamic or Koranic school.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, twenty-nine out of the fifty women I surveyed responded as having zero or only one child. Though it is true that many women I surveyed were of the younger generation and it is possible that they had just started their families and were planning to have many more children, I did speak with any girls under eighteen years of age. Therefore many of these girls had at least waited until later than has been the norm to get married and begin having

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<sup>42</sup> Formal Interview with Siradja. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>43</sup> Formal Interview with Hawaou Sabo. 22 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>44</sup> Appendix: Survey Statistics.

children. In addition the one woman I spoke with with who had continued on to graduate school was thirty years of age and had not begun having children yet.

Furthermore this education is a crucial point for the independence of a woman, along with having her own job and income. *“L’avantage est que la femme est épanouie. Elle ne dépend plus totalement de la famille, ou ni de son mari... Elle peut prendre seule les décisions”*.<sup>45</sup> When a woman is educated, it does not just benefit her. It benefits the entire family. Many women were very adamant that educating a woman is to educate many, and can benefit everyone within the community. The advantages are numerous, but the importance of work and the further education of the next generation within the home were probably the two most highlighted points from all of the discussions I had with these varying women.

### Financial Independence and the Importance of Work

Women are a group of people in the world who live in some of the most formidable conditions, and are often the most affected by poverty and lack of opportunities. *“Les femmes et les filles représentent 70% des 1.3 milliard de personnes vivant dans l’extrême pauvreté. Signifie l’extrême pauvreté vivant avec moins de 500 FCFA (1\$) par jour”*.<sup>46</sup> Further schooling has been proven as highly beneficial when it comes to finding a job and having an income to contribute to one’s family. *“Les filles qui ont une année de l’enseignement primaire gagnent 10 à 20 pour cent de plus, en moyenne. Une année supplémentaire de l’enseignement secondaire, augmente les salaires des filles de 15-25 pour cent, comparativement à 14 pour cent pour les garçons”*.<sup>47</sup> Since women are also imperative to the health and wellbeing of their families, this work and personal income is crucial. *“Les femmes, en moyenne, réinvestissent jusqu’à 90% des revenus*

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<sup>45</sup> Formal Interview with Oumoul. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>46</sup> Corps, Peace. *Forum National des Filles: “Éduquer Une Fille C’est Éduquer Une Nation”*. Page 3.

<sup>47</sup> Corps, Peace. *Forum National des Filles: “Éduquer Une Fille C’est Éduquer Une Nation”*. Page 3.

*dans leurs foyers (la moyenne pour les hommes est 30-40%)*".<sup>48</sup> Studies have shown that on average women are much more likely to spend their income towards the health, wellbeing, and further education of their families and children.

Nearly every woman I spoke with during my research mentioned the importance of financial independence. During my surveying, I asked women who in the household controlled the family spending. I got a relatively even mix of "moi" and "mon mari". Only three women with jobs, out of twenty-two who responded yes in some form to work, said that it was their husband who controlled the funds of the family.<sup>49</sup> The rest responded with either "moi" or "moi et mon mari". What I did not realize in asking this question though, at the time, was that within Islam when someone earns money, that money is theirs to spend.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, when a woman has any sort of work or income, that money is hers to decide where it is to be spent.

When doing further investigation and interviewing, nearly every women who did not work outside the house said she wished that she did. If she could work, then she would not have to go to her husband to ask for money for little things around the house or for the family. If a woman could have her own work, then it greatly increases her independence within the home and with her husband. "*Je voudrais être beaucoup plus indépendante. Si j'avais quelque choses à changer, ça devrait être peut-être l'indépendance financière*".<sup>51</sup> I also was able to have a glimpse into the aspirations of the younger generation in this regard when speaking with Siradja. "*Yes, to have a job and be, I mean independent of your husband is very good. I support this idea, I also want to be the same. I don't want to always depend on my husband*".<sup>52</sup> When a woman has to depend on her husband for money then it can create a dependency in many other aspects of

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<sup>48</sup> Corps, Peace. *Forum National des Filles: "Éduquer Une Fille C'est Éduquer Une Nation"*. Page 3.

<sup>49</sup> Appendix: Survey Statistics.

<sup>50</sup> "Discussion with Dia". Formation School. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon. 18 November 2013. Observation.

<sup>51</sup> Formal Interview with Hawaou. 22 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>52</sup> Formal Interview with Siradja. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

life as well. But when a woman has her own income, she does not have to go to anyone for help. She can make decisions herself, and this creates a confidence and power for her that has a positive chain reaction within her family and community.

Often times some form education is necessary in order to find this work, but during my research I found a number of situations where women had different ways of finding that financial independence they sought, but without having completed a formal education. I was invited to attend a women's micro-finance meeting which a woman whom I had already interviewed invited me to. The day that I went there were probably fifteen or twenty women at the "*reunion*", and nearly all of them were Muslim. I explained my project a bit, with various women helping translate and explain in Fulfulde, and I began doing my surveys with the women. Many of the women in the room had finished their studies in primary school, or had hardly attended school at all. As a result of this, many of them hardly spoke any French. Yet all of these women were in the micro-finance organization and were doing commerce to create their own income. And, as expected, nearly all of them said that they were in control of where the family income was spent.

In addition my translator, Dia, had a connection with a formation school just outside the city. She had called me one afternoon informing me that she had probably twenty women who could do my survey, and though I thought that sure was a lot, I printed a few extra surveys just in case. The school is a formation school to train people to become teachers. After discussing with one of the secretaries of the school and showing him my survey and certificate to do research, he took us into the grand classroom where, sure enough, about twenty young Muslim women were all sitting on one side of the room ready to take my survey. They were all very open and willing to hear about my project and take my survey, and many of them even left me their contact information for follow up interviews. Once again, many of them had finished their education in



different ranges of primary, secondary, and high school levels. None of them had continued on to university, but even having finished only lower levels of education, they were all still there learning to become teachers in order to start a career and have their own incomes.

Women are slowly but surely challenging what has been seen as their traditional role within society of staying in the home and taking care of the children. *“Yes, that is it. Because I mean most, most of the men want their women to stay at home just to take care of the children. But I think this is a very bad thing. No I don’t support the idea. I want to work, I want to go site see the world. Yes, I will also take care of my children, say that my children won’t be neglected, I will take care of them. But I also want to work”*.<sup>53</sup> Women are realizing that work and an income is important, not only for the wellbeing of them and their families but for their own independence as well. In addition it is becoming known that women can work, and can be outside of the home for part of the day, and still be able to take care of the children and fulfill their duties to their family within the home as well.

### Future Education of Children

*“Si vous éduquez un garçon, vous éduquez un être humain. Si vous éduquez une fille, vous éduquez les générations.” -Mieko Nishimizu, la Banque Mondiale Vice-Président.*<sup>54</sup>

Research has shown that the education of females has a great impact on the education of their daughters in the future. In addition, when a woman has been educated she has the capacity to help the education of her children within the home. *“Among countries with a large female disadvantage in enrollment, the education of adult women generally has more impact on the enrollment of girls than on that of boys- such as in Cameroon, India, Pakistan, and Turkey”*.<sup>55</sup> In addition, as the importance of having work has been greatly discussed, when a women has an

<sup>53</sup> Formal Interview with Siradja. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>54</sup> Corps, Peace. *Forum National des Filles: “Éduquer Une Fille C’est Éduquer Une Nation”*. Page 3.

<sup>55</sup> “What Works in Girls Education”. Herz and Sperling. Page 30.

income it is far more likely to go to the further education of her children. *“Yet a 10 percent increase in mothers’ wages also increases by 3 percent the proportion of households sending all their children to school, as schooling costs become more manageable”*.<sup>56</sup> To educate a woman is to educate the nation, as many women told me throughout my research. When a woman is educated, she can help to further educate the next generations. Though a number of studies have shown this importance, and that is not to be discredited, I found a bit of a different pattern with the woman I spoke to during my research as well.

Every woman I spoke to, regardless of her background or level of education, emphasized the great importance of education. Women who had gone through university and women who had never attended modern school alike wanted their daughters to continue with their school. Many of them said that they had these aspirations, though for some of them it depended on if there was the means to send their children that far. But all of them stressed its importance. Many women even stressed the fact that they wished their daughters could pass their level of studies, to become better than them. *“En ce qui concerne l’éducation des mes enfants, et particulièrement de mes filles, elle vont étudier fortement, jusqu’à dépasser mon niveau”*.<sup>57</sup> Even young Siradja, who had high aspirations of university in her near future and wished to achieve a very high level of education, wanted her daughters to go beyond her. *“They will be highly educated, yes they will be highly educated. I wish my children will just move ahead of me, they should be more than me in the future”*.<sup>58</sup> I had assumed that women who had not gone to school would be content with that, and happy to have been married and able to have children. And though every woman I spoke with expressed happiness in their life and their current situation, the women who had not completed as much education nearly always expressed their desire to have been able to continue

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<sup>56</sup> “What Works in Girls Education”. Herz and Sperling. Page 62.

<sup>57</sup> Formal Interview with Hawaou Sabo. 22 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>58</sup> Formal Interview with Siradja. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

their studies. One woman who had never attended formal schooling, and was facing many difficulties in her life due to this lack of schooling, even emphasized her desire for the education of her girls, for the purpose that they do not end up like her. *“Je veux que mes enfants aillent le plus loin que c’est possible à l’école. Je ne veux pas que mes enfants soient comme moi”*.<sup>59</sup>

In addition, it seems that the tradition of very young marriages for girls is also beginning to slowly but surely change. It is still a very prevalent occurrence, and a strong tradition with the culture and religion here in Ngaoundéré. Due to this it is obviously still occurring and effectively pulling girls away from their education, there is a change of mentality that is evolving as people realize the importance of education for girls. *“J’encourage ma fille d’aller à l’école...elle ne doit pas abandonner les études. L’éducation est plus importante pour elle que le mariage”*.<sup>60</sup>

Education is being recognized as equally important for ones sons as for ones daughters, and a child should not be married young and quit her studies simply because she is a girl. *“Mes filles. Non, dans ma tête j’aimerais que, filles comme garçons doivent étudier normalement. Si on a des moyens, jusqu’à l’université...Je ne veux pas que mon enfant interrompre ses études pour se marier juste parce qu’elle est une fille, non”*.<sup>61</sup> This is not to say that all women and families feel this way, but it is clear that there is a change happening within society that is valuing the place and education of girls and women more so than previous generations.

### “The Revolution” and How Things are Changing

The role of women in society is a tradition which has been set in place in Ngaoundéré for many generations. But these traditions really are beginning to see change. As more and more women are going to school, the value of this education is becoming recognized by both men and women alike. Women are continuing with their education and finding a new level of

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<sup>59</sup> Formal Interview with Suada. 24 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>60</sup> Formal Interview with Hawaou. 22 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>61</sup> Formal Interview with Adama. 21 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

independence within their homes, especially as working outside of the home is becoming more and more prevalent. Modernity and changing times are truly having an impact on the female population here. *“Maintenant, tout a changé avec la vie moderne...L’éducation nous apprend à vivre en société, avec ton mari, et savoir vivre avec les gens”*.<sup>62</sup>

Just ten years ago, times were different. There were far fewer Muslim girls in school at the high school level, and scarcely any could be found at the university level. *“Oui, ça change. Et ça a beaucoup changé. Parce que, il y a dix ans cinq ans...on ne pouvait pas trouver une fille musulmane au lycée, encore moins à l’université”*.<sup>63</sup> In the past once a girl hit a certain age, it was time for marriage and the education stopped there. But today, many girls are getting the opportunity to continue with their education. *“Maintenant, chaque parent essaie...d’envoyer leur enfant à l’école. Parce qu’ils ont vu les avantages... Ils envoient maintenant les filles à l’école”*.<sup>64</sup> There is a new perception of the traditional roles for women which are giving these girls new opportunities. This is why today you can find Muslim girls in high school working to continue with their education, some even studying in university.

Today many girls are able to get married later in life, after continuing their studies. Some girls are even given the option to choose who their future husband will be as well. *“Sinon la tradition de se marier très jeune n’est plus d’actualité. Parce que maintenant les parents laissent le choix d’études aux filles, et aussi le choix de son mari. C’est une bonne chose”*.<sup>65</sup> I even encountered a few women whose husbands were the ones encouraging them to continue their education, go through training to find a job, or even to go back to school to continue their education. I also found very few women whose husbands seemed to have any problems with

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<sup>62</sup> Formal Interview with Adama. 21 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>63</sup> Formal Interview with Oumoul. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>64</sup> Formal Interview with Oumoul. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>65</sup> Formal Interview with Oumoul. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

them working outside of the home and having this independence in their lives. Some women simply felt they could not due to their level of education, but said that their husbands would accept if they wanted to do so. The change in the culture of marriage will take time though, as it is a very important part of life here and girls for generations have been getting married at a young age to begin their families. *“...la mentalité des grand-parents ne finit pas dans un jour. Ils disent que...envoyer une femme à l'école c'est peut-être l'envoyer à faire la prostitution. Très souvent les grand-parents ne sont pas d'accord... non, si elle est déjà grande, elle doit aller en mariage...Mais maintenant, ça a changé”*.<sup>66</sup> It just takes time for the mentality of the former generations to change. It is moving, it just takes time.

Higher levels of education and having more women working outside of the home are having a huge impact on the independence many of these women are feeling. Whereas before, girls were not allowed to express their opinions or desires in their relationships with their parents or husbands, today girls are gaining a voice. They can express how they are feeling and can have an understanding discussion about their wants and desires. *“Oui, ce que je peux ajouter c'est qu'avant, sans vous mentir, avant les filles n'avaient pas de parole...Mais avec cette éducation, les parents sont devenus compréhensifs. Plus qu'avant, ils envoient leurs filles à l'école, et maintenant nous sommes plus indépendantes, nous sommes plus épanouies. La femme a le droit de choisir son mari, et peut aller travailler en dehors de la maison. C'est vraiment un point positif”*.<sup>67</sup> Parents are becoming more “comprehensive” and understanding, and allowing girls and women the space to gain this feeling of independence. The dependency of women on other more powerful figures in their lives is changing bit by bit, where women no longer have to submit and accept the decisions that others make for them.

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<sup>66</sup> Formal Interview with Oumoul. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

<sup>67</sup> Formal Interview with Oumoul. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

Change takes time. Many of these traditions have been an integral part of the culture for generations. The mentality of the former generation will not finish in one day. Therefore it will take time, the mentality of each generation changing bit by bit, for there to be a real transformation in society. But this change is coming, and there is a revolution taking place in the lives of women in Ngaoundéré.

## V. Conclusion

Before beginning this project, I thought I would find a number of differences between the lives of women who had been formally educated and the lives of those who had not gone quite as far with their schooling. Even though language and translation created significant limitations for my research, there were some visible differences I was able to see, and many of the women shared numerous commonalities. They all had very similar opinions about the education and their children, and they all emphasized the importance of work and the assistance an education can provide in finding a job. Every woman emphasized the importance of education, and that educating her daughters was important so that they could live better in society and be able to find work. Tradition is strong here, but very few women believed that schooling had changed their religion or their culture in any way. Only maybe changed their perception of these traditions. Very few believed that the two were in conflict with one another. It seemed to me that women's positions in their relationships with their husbands are improving, and many women were very happy. Quite a few women had seemingly very encouraging husbands, who actually wanted them to work and were willing to help them in their endeavors. Even though education can make finding a job much easier, it was made clear that women can find sources of income and the independence they are searching for with or without this schooling. Education is crucial for women, as all of them play a role in educating the nation. Even though this change takes time,

with each generation's mentality changing little by little, women are clearly gaining more independence and finding a way to balance the importance of education with the importance of culture and tradition.

## VI. Further Study

Though much has already been done on the topic of women and girls in Muslim societies, and specifically here in Ngaoundéré, as well as the topic of women's education, there are many options for further study. The opinions of women on all of these topics were very interesting, but I think it would have been very fascinating to compare the women's responses to my questions to the responses of their husbands to similarly posed questions. It is quite possible that one would find a variation between what the wife says and what her husband has to say. Because there are clearly changes happening in the mentality of the average woman here, and even though they often said their husbands were encouraging and in accordance with their ambitions, it would be interesting to see if that was in reality how these relationships are and to see if men as well stressed the importance of education for their daughters.

## VII. Appendixes

### Survey Questions

Nom et Coordonnées (confidentiels et optionnels):

Âge:

Groupe Ethnique:

Religion:

Où est-ce que vous avez grandi? (quel région? quelle ville ou village?)

Avez-vous fréquenté à l'école moderne?

Oui Non

Quel est votre niveau d'éducation?

Êtes-vous mariée?

Oui Non

À quel âge est-ce que vous vous êtes mariée?

Est-ce qu'après vos études vous avez eu un emploi?

Oui Non

Si non, quelles sont vos sources de revenus?

Qui décide de la manière dont les revenus de la famille sont utilisés?

Quelles sont vos trois priorités de dépenses financières?

Quelles sont vos relations avec la tradition et la religion? Si vous êtes allée à l'école moderne, est-ce que cette relation a changé?

Combien d'enfants avez-vous? Avez-vous des filles?

Quels âges ont-elles?

Est-ce que vos enfants filles vont à l'école? Si oui, voulez-vous qu'ils fassent l'éducation supérieure (l'école secondaire jusqu'à l'université)? Pour quelles raisons?

Est-ce que vous pensez que l'éducation des femmes est une chose positive ou négative? Pour quoi?

### Interview Questions

Quel âge avez-vous lorsque vous avez fini votre éducation?

Quelles sont les raisons qui expliquent l'arrêt de vos études?

Quelles sont vos opinions sur l'éducation des femmes Musulmanes?

Selon vous, quelles sont les avantages et aussi les difficultés de l'éducation des femmes Musulmanes?

Est-ce que votre niveau d'éducation vous pose des problèmes dans votre vie?

Quelles sont vos ambitions en ce qui concerne l'éducation des vos enfants, et particulièrement vos filles?

Est-ce que vous travaillez hors de la maison? Si non, voulez-vous travailler? Pour quelles raisons?

Est-ce que vous pouvez décrire la nature de votre relation avec votre mari? Est-ce que vous pensez que cette relation serait différente si vous avez eu plus/moins d'éducation?

Est-ce que vous vous sentez heureuse dans votre vie? Est-ce que vous avez des choses que vous aurait voulu changer si vous le pouvez?

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## Interviews

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- Formal Interview with Adama. 21 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.
- Formal Interview with Hawaou. 22 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.
- Formal Interview with Hawaou Sabo. 22 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.
- Formal Interview with Oumoul. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.
- Formal Interview with Siradja. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.
- Formal Interview with Umul. 23 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.
- Formal Interview with Suada. 24 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.
- Formal Interview with Rougayatou. 27 November 2013. Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

## Survey Statistics

### Married

Yes: 34

No: 15

Widowed: 1

### Age

None: 2

18: 5

19: 2

20: 4

21: 2		
22: 4		
23: 5		
24: 2		<u>Children</u>
25: 4	<u>Job</u>	0: 19
27: 5	None: 9	1: 10
28: 2	Student: 6	2: 3
29: 1	Commerce: 7	3: 4
30: 3	Oui: 4	4: 4
31: 1	Seamstress: 1	5: 4
34: 1	Restaurant: 1	6: 3
38: 2	Oui; Training: 7	7: 2
40: 1	None; Training: 13	10: 1
41: 1	Commerce/Training: 1	Average (for women who had
46: 1	Couture: 1	children): 3.42
47: 1		

54: 1  
Average: 25.6

Education Level

None: 3
Primaire: 11
Primaire (l'école Koranic): 1
Secondaire: 6
Secondaire (pas encore finit): 3
Cinquieme: 2
Lycée: 2
Oui: 2
Niveau 2 (pas encore finit): 1
Licence (pas encore finit): 2
BEPC: 9
Probatoire: 1
Probatoire G2: 1
Niveau 3e: 1

Age of Marriage

13: 1
14: 6
15: 2
16: 2
17: 4
18: 5
19: 3
20: 4
21: 4
22: 2
23: 1
26: 1
28: 1
None: 14
Average: 18.31

Translated Quotes

“To educate a woman is to

<u>Decision Maker</u>	educat
None: 13	e a
Moi: 12	whole
Mon Mari: 17	nation..
Mon Mari et Moi: 3	.an
La mère: 2	educat
La père: 2	ed
Parent (père et mère): 1	woman

is an educated family. The husband, as well as the children. And these children, each one, constitutes all of another family, so it is like a tree that is educated” (Page 5).

“So it is because of this that it is better to study. And the religion has

never forbidden going to school. Yes. It has not prevented it” (Page 20).

“It is her father who has not brought it. Because before, the parents...especially her father, did not want their daughters to go to school” (Page 20).

“Firstly, it is the parents. They do not pay for studies. They don’t give to girls the means necessary to continue their studies...it is the parents fault” (Page 21).

“Marriage today, it is true that it is a tradition in our religion: Islam. It is a strong tradition in Islam...” (Page 21).

“Girls do not marry quickly because the majority of men say that if a woman attained a certain level of education...she will no longer respect them” (Page 23).

“This is certain. Because already, each time when he needs you, you are at work...This absence from the house is what poses problems. You return late...that poses problems” (Page 24).

“If I had gone to school, this would be much easier. I would be able to resolve my problems...Now, it is my husband who resolves these problems” (Page 25).

“If you have studied you will work, but now I have not studied, I can not work outside of my house” (Page 25).

“School is good. School is good because if a woman does not go to school, it is as if she is blind. Yesterday, I went to the hospital for my pregnancy, we discussed everything, I did not understand. I returned and I told my mother that: if I had gone to school it would not be like this” (Page 26).

“It is my husband who occupies the expenses. That is our relationship...But if I had studies, and if I had my own work, I would have the expenses for my children...So, if I had done a little bit more education, myself, I would have been able to take care of my needs alone. Without asking my husband. I would be independent” (Page 27).

“But without education, what can you suggest to your husband? Nothing. Maybe the name you are going to give your sauce” (Page 27).

“School...I would say that this has not changed the tradition, but it has changed the perception of this tradition. This has changed a lot, here, before, when one spoke of respect, the respect was total submission...before between a husband and a woman, as well as the parents, there was not dialogue, they made the decisions and you applied them. But now, people take the points of view of the young girls. You, what do you want?” (Page 27).

“No. With my husband we understand each other very well. It is he who encourages me...to find something to do. To not stay only at the house, and take care of the children. He encourages me to do something...He said yes...you will continue and I will look for maybe a house woman who comes to deal with the house, and to watch the children, for the time when you go to study. He accepted. He said yes, he asked me again what he could do to open the couture shop...he is going to help me do that” (Page 28).

“I think that the education of Muslim women is a good thing...because it is indispensable for everyone” (Page 29).

“The advantage is that the woman has blossomed. She does not totally depend anymore on the family, nor her husband...She can make her own decisions” (Page 30).

“Women and girls represent 70% of the 1.3 million people living in extreme poverty. Extreme poverty means living with less than 500 CFA (1\$) a day” (Page 31).

“Girls who have one year of primary learning gain 10 to 20 percent more, on average. One supplementary year of secondary learning, raises salaries of girls 15-25 percent, compared to 14 percent for boys” (Page 31).

“Girls, on average, reinvest up to 90% of revenues in their homes (the average for men is 30-40%)” (Page 31).

“I would like to be more independent. If I had something to change, that would be maybe financial independence” (Page 32).

“If you educate a boy, you educate a human being. If you educate a girl, you educate the generations” (Page 34).

“Concerning the education of my children, and particularly my girls, they will study hard, until they pass my level” (Page 35).

“I want for my children to go the farthest possible at school. I do not want my children to become like me” (Page 36).

“I encourage my daughters to go to school...she should not abandon her studies. Education is more important for her than marriage” (Page 36).

“My daughters. No, in my head I would like that, girls as well as boys should study normally. If there are the means, up to university...I do not want my child to interrupt her studies to get married just because she is a girl, no” (Page 36).

“Now, everything has changed with modern life...Education teaches us to live in society, with your husband, and to know how to live with people” (Page 37).

“Yes, this has changed. It has changed a lot. Because, ten or five years ago...one could not find a Muslim girls in high school, and even less at university” (Page 37).

“Now, each parents tries to send their child to school. Because they have seen the advantages...They now send their daughters to school” (Page 37).

“Otherwise the tradition to get married very young is no longer the actuality. Because now parents leave the choice of studies to the girls, as well as the choice of her husband. It is a good thing” (Page 38).

“...the mentality of the grand parents does not finish in one day. They say that...to send a girl to school is maybe to send her to do prostitution. Very often the grand parents are not in accord...No, if she is already grown, she should get married...But now, this has changed” (Page 38).

“Yes, what I can add is that before, without lying to you, before the girls did not have a word...But with this education, parents have become comprehensive. More than before, they send their daughters to school, and now we are more independent, we are more radiant. Women have the right to choose their husband, and to work outside of the house. This is really a positive point” (Page 38).