

End Report on ICT Studies in Kumbo, Cameroon

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Section One: Basic Facts

Kumbo is a small town located in the North West Province of Cameroon with about 70,000 inhabitants. It is distributed over the five zones Tobin, Mbveh, Kumbo, Bamkikai/Romajai and Shishong which can be compared to suburbs. Each zone is divided again into different quarters.

The road network in Kumbo and the surrounding area is poorly developed, up to all roads are not tarred and in very bad shape. Because of this only little industry has settled there. To reach the next larger city Bamenda a two hours drive is needed, the distance to the Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon, is about 480 kilometres and a bus-trip may take between seven and twelve hours.

Most of the people in Kumbo are shop-owners, tailors, carpenters etc. running besides their small business a farm to provide them with the necessities of life. The income per head is too low to survive without the additional work on a farm. Not to forget about the unemployment rate of around 40% or more, especially the youth suffers under these conditions; some of them flee into larger cities struggling to find a better life.

The school system differs from the European one in some points, main problem in Cameroon are school fees. Many parents can not afford to send all their children to school, but the situation is improving - nevertheless the rate of illiterate persons is with more than 50% too high.

Section Two: Power Situation

The voltage supplied in Cameroon is 220 Volts / 50 Hertz, but not very stable at all: measurements at a power outlet showed a voltage of about 180 Volts. Companies and private persons use stabilizers to beware the electronic components from damages caused by e.g. voltage drops or fluctuations. Another problem is lightnings which cause severe damage and are attracted by the typical metal-made roofs.

According to elder people there were power outs for longer time periods, e.g. three or four days. Within the months May to August power outs happened frequently without prior information to the people and have lasted for up to one day. Especially in June every Sunday

started with a power out, later other days were affected too. To cope with this serious problem people use UPS (Uninterruptible Power Supplies), which provide them with some extra time e.g. for saving all data and powering down the computer.

Section Three: Hard- and Software Equipment

The hardware found in Kumbo varies from a few old Intel 386 und 486 systems to brand new Pentium IV 2.4 GHz systems. Pentium I and II systems with CPU frequencies between 60 MHz und 400 MHz form the majority, a handful notebooks are also available. Floppy drives and CD-ROM drives are a de facto standard, in some cases CD-Burner are found. The capacities of the hard drives are from one GByte up to 20 GByte, IDE drives dominate over SCSI. Most of the main boards are not able to handle hard disk with large capacities; the tools ezDrive is therefore widely spread. The computers (system unit inclusive monitor), printers etc. are provided by foreign NGOs and have an estimated value of 150,000 CFA each.

The environment in which the computers are used is quite different from the one known in Europe. Computer labs visited so far look very simple and the mobilier consists of old tables and benches. Daily cleaning is performed, but the dust (fine particles of the red soil) cover the computer chassis every day from new. Regularly the system units have to be opened to remove the dust; dust covers can improve the situation.

Nearly 100% of the computers run Microsoft operating system Windows, older ones use Windows 98 or Windows Millennium and newer ones according to a higher CPU speed Windows XP. Linux and other operating systems are neither used nor known. For e.g. word processing and spreadsheet calculation Microsoft Office is the preferred choice. Computer schools concentrate their focus on Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint etc. and Adobe PageMaker or Microsoft Publisher for Desktop Publishing. Other alternatives e.g. office suites like OpenOffice are not known.

The missing awareness of the need for virus protection and backup systems causes often the loss of data. Within the last three months several systems broke down completely, because of the use of virus infected floppy disks. One of the most known victims was the local water authority, but also computer schools were affected by viruses.

Section Four: Teaching in Computer Schools

End!