

Original Research Paper

# Residents Perceptions of the Economic Impacts of Hosting Mega Sports Events: A Cross-Sectional Study of Host Cities of AFCON 2022 in Cameroon

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**Abstract:** Economic incentives often constitute the thrust of galvanizing local community support for mega sports events. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of residents of the AFCON 2022 host cities on the economic impacts of the mega sports event on their lives and the city. The cross-sectional study employed a quantitative research paradigm through the use of a questionnaire in collecting 1683 duly completed responses from residents of the five AFCON 2022 host cities. Participants were randomly selected among residents who expressed willingness to take part in the study and descriptive and exploratory data analysis was performed on the data. The analysis revealed that the respondents place great importance on the security situation in the country and perceive economic benefits to be related to the security situation. It is therefore concluded that to derive maximum economic benefits from AFCON 2022, the government needed to have found a speedy way to resolve the ongoing armed conflict. Practical and policy implications are discussed, particularly the development of inclusive policies that would bring more women into the economic mainstream and the combating of poverty with systematic policy instruments, rather than with a once-off event such as the AFCON mega event.

**Keywords:** Cross-Sectional, Economic Impacts, Sports, Events, AFCON 2022, Cameroon

## Introduction

Studies on the potential economic impacts of mega sports events are often used to attract community support for the event (Li and Jago, 2013; Barajas *et al.*, 2016). Most economic impact studies generally precede the commencement of mega sports events and dwell on the profitability of the event as a way of justifying the investment that the government or local authorities are prepared to make toward the organization of the competition (Mills and Rosentraub, 2013). Agha and Taks (2015) explain that studies on the economic impacts of mega sports events frequently refer to the large expenditure on infrastructure development such as reliable electricity and clean water supplies, road and rail networks, and new sports facilities, among others. The studies illustrate how the surge in economic activities would avail more job opportunities and higher incomes for the resident population (Mirzayeva *et al.*, 2020). Hence, several studies have suggested that mega sports events can serve as effective instruments to stimulate the local economy through infrastructure

development, sales, output multipliers, small business support, and job creation, among others (Raoul and Zenabou, 2020).

Taks *et al.* (2011), however, pointed out that several economic impact studies have been criticized for giving incorrect calculations and making unsubstantiated assumptions. Similarly, Yen and Kerstetter (2008) argued that a major shortcoming in some studies on the economic impacts of mega sports events is that they do not present the community perspective in the discussion. This is considered a major omission because the impacts of mega sports events are predominantly at the community level (Li and McCabe, 2013). Wicker and Frick (2020) therefore advise that a community approach be adopted in studies analyzing the impacts of mega sports events. Colomb and Novy (2016) further recommend an inclusive approach that examines multiple perspectives, rather than isolated cases, in the study of community impacts. This study responds to both propositions by analyzing the perceptions of residents from all five host cities of AFCON 2022 and exploring the data for salient differences and similarities.

## Literature Review

Economic benefits represent the single most frequently advanced motivation for bidding to host mega sports events and equally market the event to local communities (Chanaron, 2014; Rojas-Méndez *et al.*, 2019). The following sections review the literature on some strands of economic benefits often mentioned in the bid and planning documents, such as employment opportunities, infrastructure development, support for Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs), and sales and output multipliers, among others (Mirzayeva *et al.*, 2020).

### *Mega Sports Events and Job Creation*

Chanaron (2014) purports that mega sports events have been instrumental in creating new job opportunities and, equally, helping in securing existing jobs. This statement is corroborated by Preuss (2004), whose profile of several editions of the Olympic Games arrived at the empirical evidence that 37,900 jobs were created when Munich hosted the event in 1976, 28,600 in Los Angeles in 1984, 191,300 in Seoul in 1988, 281,200 in Barcelona in 1992 and 87,500 when the Olympic Games were held in Atlanta in 1996.

However, critics of studies that propagate the positive economic impacts of mega-events, especially in creating employment, argue that the projected economic benefits are rather speculative because the numbers in the bidding or planning documents generally exceed the benefits presented in the legacy impact studies (Horne and Whannel, 2016; Roche, 2017). Getz (2017) also points to the difficulties faced by the organizers of mega sports events in satisfying the expectations of multiple stakeholders with often contrasting goals, from hosting the event. Further doubt is cast on the actual employment benefits from hosting mega sports events by Gration *et al.* (2016), who assert that the number of new jobs created from hosting mega sports events is few, with most of the jobs being of a temporary nature. Bason and Grix (2017) contend that the disparities in the actual employment benefits from hosting mega sports events arise out of the failure on the part of event organizers to engage community members in a meaningful way. This explains the motivation of the current study, which is to explore the perceptions of residents of the AFCON 2022 host cities regarding the economic benefits of the mega sports event.

### *Mega Sports Events and Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprise (SMME) Development*

The objective of stimulating SMME development features prominently among the key selling points of mega sports events, especially in developing economies (Kirby *et al.*, 2018). This assertion is closely associated with the international traction or visitor “pull” that mega sports events such as the FIFA World Cup, AFCON and the

Olympic Games have, due mainly to the huge media attention that these events generate (Roche, 2017). Getz (2017) and Gration *et al.* (2016) explain that the intense media focus on the host destination of mega sports events helps to attract a large number of international and local visitors to these events, which significantly increases the demand for local goods and services provided mainly by SMMEs.

Many studies have highlighted the important function that SMMEs play in supporting economic growth (Horne and Whannel, 2016; Kassens-Noor and Lauermann, 2017; Bason and Grix, 2017). SMMEs are generally advantageous as an economic tool because they require less start-up capital, have short turnaround times, employ many people, help in the fight against poverty, and bridge income inequalities (Getz, 2017; Kirby *et al.*, 2018; Helgeson *et al.*, 2022a). Empirical evidence to support the important role of SMMEs in economic development reveals that before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, 44% of economic activities in the United States of America (USA) were in the SMME sector, with 59 million people employed by the sector in 2018 (Helgeson *et al.*, 2022b).

A glimpse into the SMME sector in Cameroon reveals that hosting AFCON 2022 presented a great opportunity to give businesses a much-needed boost. According to the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) in Cameroon, the 93,969 recorded enterprises in the country declared a slowdown in business activities from +4.1% in 2018 to +3.7% in 2019 (NIS, 2021). This general slowdown in economic activities was attributed to three factors, namely the persistent insecurity situation in the North-West and South-West regions of the country, the fire that engulfed part of the petroleum refinery plant (SONARA) in Limbe and the gloomy economic outlook in the world (NIS, 2021). Piabuo *et al.* (2015) state that 99.2% of all enterprises in Cameroon are SMMEs, which employ 62% of the workforce in the private sector. One of the main challenges facing SMMEs in Cameroon is poor infrastructure, such as access roads, reliable electricity, and an inadequate transport network (Piabuo *et al.*, 2015). Considering the high dependence of Cameroon on the SMME sector, the volatile security situation, and the slowdown in economic activities, it is understandable that the government and businesses in Cameroon needed a mega sports event such as AFCON 2022.

### *Mega Sports Events and Infrastructure Development*

Kindzeka (2020) refers to a speech by Narcisse Mouelle Kombi, Cameroon's Minister of Sports and Physical Education, in which the Minister emphasized that deferring the country's opportunity to host AFCON in 2019 presented them with the chance to complete infrastructure projects in health, communication, roads, and stadia. Indeed, studies by St-Pierre *et al.* (2015) and Azzali (2019) confirm that improved infrastructure is imperative for the Cameroon government because it is the one factor that makes the cost of doing business so high in the country.

The World Bank's report on the ease of doing business in Cameroon notes that the country's ranking dropped from 162 out of 190 countries surveyed in 2012, to 167 in 2019 (World Bank, 2021). St-Pierre *et al.* (2015) present a gloomy picture of the business infrastructure in Cameroon, particularly the fact that only 25% of the 50,000 kilometers of the road network is in good driving condition. Further, an unreliable electricity supply and limited access to telecommunications only serve to exacerbate the situation. All these aspects illustrate the extent to which developing infrastructure for AFCON 2022 could have been of great benefit to the government and the people of Cameroon. Studies on the Shanghai World Expo of 2010 (Yao and Schwarz, 2018), the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa (Nyikana *et al.*, 2014), and the 2016 UEFA European Football Championship (Andersson *et al.*, 2021) attest to the positive correlation between mega sports events and infrastructure development. Hence, the purpose of this study was to explore the views of residents of the AFCON 2022 host cities in Cameroon regarding the potential for infrastructure development in their city, as a result of hosting AFCON 2022. The Social Exchange Theory (SET) is discussed below, to provide a theoretical underpinning for this study and further elucidate the extent to which residents' perceptions of the economic impacts of hosting AFCON 2022 could reveal their support for the mega sports event.

### *Social Exchange Theory and Perceived Economic Impacts of Mega Sports Events*

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) has often been used in tourism and events management studies to explain the relationship between residents' perceptions of the impacts of mega sports events such as AFCON 2022 and the propensity of community support for the event (Johnston *et al.*, 2021). The SET is used to explain the transactional exchange of resources between individuals and groups (Ap, 1992). In other words, the SET provides a basis for understanding a relationship in which the reaction of an individual or group of people is precipitated by the actions of another (Inoue and Harvard, 2014). This theory is premised on the underlying assumption that the perceived benefits and costs of a transaction determine the extent to which it is considered positive or not (Johnston *et al.*, 2021). West and Turner (2017) underscore the basic fact that humans are rational beings who appreciate rewards and shun negative reactions. Based, therefore, on whether benefits exceed costs, one of the parties concerned may conclude that the transaction is satisfactory. If the costs exceed the benefits, however, the transaction may be regarded as unbeneficial, thereby leading to the end of the relationship.

In the context of mega sports events, the SET can be used to illustrate why community members who expect the event to yield more positive impacts, will be more

favorable towards hosting it in their city or community than other residents who do not share the same positive sentiment (Fredline, 2004; Inoue and Harvard, 2014). Therefore, the following questions are central to this study.

How did residents of the AFCON 2022 host cities perceive the economic impacts resulting from the event?

What differences can be observed from the perceptions of residents of the AFCON 2022 host cities regarding the economic impacts of the event?

What insights can organizers of sports events such as the AFCON 2022 learn from the Cameroon situation?

Following the SET, residents' perceptions of positive impacts emanating from hosting AFCON 2022 could trigger other positive inclinations such as friendliness and hospitality towards visitors from residents (Cheng and Jarvis, 2010). Hence, posit that the SET is relevant in events and tourism research, as it explains the correlation between residents' perceptions and their support for mega events and tourism initiatives.

## **Materials and Methods**

This study adopts a quantitative research paradigm with a focus on five cities that hosted the AFCON 2022 matches in Cameroon. The following sections provide details on the study sites, design, data collection instrument, methods, and analysis.

### *Study Sites*

The five host cities of AFCON 2022 were purposively selected as the sites of this study, due to the respondents' proximity to the actions of the mega event. The host cities were therefore identified as Limbe in the South-West Region of Cameroon, Douala in the Littoral Region, Bafoussam in the West Region, Yaoundé in the Central Region, and Garoua in the North Region. Yaoundé is the political capital of Cameroon and the diplomatic center housing most foreign embassies and ministerial buildings, while Douala is the economic hub, as it is the seat of most industries and corporations and the main entry point for cargo by sea as well as for international tourists (Tichaawa, 2017).

Garoua is situated in the Muslim-dominated North Region of Cameroon. Key tourist attractions in the area are nature-based and complemented by indigenous culture. Bafoussam, on the other hand, is the capital of the West Region, dominated by the entrepreneurial Bamileke tribes who inhabit the grasslands (Harilal *et al.*, 2019). The city of Limbe is renowned for its black sandy beaches along the Atlantic coastline. It is in the South-West Region of the country, but unlike the other four host cities, Limbe is not a regional capital. Moreover, Limbe was the only AFCON 2022 host city in the English-speaking part of Cameroon where there has been ongoing fighting between government forces and separatist rebels who want an independent country. Convenience sampling was

employed in selecting participants in this study. Hence, residents in the AFCON 2022 host cities were randomly approached and asked if they would be readily willing to take part in the study. Those who accepted and signed the respondent consent form were handed the questionnaire to complete.

### *Study Design*

This study employed a cross-sectional research design to collect data from residents of the five AFCON 2022 host cities of Bafoussam, Douala, Garoua, Limbe, and Yaoundé. Data were collected from 6 January 2022 when the tournament started, until 9 February 2022 when it ended. A quantitative research approach was followed, using a questionnaire in collecting the data.

### *Data Collection Instrument*

A total of forty-four (44) items were included in the questionnaire, which was divided into two sections, labeled "A" and "B". The first section ("A") was made up of questions 1-10. The questions focused on collecting demographic information such as gender, age group, household income, employment, education, and so on, while questions 11 to 44 collected data on how the respondents perceived hosting the AFCON 2022 tournament would impact their lives and welfare. Questions in section "B" resulted from an in-depth literature review on the impacts of sports events on residents and the host city (Gursoy and Kendall, 2006; Jago *et al.*, 2013; Wang and Jin, 2019; Johnston *et al.*, 2021). The triple bottom line of sustainability provided the underpinning lens or framework, where various impacts were seen as being beneficial or detrimental to the economic, environmental, or social welfare of the respondents (Johnston *et al.*, 2021). The social context of the COVID-19 pandemic was also considered in some questions. A comprehensive list of potential impacts was subsequently adjusted to fit the Cameroon socio-economic context.

### *Pilot Study*

To ensure that all items considered in the questionnaire were relevant to the Cameroon situation and that the use of language was clear of any ambiguity, a pilot study was undertaken in the town of Buea, which is near the city of Limbe, in Cameroon. One hundred (100) postgraduate students from the University of Buea and the Ahas University Institute of Tourism and Business Management were randomly selected to complete the questionnaire, based on their experience of local sports competitions. The outcome of this process was the rephrasing of some questions and the substitution of some words that did not convey the

intended meaning. An important example of this change was the heading of the likert scale questions which was rephrased from "How will hosting the AFCON 2022 affect you" to "Hosting the African Nations Cup 2022 in this city will have the following impact". This change was made to give the respondents a more vivid perception of the impact becoming a reality. Once the final version of the questionnaire was adopted, an application for ethical clearance was completed and submitted to the ethics committee in the Faculty of Commerce and Administration at Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha, East London. The committee further scrutinized the research process and the questionnaire for any possible ethical risks. Ethical clearance for the study was granted on 2 November 2021.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

In preparation for data collection, fifteen (15) postgraduate students who had previously taken part in research activities, were recruited and trained in fieldwork. To qualify for selection, the students needed to have taken part in research at the undergraduate level and had to be residents of the AFCON 2022 host city where they were going to collect data. Three fieldworkers were allocated to each of the host cities, to ensure that data collection was as widely spread as possible across the study site. Data collection started on the day the opening match of the tournament was played on 6 January 2022 and ended when the final match was played on 9 February 2022. This was to ensure that the respondents were living the experience of hosting the matches.

During the data collection exercise, residents who were outdoors carrying out their usual daily activities such as shopping, walking, going to work, or relaxing in a liquor outlet or restaurant, were randomly approached and asked if they would be willing to take part in the study. Those who accepted to participate in the study were familiarised with their rights to anonymity and the freedom to opt-out of the study at any point, without further interrogation. With ethical considerations addressed, the respondents were handed the questionnaires to complete, while the fieldworker waited or attended to other potential respondents. The completed questionnaires were then returned to the fieldworkers, who checked for completeness, at which point the process itself was complete.

### *Data Analysis*

The data collection exercise yielded a total of 1683 completed, screened, and usable questionnaires distributed as follows: Bafoussam (302), Douala (394), Garoua (161), Limbe (269) and Yaoundé (557). The gathered responses were primarily coded and cleaned for

outliers and other errors, before being exported to SPSS 24.0 for comprehensive analysis. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was applied, to determine the economic factors that the respondents considered most impacted by hosting AFCON 2022 in their city.

### Analysis of Demographic Data

Considering that this is a cross-sectional study involving the five host cities of AFCON 2022, the demographic data is presented in such a way that key differences among the host cities are visible.

Data from Table 1 reveals that there was a significant imbalance in favor of males (90.7) among the respondents who took part in the study in Garoua. This can be attributed to the traditional values of the Muslim faith which places great emphasis on the role of women as custodians of the home and family values (Noormohamed, 2008), thereby restricting their movements outside the home. The rest of the data on gender looks fairly balanced. It is also evident from the data that most of the respondents in this study were youths between the ages of 18 and 35 years.

The economic situation of the respondents is quite varied. While most of the respondents from Limbe (36.1%) and Douala (38.3%) live on less than 50,000 CFA francs a month, the majority of respondents in Yaoundé (25.3%) and Garoua (26.7%) live on between 50,000 CFA and 150,000 CFA francs a month. Results from Bafoussam, however, reveal a major difference, as most of the respondents (32.8%) earn more than CFA 551,000 francs a month. This is an indication that there are more affluent people in the Western Region of the country where the city of Bafoussam is located. Results on the employment statistics of the respondents reveal that most of the respondents from Limbe are unemployed (52.8%), followed by Douala (48.5%) and Yaoundé (39.7%). On the other hand, the majority of the respondents from Garoua (58.4%) and Bafoussam (32.1%) indicated that they were self-employed. Finally, data on the level of education of the respondents shows a clustering of data from all groups around the Advanced level (University entrance) qualification (30.1, 24.9, 40, 27.3, and 22.5%, respectively).

**Table 1:** Results of the demographic data from the five AFCON 2022 host cities

Variable	Description	Host city/%				
		Limbe	Douala	Yaoundé	Garoua	Bafoussam
Gender	Male	46.0	46.2	44.5	90.7	54.3
	Female	54.0	53.8	55.5	9.3	45.7
Age (years)	18-24	49.4	52.8	40.8	13.7	19.9
	25-35	22.3	24.2	23.9	49.7	30.5
	36-45	14.1	13.5	16.0	34.2	27.5
	46-55	8.6	5.1	14.7	1.9	9.9
	56-65	4.5	3.0	3.1	0.6	5.0
	66+	1.1	1.5	1.6	0.0	7.0
Monthly income (in CFA francs-XAF) \$1 = XAF600	<50,000 (<\$83)	36.1	38.3	16.5	6.8	10.9
	50,000-150,000 (\$83-250)	17.1	21.3	25.3	26.7	5.3
	151,000-250,000 (\$250-416)	8.2	9.6	24.4	26.1	7.0
	251,000-350,000 (\$416-583)	10.8	5.8	12.2	37.3	9.6
	351,000-450,000 (\$583-750)	9.7	5.1	12.4	2.5	12.6
	451,000-550,000 (\$750-916)	5.9	6.6	4.3	0	21.9
	551,000+	12.3	13.2	4.8	0.6	32.8
Employment status	Unemployed	52.8	48.5	39.7	28.0	27.5
	Government employee	6.3	7.1	21.7	4.3	12.6
	Private sector employee	11.9	24.9	18.9	9.3	27.8
	Self-employed	29.0	19.5	19.7	58.4	32.1
Education level	Below G.C.E Ordinary level certificate	31.2	26.4	4.7	11.8	9.6
	Completed Ordinary level certificate	10.0	26.1	12.0	16.2	11.4
	Advanced level (University entrance)	30.1	24.9	40.0	27.3	22.5
	Bachelor's degree	18.6	15.8	31.4	40.4	35.2
	Master's degree	8.2	5.3	9.9	4.3	11.6
	Doctoral degree	1.9	1.5	2.0	0.0	9.7

## Results

This study sought to answer the following key research questions.

How did residents of the AFCON 2022 host cities perceive the economic impacts resulting from the event?

What differences emerged from the perceptions of residents from the AFCON 2022 host cities?

What insights can organizers of sports events such as the AFCON 2022 learn from the Cameroon situation?

Economic welfare in this study was measured in terms of seven (7) elements which included employment opportunities, quality services, security, peace, waste of taxpayers' money, and access to stadia.

**Table 2:** Perceived impacts of hosting AFCON 2022 on the economic and security welfare of communities in Cameroon

Attribute	Host city	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Economic security	Limbe	269	3.6	0.672
	Douala	394	3.4	0.744
	Yaoundé	557	3.7	0.622
	Garoua	161	4.6	0.464
	Bafoussam	302	4.2	0.434
	Total	1683	3.8	0.723
	Employment opportunities	Limbe	269	3.8
Douala		394	3.5	1.272
Yaoundé		557	3.9	1.030
Garoua		161	4.9	0.411
Bafoussam		302	4.2	0.911
Total		1683	3.9	1.128
Quality services		Limbe	269	3.9
	Douala	394	3.5	1.137
	Yaoundé	557	3.9	1.101
	Garoua	161	4.8	0.798
	Bafoussam	302	4.6	0.811
	Total	1683	4.0	1.119
	Security	Limbe	269	4.4
Douala		394	3.8	1.099
Yaoundé		557	4.1	0.973
Garoua		161	4.8	0.698
Bafoussam		302	4.6	0.572
Total		1683	4.2	0.983
Peace		Limbe	269	3.3
	Douala	394	3.2	1.108
	Yaoundé	557	3.6	1.078
	Garoua	161	4.7	0.792
	Bafoussam	302	4.2	0.773
	Total	1683	3.6	1.134
	Waste taxpayers' money	Limbe	269	3.4
Douala		394	3.3	1.225
Yaoundé		557	3.6	1.109
Garoua		161	3.9	2.436
Bafoussam		302	3.5	1.033
Total		1683	3.5	1.326
Increase incomes in poor families		Limbe	269	3.0
	Douala	394	2.9	1.410
	Yaoundé	557	3.4	1.369
	Garoua	161	4.4	0.682
	Bafoussam	302	3.6	1.093
	Total	1683	3.3	1.379
	Access to stadia	Limbe	269	3.8
Douala		394	3.6	1.291
Yaoundé		557	3.8	1.146
Garoua		161	4.8	0.685
Bafoussam		302	4.4	0.953
Total		1683	4.0	1.199

Descriptive statistics on the perceived impacts of hosting AFCON 2022 on the economic welfare of communities in Cameroon are presented in Table 2.

A bird's eye view of data in Table 2 reveals that respondents from all five host communities agreed that hosting AFCON 2022 had a significant impact (3.8 out of 5) on their economic welfare.

Communities in Limbe, Yaounde, and Bafoussam shared the same view expressed above. Although Garoua communities were also in agreement on this aspect, they expressed much stronger views. The overall economic welfare means score for Garoua communities was very high, at 4.6, when compared to the maximum possible score of 5. On the other hand, Douala communities were generally not sure of the impact of hosting AFCON 2022 on the economic well-being of their communities. The overall economic welfare means score for Douala communities was moderate, at 3.4.

Communities in Limbe, Douala, Yaounde, and Bafoussam were in agreement that hosting AFCON 2022 in Cameroon led to increased employment opportunities for community members. The mean scores recorded by Limbe, Douala, Yaounde, and Bafoussam communities were high and ranged between 3.5 and 4.2. On the other hand, Garoua communities again expressed much stronger feelings on the impact of hosting AFCON on employment opportunities. They strongly suggested that AFCON 2022 helped in the creation of employment opportunities within their communities. The mean score recorded by Garoua communities on the creation of employment opportunities was very high, at 4.9, when compared to the maximum possible score of 5.

Limbe, Douala, and Yaounde communities agreed that hosting AFCON 2022 in Cameroon encouraged improvements in the quality of services given to customers. The mean scores recorded by these three communities were favorable and high, at 3.9, 3.5, and 3.9, respectively. On the other hand, Garoua and Bafoussam communities expressed much stronger feelings about the impact of hosting AFCON on the quality of services given to customers. Garoua and Bafoussam communities strongly submitted that hosting AFCON 2022 in Cameroon encouraged improvements in the quality of services given to customers. The mean scores recorded by the Garoua and Bafoussam communities on the quality of services given to customers were very high at 4.8 and 4.6, respectively when compared to a maximum possible score of 5.

Similarly, Limbe, Douala, and Yaoundé communities agreed that hosting AFCON 2022 in Cameroon helped in the improvement of security in their communities. The mean scores recorded by Limbe, Douala, and Yaoundé communities were favorable and high at 4.4, 3.8, and 4.1, respectively. However, Garoua and Bafoussam communities expressed much stronger discernments on the impact of hosting AFCON on the security in their

communities. Garoua and Bafoussam communities strongly suggested that hosting AFCON 2022 in Cameroon led to improvements in security in their communities. The mean scores recorded by the Garoua and Bafoussam communities on the improvement of security were very high at 4.8 and 4.6, respectively (Table 2).

The Yaoundé and Bafoussam communities generally agreed that hosting AFCON 2022 in Cameroon brought some semblance of greater peace of mind for community members. The mean scores recorded by Yaoundé and Bafoussam communities on improved peace of mind for community members were high, at 3.6 and 4.2, respectively. Similarly, Garoua communities expressed much stronger feelings on the impact of hosting AFCON on the peace of mind of community members. Garoua communities strongly suggested that hosting AFCON 2022 in Cameroon led to greater peace of mind for community members. The mean score recorded by Garoua communities on peace of mind was quite high, at 4.7. The Limbe and Douala communities, however, were not sure of the impact of hosting AFCON on peace of mind for community members. In this case, the Limbe and Douala communities recorded moderate mean scores of 3.3 and 3.2, respectively, compared to a maximum possible score of 5.

Despite all the positives that the communities pointed out on the impact of hosting AFCON 2022 in Cameroon, communities in Yaoundé, Garoua, and Bafoussam felt that it was a general waste of taxpayers' money. In agreement that hosting AFCON 2022 was a waste of financial resources, the Yaounde, Garoua, and Bafoussam communities recorded high mean scores of 3.6, 3.9, and 3.5, respectively. The Limbe and Douala communities, however, were not sure whether hosting AFCON 2022 in Cameroon was a waste of taxpayers' money (Limbe and Douala communities recorded moderate mean scores of 3.4 and 3.3, respectively).

The Garoua and Bafoussam communities agreed that hosting AFCON 2022 in Cameroon helped in the reduction of poverty by increasing incomes for poor families. These communities recorded high mean scores of 4.4 and 3.6, respectively, on this variable. The Limbe, Douala, and Yaounde communities, however, were not sure whether hosting AFCON 2022 in Cameroon had some effect on increasing incomes for poor families (Garoua and Bafoussam communities recorded moderate mean scores of 4.4 and 3.6 respectively).

The Limbe, Douala, Yaounde, and Bafoussam communities were of the view that hosting AFCON 2022 in Cameroon led to increased access for community members to go to the stadia and watch the matches. The abovementioned communities recorded high mean scores which ranged between 3.8 and 4.4, as shown. However, Garoua community members strongly suggested that hosting AFCON 2022 helped in increasing access for community members to go to the stadia and watch the matches. The Garoua community recorded very high mean scores of 4.8, compared to a maximum possible score of 5.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore residents' perceptions of the economic impacts emanating from hosting mega sports events such as AFCON 2022 in Cameroon. Cross-sectional data collected from the five AFCON 2022 host cities in Cameroon provided an opportunity to explore commonalities and differences among residents of the host cities. The following conclusions can be drawn from the results presented above.

Overall, the findings from this study reveal a generally positive sentiment across all five host cities of Bafoussam, Douala, Garoua, Limbe, and Yaoundé, on the potential economic benefits of hosting AFCON 2022. The difficult economic situation in Cameroon, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the armed insurrection in the North-West and South-West regions makes the realization of this expectation of the residents an imperative for the government. Previous studies by Chanaron (2014), Rojas-Méndez *et al.* (2019), and Mirzayeva *et al.* (2020) are also aligned with this conclusion, in that most residents perceive positive economic impacts to accrue from hosting mega sports events.

Another interesting observation from the results of this study is the connection between security and economic impacts. There is a generally high expectation among respondents from all host cities that the greatest positive impact of hosting AFCON 2022 would be in the area of security (4.2). Because SMMEs constitute a large portion of the Cameroonian economy (Piabuo *et al.*, 2015), it is not surprising to see the extent to which the respondents perceive insecurity in the country to be interfering with their economic activities.

Despite the generally positive sentiment on the potential economic impacts of hosting the mega sports event, it is surprising that the respondents do not expect the event to make a significant impact on alleviating poverty in the country. Respondents from Limbe and Douala, in particular, seem quite pessimistic, with ratings of 2.9 and 3.0, respectively. The geographical proximity of the two cities to the effects of the armed conflict in Cameroon might explain the general apathy in the respondents. This conclusion could also reflect the respondents' understanding that while economic welfare could improve in the short term, poverty alleviation requires a longer-term intervention (Johnston *et al.*, 2021).

From a gender perspective, this study reveals the important role that sports events such as the AFCON 2022 can play in enhancing the inclusion of women in the economic mainstream. The fact that there was greater female participation in this study than males, points to the strong interest that they have in sports events. Hence, sports events can be used as an instrument to promote the economic participation of women. A similar conclusion was also reached by Kirby *et al.* (2018) who advocate for

women's economic empowerment in mega-sports events, especially in the domain of Small, Medium, and Micro-Enterprises (SMMES).

In the context of the Social Exchange Theory (SET), it can be inferred from the findings of this study that most of the respondents supported their city hosting matches of AFCON 2022. This is because they perceived mostly positive economic impacts emanating from hosting the mega sports event. While previous studies (Li and Jago, 2013; Barajas *et al.*, 2016; Mirzayeva *et al.*, 2020) tend to confirm that the host community is inclined to be in favor of hosting mega sports events in their city, a study by Schnitzer *et al.* (2021) on overtourism and support for sports mega-events reveals that referenda to obtain residents' support for hosting mega sports events such as the Olympic Games have failed to garner enough support.

### Implications

While most studies on residents' perceptions of the economic impacts of mega sports events have focused on individual cities (Coates and Wicker, 2015; Yao and Schwarz, 2018; Wicker and Frick, 2020), this study analyzed the perceptions of residents from all five host cities of AFCON 2022, to delve into the issues that residents are most concerned about. This comprehensive approach implies that the findings and conclusions reveal a nationwide perspective about the respondents' perceptions of the mega event.

### Practical Implications

The first practical implication of this study is that to address the economic hardships affecting the people of Cameroon, the security situation should be resolved. It is evident from this study that most of the respondents see their economic challenges as rooted in the insecurity in the North-West and South-West regions of the country.

Secondly, even though the armed conflict is geographically localized in the two regions (North-West and South-West), it appears to have a paralyzing effect on economic activities in the entire country, particularly on residents of the economic capital of the country (Douala), who are quite close to the South-West Region. This implies that serious efforts to improve the economy of Cameroon should begin with normalizing the security situation.

Thirdly, there appears to have been a great rift between local communities and the organizers of the AFCON 2022 event. This implies the absence of meaningful consultations with communities and their leaders on how they would have liked to contribute or be involved in the organization of the mega sports event. To maximize economic benefits from hosting mega sports events, this gap between the local communities and organizers of mega sports events needs to be bridged.

This study has also highlighted the importance of cultural and religious sensitivity if economic benefits



from mega sports events are to be extended to a significant proportion of community members. The case of Garoua, where more than 90% of accessible respondents were male, implies that discussions and engagements need to be held with local leaders, to include women in the economic mainstream.

Several policy implications equally emerge from this study. The first of these relates to measures to alleviate poverty. Results from this study reveal that even though hosting mega sports events could bring economic benefits to local communities in the short term, efforts to combat poverty require policy directives because eliminating poverty is a long-term goal. The government of Cameroon should therefore initiate policies that will consistently ease the people out of poverty by providing sustainable livelihoods.

Another policy implication of this study relates to the role of women in the hosting and delivery of mega sports events and economic development in general. Policies that encourage and empower women to participate in and benefit from, mega sports events, should be enacted. Since women form a significant part of the population, involving them in economic activities could boost economic development in Cameroon.

Finally, the fact that mega sports events are generally marketed to local communities based on economic benefits and legacy projects that will be beneficial to residents, means that targeted, trickle-down policies should be developed, with clear channels indicating how those benefits will flow from the event to the residents. Economic benefits to residents should not be speculative or mere assumptions. Debating and promulgating such policies should involve the participation of local people who would make informed choices on how they would like to be active participants in the delivery of mega sports events such as AFCON 2022.

## Conclusion

It is important to underline the unique contribution of this study. Firstly, the focus of this study on the perceived economic impacts of AFCON as a mega sports event from a community perspective brings new insight to the literature on mega sports events. Secondly, the multicultural context of Cameroon and the armed conflict that at one point threatened to derail the mega sports event brought new impetus and originality to the study. The richness of the empirical evidence gathered from all five host cities of AFCON 2022 also adds to the original contribution of the study.

It is worthwhile noting the following limitations of this study: Firstly, considering the short period during which the study was carried out (6 January-9 February 2022), only a small proportion of the population could be

approached to take part. Therefore, generalizing the findings of this study to the entire population of the cities concerned should be done with caution as some residents could have different views.

Secondly, the quantitative research approach adopted in the study meant that respondents were not allowed to explain the reasons for the responses they choose. Hence, it is possible that the conclusions reached from the analysis of data might not reflect the specific interpretations of individual participants.

As a result of these limitations, it is recommended that further studies be conducted to consider the perceptions of more community members on the economic impacts of sports events. It is equally important that further studies employ a qualitative research paradigm to allow respondents to express reasons for their perceptions.

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## Ethics

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