1. Introduction

The University of Yaounde I (UYI) often referred to as “The Mother” of all State Universities in Cameroon was created in 1993 by Presidential decree, following the split of the University of Yaounde, created in 1961.

2. The Missions of The University of Yaounde I

1. Elaboration and transmission of knowledge
2. Uplifting of higher forms of culture and research
3. Development of research, cooperation, and the training of men. Publication of high quality publications
4. Quality of teaching staff in terms of numbers and qualifications
5. Practice of French-English bilingualism
6. Use of Technologies of Information and Communication
7. The University less of an “Ivory Tower” and more relevant to the community at large
3. The 2007 Academic Ranking of World-Class Universities

1. Quality of education: number of alumni winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals
2. Quality of faculty:
   - Nobel Prizes and Field Medals
   - Highly cited researchers
3. Research output:
   - Number of articles in Nature and Science
   - Articles in Science Citation Index-expanded, Social Sciences Citation Index
4. Size of institution: weighted score of 1. to 3. above divided by number of full-time academic staff

A comparison between the missions of The UYI and the four (04) indicators of academic or research performance of the ARWU.

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4. Is The University of Yaounde I a Potential WCU?

In her role as ‘elite university’, what has the UYI done, and what is she doing today to become a WCU tomorrow?

To give an objective answer to this fundamental question, we shall explore in turn the following five (05) avenues with appropriate examples:

1. The strategic development plan
2. Quality teaching and quality research at The UYI
3. Promotion of interdisciplinary and international research projects
4. Development of cooperation links with other universities, and
5. Innovations as an elite university in Cameroon and the sub-region.

4.1 The strategic Development Plan (SDP)

For the next ten (10) years, the SDP tackles the following five (05) points:
1. Management of admissions and respect of equity
2. Improvement of internal efficiency and preservation of quality
3. Development of partnerships with the private sector and professional milieus
4. Improvement of management and university governance
5. Development of durable and efficient financing.

The three (03) priority axes of the SDP may be summarised as follows:
1. The improvement of access and equity for all types of teaching according to the available resources and the needs of the society
2. The improvement of the quality and relevance of the teaching offered, taking as a yardstick the UNESCO standards
3. The improvement of management methods and university governance.

The SDP is therefore one of the most valuable tools to be used by the UYI in her efforts to become a WCU in future.
4.2. Quality Teaching and Quality Research at The UYI

The Department is the fundamental unit in which teaching and research are conceived, structured and carried out. Each department has been enjoying greater administrative and financial autonomy since 2006. The budgetary allocations of Department have been steadily on the increase.

To illustrate this fact, we have selected at random three (03) departments in the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences, the Faculty of Sciences, and the National Advanced School of Engineering.

A comparative study of their respective budgetary allocations from 2005 to 2008 shows clearly that:

- Just like the ARWU, the UYI lays special emphasis on science and technology.
- The UYI favours the development of applied sciences (ENSP), followed by pure sciences (FS), and then by social sciences and humanities (FALSH).
- All these important components of knowledge do receive some kind of attention. None is completely neglected at the expense of the other(s).

We may therefore conclude that in the domains of quality teaching and quality research the ARWU and The UYI do share the same vision.

4.3. Promotion of Interdisciplinary and International Research Projects

Two (02) structures housed in the Biotechnology Centre:

1. The Immunology Laboratory
2. The Molecular Biology and Metabolic Disease Research Laboratory.

These two laboratories have been selected on the grounds that they are considered among the most representative of the vision of The UYI as a whole.
4.3.1. The Immunology Laboratory Headed by Prof. Rose Leke

- **Malaria Project Activities**
  - A collaborative project between The University of Yaounde I, and the University of Hawaii in the USA
  - The project is currently ongoing with the participation of a multi-disciplinary team of specialists
  - It was visited by two clinical independent monitors from the National Institute of Health in the USA, and one from South Africa.

- **Collaborative Research on Medicinal Plants**
  - In collaboration with the Laboratory of Nutrition and Nutritional Biochemistry of The University of Yaounde I
  - Properties of two medicinal plants of the Cameroonian pharmacopeia, namely, *Chromonela odorata* and *Harungana madagascarensis*
  - One student defended her Postgraduate Diploma dissertation on this work.

4.3.2. The Molecular Biology and Metabolic Disease Research Laboratory Headed by Prof. J.C. Mbanya

- The project is the study of diabetic patients under the age of 40 residing in Cameroon. It is the fruit of collaboration between the Free University of Brussels (VUB) in Belgium and The University of Yaounde I.

- The objectives of the project include:
  - study the relationship between genetic, lifestyle and/or environmental factors and development of the disease;
  - prepare, develop and support new experimental therapies and participation in international studies; and
  - provide information and advice to authorities, physicians, patients and their families and the general public.

- In addition, the project is geared towards capacity building, with four (04) Cameroonian students currently preparing their Master’s and Doctorate degrees at VUB, Belgium.
4.4. Development of Cooperation Links with Other Universities around the World

Activities in the last seven (07) months include

1. The reception of foreign delegations,
2. Cooperation missions abroad, and
3. The formalisation of partnerships.

4.4.1. The Reception of Foreign Delegations

- In May and August 2009, two (02) delegations from the University of Venise in Italy.
- In July 2009, experts from the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention of Atlanta in the USA.
- In April 2009, Vice-Rector in charge of relations with “Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF)”, Regional Director for Central Africa.
- In March 2009, Spanish Ambassador to Cameroon accompanied by the Secretary General of the Casa Africa Network.
- Finally, and international workshop on Linking Institutions for Veterinary Education (LIVE) was organised in February 2009 at The UYI.
4.4.2. Cooperation Missions Abroad

- During that period, officials of the Rector’s Office have visited the following five (05) countries: Italy, Spain, South Africa, Nigeria and South Corea.

- This is enough evidence to show that The UYI is indeed making the necessary efforts to open up to the outside world.

4.4.3. Formalisation of Partnerships

The different offers made and studied have led to the signing of several outline agreements for interuniversity cooperation, agreements for co-supervision of theses, and conventions for the funding of research projects.

- The comprehensive list of these agreements and conventions is compiled in the Department of Academic Affairs and Cooperation in a document entitled “Repertoire of Agreements and Conventions”.

- Examples may be taken from The National Advanced School of Engineering (ENSP), the Faculty of Sciences (FS), the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences (FALSH), the Higher Teacher’s Training College (ENS), and the Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences (FMBS).
4.5. Innovations as an Elite University in Cameroon and the Sub-region

We shall discuss two (02) pace-setter innovations:

1. The creation of a University Free Zone

2. The setting up of two (02) virtual universities on her campus

4.5.1. The Creation of a University Free Zone

Its main activities will include the following:

- Train engineers and higher technicians for enterprises and industries in the Central African sub-region;
- Carry out applied research and development-research together with partners from the relevant economic and administrative sectors;
- Welcome training centres from enterprises and big industrial groups;
- Build a centre for the creation of enterprises to facilitate the insertion of qualified technicians in the economic life through innovative approaches;
- Create a big university campus capable of receiving students and lecturer-researchers from the whole of the Central African sub-region and perhaps of the whole Sub-Saharan region;
- Ensure that the development induced by the economic, social and cultural role played by the University Free Zone is durable.
4.5.2. The Virtual Universities

- Cameroon has been selected to host the Pan-African e-Network project which aims at creating in Cameroon two virtual universities, one national and the other sub-regional.

- The sub-regional virtual university is in fact a telecommunication relay centre intended for the following nine (09) countries: Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Congo, Sao-Tome and Principe, Chad, The Central African Republic, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Rwanda.

- The global strategic objective of the project is to take an active part in the Cameroon technological mutation that will make her a middle income country by the year 2030.

- The specific strategic objectives of the project will:
  - Reinforce the capacities of Cameroonian citizens and consolidate the country’s geostrategic position in the continent;
  - Bring into higher education the digital culture and prepare the country’s entry into the digital society.

The two virtual universities project constitutes an additional factor which helps confer to the UYI the leading role of an elite university at the national and sub-regional levels.

- The impact of these virtual universities on The UYI is bound to be multifarious. It will help improve quality of education, quality of faculty, and research output.

- It is therefore evident that just like the ZFU, the virtual universities will help confer to The UYI the leading role of an elite University at the national and sub-regional levels.

- It will also help pave the way for The UYI to enter the exclusive club of WCU.
5. General Conclusion

- The UYI is indeed a potential WCU.

- She has taken concrete measures, and is planning to do more to approximate the goals of the WCU which fall in line with the missions of the University.

- An uphill task, but not an impossible one.

- The UYI authorities remain optimistic and highly determined to meet the challenge.