

CARDANO TECH SUMMIT 2026

HACKATHON – KWANG TECH HUB – DSCHANG, CAMEROON

Local Context

Introduction

I remember my meeting with the rector of the Polytechnic University of Turin, Prof. Profumo, who would later become the Italian Minister of Higher Education. During our conversation, I pointed out that what was sorely missing from our engineering education was ethics and philosophy.

Unfortunately, this observation is not limited to Italy, nor to engineering training. It applies to all fields and all countries.

If already at that time I was asking for courses in ethics and philosophy, it was because I had noticed a deep disconnect between the technological inventions proliferating around us, the laboratory research, and the human being for whom these things were supposedly created. The human being, life, nature were never placed at the center. They appeared last—after the harm had already been conceived and sometimes widely deployed.

From this observation emerged my profound questioning about the very essence of technology.

What is technology? What is its purpose? Who does it serve? How is it conceived? How does it unfold?

All important questions that require serious reflection.

One only has to look at the digital communication apps we use—WhatsApp or Telegram—to understand the need for a local approach to technological creativity. Where are the African cultural elements in these apps? If they don't exist, it is not because of negligence by the designers, but simply because technology is the daughter of the cultural context that gives birth to it, as well as of the environmental, socio-cultural, economic, historical, and political realities that shape it.

Ignoring these realities is a constant danger for culture, for human beings, and for nature. Every creation must therefore be anchored in the specific context of the local reality—both lived and perceived.

It is precisely in this spirit that the Hackathon we are participating in is situated. We will observe our immediate environment—our neighborhood, our city, our region, and beyond, our country. This observation will help us identify the problems faced by our communities and propose viable solutions.

This document therefore serves as a guide, tracing the context in which the problems we observe are rooted, as well as the relevance of the solutions we will propose.

Dzubang Mermoz

A Glimpse of Local Reality

The city of Dschang, whose name is said to mean “problems” or “discord,” is one of the first colonial towns. Before the arrival of the colonizers, it served as a gathering point for artists and artisans from surrounding villages who came to sell the products of their genius, share new creation techniques,

and disseminate their art.

Beyond the common interpretation of “problems,” the name Dschang actually derives from ce■, which means both “prison” and “womb.” Although this etymology is not widely known, it is in fact the true root of the name. In the African context, names matter—they reveal the true nature of a thing. Dschang is therefore a space of transformation: either one grows and evolves there, or it becomes a prison. This sentiment, expressed through the name, is a lived reality for those who settle there.

Educational Context

A city of knowledge, Dschang is filled with universities and training centers of all kinds, and their number grows each year. With so much knowledge circulating and so many skills being acquired, one might expect—like in many other cities around the world with similar characteristics—that Dschang would also be a strong technological and industrial hub. But it is not. Why?

Some blame state institutions; others blame local governance; still others blame the lack of inventiveness among the youth who were never taught to think for themselves.

Although this issue seems more pronounced and more bitter in Dschang, it nonetheless reflects the general state of the country. In Cameroon, the national education system is still not built upon a serious, intentional development plan. Unfortunately, it remains a colonial education system designed to produce civil servants obedient to colonial institutions. People study simply to study, to obtain a diploma, or to secure some fantasized job. Very few are trained with the explicit purpose of solving a clearly identified problem.

All of this becomes painfully obvious when we consider that our science is not grounded in our cultural substrate, that almost nothing of our essence appears in our research. Our medicine distances itself from our ancestral practices and even denies them any scientific validity. Our art is becoming increasingly contemporary—and thus increasingly empty of meaning. Our technology is essentially nonexistent, because technology is the daughter of arts and sciences that have not yet managed to emancipate themselves.

Political Context

The political climate of the city is no different. With colonial institutions still in place since the so-called independence, the country—and therefore the city—struggles to find balance between modern state institutions of colonial origin and the traditional institutions that continue to exist, barely alive, often weakened and marginalized.

Economic Context

Economically, like the country as a whole, the city’s economy is highly outward-oriented. Most of the products filling shops and stalls are of foreign origin. Beyond this, Dschang is a particularly inflationary city. Many economic actors think themselves clever and adopt fundamentally selfish behaviors that harm collective well-being.

For example:

About a year ago, the government increased the price of fuel at the pump by 50 FCFA per liter. Moto-taxi drivers responded by increasing the cost of an average ride by 50 FCFA—even though such a trip does not require a full liter of fuel but approximately 1/20 of a liter.

Believing they are acting shrewdly, they fail to realize that they are the primary transporters of fresh produce from rural areas to city markets. As a result, market women increased food prices to

compensate for the rise in transport costs—and added their own profit margin under the same pretext. Step by step, all goods and services undergo disproportionate inflation. Everyone suffers, yet everyone raises prices “to survive,” creating further economic distress. No one sees how their own behavior contributes to this systemic inflation.

The erosion of traditional institutions and values has fostered ultra-capitalist and predatory behaviors, where the individual—who was once at the service of the community—has now become a wolf to others and even to their own community.

Beyond these phenomena lie corruption and the absence of effective regulatory structures, contributing to the growing gap between rich and poor, as is the case everywhere capitalism thrives.

It is also important to note that remittances from the diaspora constitute a significant portion of household incomes.

Cultural Context

Culturally, television and the internet have enabled the rise of a global popular culture, gradually dissolving cultural boundaries. In Cameroon, as elsewhere, people are more enthusiastic about Beyoncé than about local artists. They follow Barcelona and Real Madrid more than our numerous local football clubs, which languish in mediocrity and invisibility due to lack of support.

Despite this, many still cling to certain aspects of their culture: local music and rhythms, various films and web series, their indigenous languages, and local rituals and customs. The internet has also allowed the emergence of a new class of conscious individuals who, despite difficulties, strive to break free from the dominant system and propose viable alternatives more deeply rooted in our endogenous values.

Social Context

Socially, the situation is similar. The lack of reference points creates a feeling of collective powerlessness and resignation. Few still dare to hope or attempt to positively impact their communities. Many believe the people’s destiny lies in the hands of a messiah, a martyr who would sacrifice themselves, a revolutionary—anyone but themselves.

People thus attribute to the government powers it does not truly have, and consequently endure abuses from representatives who, in the people’s eyes, do not represent them adequately or at all. Thinking gravitates quickly toward macrocosmic structures, forgetting the microcosm, which has far more direct influence on our lives. We fail to realize that our spouse or our neighbor has much more impact on our day-to-day reality than any distant institution. Local decisions influence us most.

Nevertheless, parts of our traditions remain, enabling a certain level of mutual aid. Njangui and other tontines continue to serve as grassroots support and social assistance systems, compensating for the inadequacies of state institutions.

Conclusion

In Dschang, as elsewhere in the country, it is difficult to conceptualize and implement projects capable of generating deep systemic change because of persistent institutional barriers placed on citizens. But even without these barriers, given our current educational and cultural context, it would still be difficult to conceive development models or serious technological tools. This is due to a profound disconnect between our sciences and our endogenous knowledge systems, as well as from our most immediate environment.

Addressing this requires a change of approach—a holistic, systemic way of understanding and tackling the issues that confront us.