

Welcome back everyone!

Our last debate on accessing finance was held in 2010 wherein we addressed a similar theme, WHY ARE SMES STRUGGLING TO ACCESS FINANCE?

It was an overwhelming success so we decided to do it again to kickoff this new exciting year in AMCHAM. We hope that the second time around will be better than the first time.

We wanted to proceed slightly differently this time and invite panelists that got their hands dirty tackling various aspects of this topic. We wanted real world experience and less theory. As we all can agree, the reality in Cameroon is often very different from what we see on the surface and what we read in the promotional materials.

During our dinner/debate in 2010 there were a few suggestions made on how to improve the environment, including creating credit bureaus and advisory groups. I'm not sure what, if anything, has been done. I do know that the environment has changed significantly in the past two years, some would say for the better and some for the worse. I'm looking forward to hearing from our esteemed panelists.

Just a quick statistic, in the United States last year SMEs accounted for 20% of the GDP because of an enabling environment. SMEs are one of the keys to development and if Cameroun is to evolve, it must partner with SMEs and give them the tools to succeed.

In concluding, I'd like to introduce tonight's moderator- Mr. Mathieu Mandeng. He's not only my friend but a fine and upstanding gentleman with a beautiful wife and fantastic kids. He is the embodiment of the Cameroonian dream, a local kid from Edea who

now walks in the corridors of power. With all his achievements he has not forgotten the less fortunate and he devotes his time and funds to making Edea and indeed Cameroon a better place. He is the current CEO of Standard Chartered Bank, he is a much appreciated board member of AmCham, he is president of APECAM which is the Professional Association of Credit Institutions in Cameroon, he is the Chariman - Business Council for Africa, he is Chairman - Business Coalition against Corruption and Vice President of GICAM.

Please let's welcome Mathieu Mandeng!