

PORTRAIT

Pr. Victor Mbarika,

ICT Technocrat

Racing for Africa's transformation

Born in Buea, South West Region, Victor Mbarika travelled to the USA to hunt for tertiary knowledge. There, the Cameroonian made breakthroughs. At the age of 32, he became one of the youngest endowed US Professors with expertise in ICT. In 2010, he created the ICT University and is the President of the Board of Trustees. With personal resources plus funding from the ICT University Foundation, he implanted campuses of the E-learning institution in developing countries including Africa, with the goal to speed development. During an audience with PM Joseph Dion Ngute in October 2020, the philanthropist presented a rich "harvests" for Cameroon.

Propos recueillis par : **Eric NDIEN**

Images : **Pictures: E.N / VM**

At the time some African Diasporans are devising strategies to tear apart countries in the continent, US-based Cameroonian Professor of Management Information System (MIS) at East Carolina University (ECU), Victor Mbarika, is working relentlessly for its transformation. He is doing so via the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) University, which he founded in 2010. So far, the ICT technocrat has implanted campuses in developing countries. In Africa, Pr. Mbarika, President of the Board of Trus-

tees of the ICT University, has sowed seeds of the internationally recognised tertiary institution of learning, with state-of-the-art infrastructure and equipment in Uganda, Cameroon, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. In only a decade of its existence, the varsity don, via its five ICT University and research institutes, has graduated over 15 to 20, 000 Bachelors, Master's and PhD degree holders, who are excelling worldwide. He plans to do more for Africa, particularly his native Cameroon. Among the innovations he announced, this year, are the introduction of E-Learning, E-Libraries, Tele-medicine, E-Agriculture, E-Governance, E-Democracy and E-traditional medicine programmes.

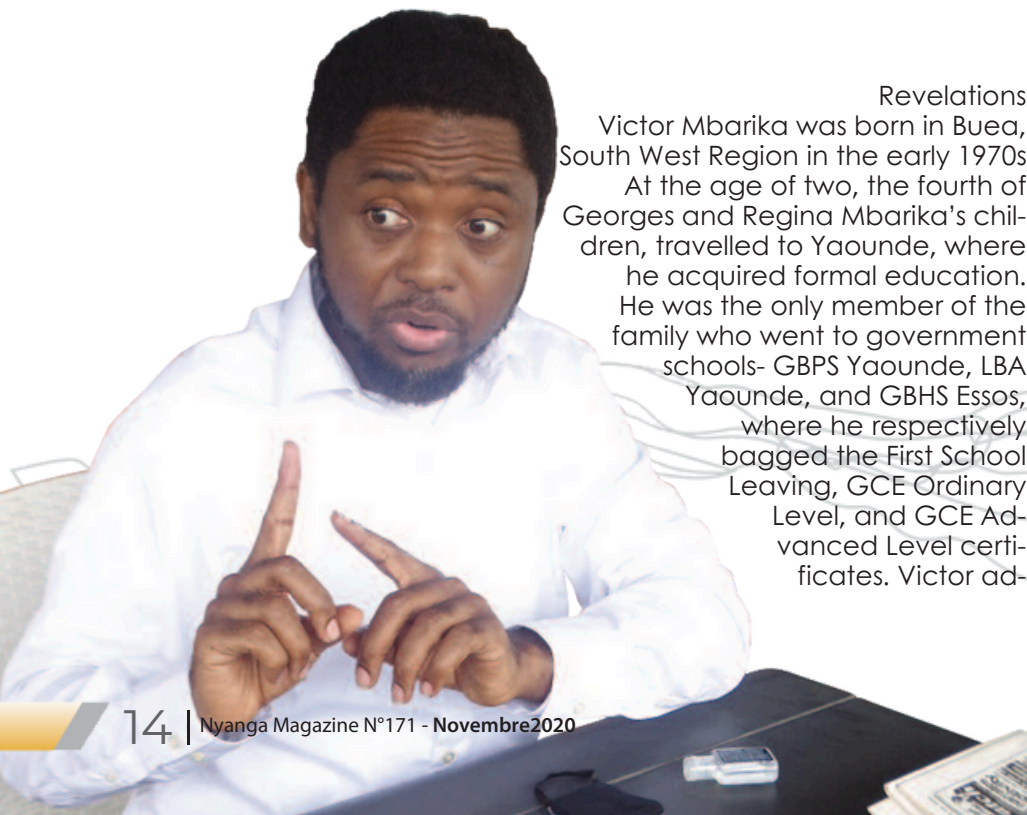




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At Star Building audience with PM Joseph Dion Ngute, Pr. Mbarika expressed love for Cameroon.



Revelations
Victor Mbarika was born in Buea, South West Region in the early 1970s.

At the age of two, the fourth of Georges and Regina Mbarika's children, travelled to Yaounde, where he acquired formal education. He was the only member of the family who went to government schools- GBPS Yaounde, LBA Yaounde, and GBHS Essos, where he respectively bagged the First School Leaving, GCE Ordinary Level, and GCE Advanced Level certificates. Victor ad-

mits he was not a brilliant pupil/student.

"In primary school, I was always promoted on trial. I didn't obtain the best grades at the GCE 'A' Level exam. Honestly, I was a rough student. I didn't like school. At the then LBA Yaounde, my father will be learning this for the first time, I was suspended for three days. I used to smoke cigarette and drink alcohol," he revealed.

Breakthroughs

His mother, Regina Mbarika (a teacher) taught him, the hard way, the discipline to focus on education, which he applied when he travelled to the US in 1993. He completed his BSc, MSc and PhD in



▲ Serving and former African Presidents including H.E Goodluck Jonathan acclaim his expertise in ICT.

MIS, with outstanding results, in five years. Instead of two years, he clinched a Master's Degree in nine months at Illinois University, Chicago. Victor Mbarika finished a four-year PhD programme in 24 months at Auburn University, USA.

At the age of 32, he became one of the youngest endowed Professors in the US and a rare gem in ICT. In 2011, he was made President of the Board of Trustees of the ICT University. Today, Pr. Victor Mbarika is not only a visiting Professor at several universities worldwide, he is an acclaimed IT consultant. The fair in complexion gentleman is also the founder of the "African Journal of Information Systems," and the International Centre for Information Technology and Development at ECU. The native of Mbengwi, North West Region, is equally a prolific writer, with over 250 academic publications in the form of books and peer review journals. "You don't have to attend expensive schools to make it in life," that's the advice the recipient of three Lifetime Achievement Awards in higher education has for the youth.



▲ At 32, Victor Mbarika became an endowed Professor in the US.



▲ He counts three Lifetime Achievement Awards in Higher Education.

Patriot Indeed

With the mountain of knowhow God has blessed him with, Pr. Mbarika didn't ask what Cameroon has done for him; instead he found the answer to what he could do for his sweet home, Cameroon. With funding from the ICT University Foundation, he erected the ICT University campus in Cameroon (Messasi precisely) in 2012. To answer to accruing demands for a Franco-phone section, Pr. Mbarika announced its operationalization this year. "We chose Cameroon to be the centre of excellence for Central Africa," he stated. During an audience Prime Minister Joseph Dion Ngute granted him in October 2020, the philanthropist announced the award of ten Master's and ten PhD scholarships at the ICT University, and the donation of two



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He uses family vacation trips to make his darling wife and children happy.



As a father, he does not forget special dates like birthdays.



Award of scholarships is his way of encouraging African students.

virtual libraries to two State Universities. Georges Mbarika, his father (a printer), donated a printing press with equipment worth over 200 million to the ICT University Cameroon campus. Pr. Mbarika plans to do even more. "In 2016, we bought land on the Bamenda-Mbengwi road to build Africa's first Tele-Medicine University. Because of the socio-political crisis, construction has not started. It's a dream that will come true. More so, Limbe will host the E-Agriculture project." Pr. Mbarika may have taken a US nationality, but he remains a Cameroonian in his soul. "I refuse anybody to call me an American. I know there is a debate in parliament over dual nationality, but I'm a Cameroonian and nobody will take that away from me. I was invited somewhere in the US to give a speech. In prelude to my presentation, the American anthem was played. I refused to deliver the speech until the Cameroon anthem was played. When the anthem is sung, I have tears in my eyes," the patriot disclosed.

Man in love

He is 1.7-m tall, handsome and full of smiles.



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▲ **Victor Mbarika serves God by serving people.**

Irene Mbarika, a Bafut indigene, was lucky to have him as husband. Irene and Victor met as Christians of the "Cameroon Youth for Jesus Ministry" and in 2004, they tied the nuptial knot. The couple, resident in the USA, is blessed with three kids. When Irene wants to

put a smile on the face of Victor, she cooks eru, his favourite meal. In his spare time, Pr. Victor Mbarika plays tennis and listens to comedy. To make him frown, simply expose him to a scene, where a poor person is maltreated. ■

Pr. Victor Mbarika vu par...

Prof. Emmanuel Anyambod, Rev. Pastor
"He uses his resources to develop other people"

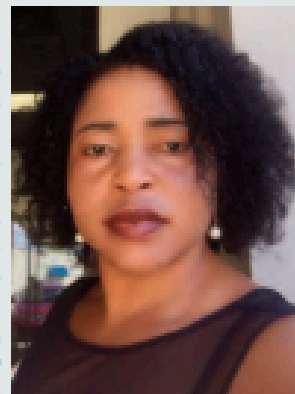
"Professor Victor Mbarika is a young man I have known right from the 1980s when I first came to Yaounde. I saw him grow. He is a dynamic, talented, determined, and focused guy who has become an endowed professor recognized the world over. His commitment to work has seen him get involve in the development of third world countries. He does that through Information and Communications Technology (ICT), an avenue through which developing countries can easily grow. Therefore, he founded the ICT University, which he runs in Cameroon, Nigeria, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Students, wherever their location, follow classes online. He introduced the E-Library, a system through which books are downloaded into a server and students can consult while on campus without necessarily having internet. I see him as somebody who uses his own resources to develop other people. Pr. Mbarika has awarded ten Masters and ten PhD scholarships, an indication he wants to share or give back to Cameroon, his country of origin. I pray that God should keep blessing him with talents, wisdom, and resources he needs to see his dream come true in Africa."



Irene Mbarika, Wife

"My best friend not just my husband"

"My husband is very God-fearing. He serves God by serving people. He likes making people around him happy. What I like most is the fact that he is my best friend not just my husband. He is very family-oriented and does not forget special dates like our wedding anniversary, my birthday or the kids' birthdays. Sending me flowers, love notes, spending quality time with me and the kids, notably special family traditions and family vacation trips around the world, are among some of the things he does that the kids and I value. He is very passionate about what he does around the world. Though his job requires a lot of travels, he has kept our Friday date night a tradition every time he is around. This has been a big booster to keep love and friendship alive."



George Mbarika Jr., Son

"A cool, but very strict dad"

"As his first son, I must admit that I have a very cool dad. He is the best at what he does. He spoils us a lot especially when we travel on family vacations. What I dislike about my father is his strictness. He can be very strict and he has high standards."

Views collected by Eric NDIEN

