

STRENGTHENING THE MULTI-STAKEHOLDER DIMENSION OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AND THE INTEGRATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN CAMEROON¹

2020

Executive Summary

On 25 September 2015, Cameroon adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and committed to “eradicating poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring prosperity for all”. Agenda 2030 recognizes the necessity of reducing the inequalities and vulnerabilities to achieve sustainable development and emphasizes the importance of participatory approaches for sustainable development.

This report identifies the existing avenues for stakeholder engagement in national and United Nations sustainable development processes and analyses their adequacy and efficiency in delivering effective participation of a wide range of stakeholders in these processes, including the most marginalized. On this basis, it develops several recommendations to meet the Common Minimum Standards for multi-stakeholder engagement in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

The research found that sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have started to become a reference within surveyed entities, which include government entities, civil society organisations, private sector organisations, and academia. Many entities articulated their work in terms of their contribution to the achievement of the SDGs. In addition to providing a vision around which entities and individuals rally, some of the respondents mentioned that the SDGs provided an opportunity to create bonds and initiate collaborations with others working towards the same objectives.

Effective monitoring and evaluation at the aggregated level and the establishment of a genuine dialogue among all categories of stakeholders around the SDGs were identified as the most significant challenges in Cameroon. Technical hurdles, lack of resources and the limited trust between state and non-state actors and among non-state actors were the factors the most often quoted as an explanation for this state of affairs.

This research found that the United Nations support has delivered significant results supporting the implementation of the SDGs. For instance, the number of female and vulnerable groups' members accessing social protection and quality education has increased. Informants have mentioned the adoption of the “Delivering as One” approach and the alignment of the UNDAF 2018-2020 on national priorities as contributing factors to this success. Respondents have mentioned the operationalization of a joint budgeted work plan and steering committee between the Government of Cameroon and the United Nations as foreseen in the UNDAF as a significant opportunity to strengthen the partnership for sustainable development.

Based on these findings, and taking into considerations international best practices also identified as part of this research, the report presents the following recommendations:

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Recommendation 1: Intensify the dissemination of, and stakeholders' awareness-raising on the SDGs.

Awareness of the SDG existence and knowledge about the SDGs, their content, and contextualization in Cameroon constitute the first step to increasing stakeholders' engagement. While this research found that SDGs have started to become a reference, awareness-raising work remains to be done for the stakeholders to assess their work in terms of SDGs achievement more systematically. In addition, this step should enable state and non-state actors to develop a shared understanding of the SDGs and their translation to the Cameroonian context, which will, in turn, contribute to strengthening the dialogue between these stakeholders. It is proposed to review the current communication and awareness-raising strategy on SDGs to (1) intensify the information campaign on the SDGs, further tailor the messages to the audience and increase the variety of communication channels, including social media; and (2) multiply opportunities for dialogue on the SDGs within each category of stakeholders (civil society, private sector, academia) and between categories. In addition, findings from these dialogues could be fed back into national and United Nations sustainable development planning processes.

Recommendation 2: Encourage and promote synergies of actions between stakeholders.

Several key informants consulted in the framework of this research have expressed the willingness to strengthen existing synergies within and across stakeholders' categories and create new ones to further contribute to the achievements of the SDGs in Cameroon. While these stakeholders bear the primary responsibility to carry out this recommendation, state actors and the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes can encourage and facilitate such partnerships. They could do so by gathering and sharing information on each stakeholder's mission and activities, encouraging adopting a partnership approach in developing and implementing programmes and projects, including public-private partnerships and the inclusion of a civil society strengthening component in the project design. It could also be helpful to identify priority SDGs at the Region level and make resources available to support the development of partnerships.

Recommendation 3: Adopt a participatory budgeting approach and mobilize financial resources for the SDGs.

The implementation of the SDGs and the monitoring, evaluation and learning requires significant resources, not the least financial. It is recommended that the central and decentralized entities develop diversified funding strategies for the SDGs and use the participatory budgeting approach.

Recommendation 4: Promote an organizational culture of dialogue.

The research has shown that Cameroon has set up planning, budgeting and monitoring processes in which stakeholders participate, although to varying degrees. Key informants often brought up the prevailing organizational cultures of the surveyed entities to explain the degree of dialogue within and across stakeholders' categories. The organizational culture of most surveyed entities, across categories, was described as hierarchical and impacting the expression of a diversity of voices in the decision-making processes. In addition, the participation of some stakeholders' categories, such as civil society organizations and informal private sector initiatives, was made more complex due to the limited degree of structuration of these actors. Therefore, it is recommended that the findings from this study start a conversation within entities first on their organizational culture and its impact on effective participation. It is also recommended that the United Nations and other partners lead by example and integrate discussions around leadership and participation in their partnership dialogues with the

authorities, civil society organizations, and private sector entities. The structuration of the informal private sector could also be beneficial, so would the promotion of a better understanding of the role of civil society and the importance of its diversity and the strengthening of conducive relationships between authorities and civil society organizations.

Recommendation 5: Reinforce the monitoring and evaluation mechanism of the cooperation framework.

Despite the efforts of the Government and the United Nations to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of UNDAF, gaps persist. The following actions would strengthen the UNDAF monitoring and evaluation mechanism: i) setting up a database to facilitate the feedback of information from regional coordination offices to inter-agency coordination; ii) strengthening the capacities of agencies on the new monitoring-evaluation mechanism; iii) systematizing monitoring by organizing at least annual data collection to inform the indicators; iv) evaluating joint programmes before the final independent evaluation of UNDAF.

Recommendation 6: Implement the tools and governance structures proposed in the UNDAF 2018-2020 to improve coordination and synergy and reduces the duplication of interventions. To strengthen synergies, the UNDAF had foreseen the establishment of joint work plans and budgets and the creation of a steering and orientation committee chaired by the Ministry of the Economy, Planning and Regional Development (MINEPAT) and the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations in Cameroon. While this study confirms that these actions remain relevant, progresses towards their realization have lagged. This study, therefore, encourages the setting up of the UNDAF steering and orientation committee, its governance structure and all the necessary tools for its optimal functioning, and the development of the joint action plan and annual inter-agency work plans.

Recommendation 7: Establish a mechanism for early engagement all stakeholders in the development of the next cooperation framework, in particular, non-governmental ones. Findings from this study indicate that governmental stakeholders have been participating in United Nations-led processes to a great extent than non-governmental ones. The development of the next cooperation framework provides an excellent opportunity to reinforce the participation of all stakeholders. Therefore, it is recommended to set up, in a consultative and participatory fashion, a mechanism that will facilitate the participation of all categories of stakeholders in the development of the next framework. This mechanism should specifically address the more limited participation of non-governmental stakeholders, such as civil society, private sector, and academia. Based on comparative best practices identified in the framework of this study, such a mechanism could take the shape of multi-stakeholder councils and/or facilitated dialogue on sustainable development among national stakeholders.