



2019 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

For Sub-Saharan Africa: Cameroon
September 2020



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Cover Photo: A group of youth gather at a free WIFI spot to access the internet in Maputo, Mozambique in March 2020. USAID is developing programs in several countries, mainly in Africa, to promote universal internet access. The program enables free access to information for young people who may not have the financial resources to access the internet otherwise, thereby helping them to participate in democratic processes, practice citizenship, and exercise their right to information.

Photo Credit: Gideon Américo Muiambo, representative of the Movement for the Prevention of Crime (MHPC)

This photo was a submission in the 2020 USAID Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance photo contest.

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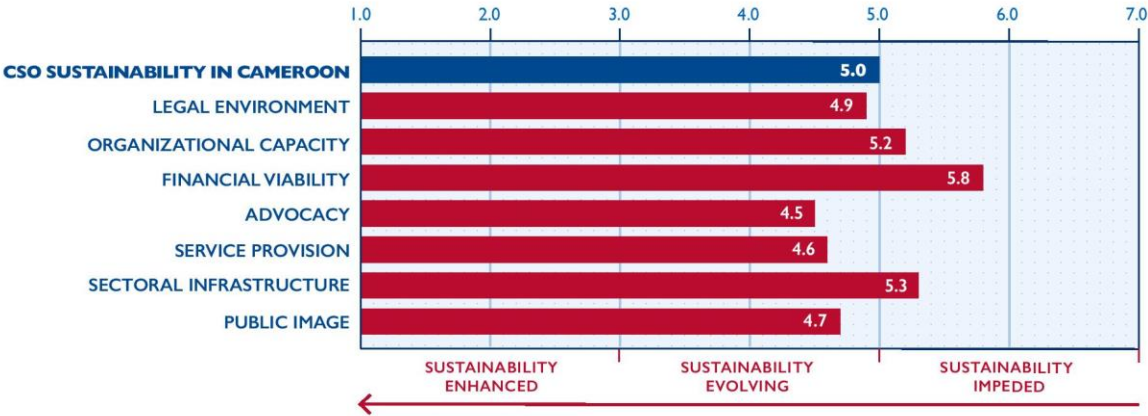
Joseph Sany, Irene Petras, Kellie Burk, and Asta Zinbo

CAMEROON

REPORT

Capital: Yaounde
 Population: 27,744,989
 GDP per capita (PPP): \$3,700
 Human Development Index: Medium (0.563)
 Freedom in the World: Not Free (18/100)

OVERALL CSO SUSTAINABILITY: 5.0



In November 2018, Paul Biya was re-elected for his seventh term as President of Cameroon. The Cameroon Renaissance Movement, one of the opposition parties, rejected the election results, alleging voting irregularities. Post-election tensions, which proceeded until early 2019, led to repression of the opposition by government forces, harassment and intimidation of CSOs reportedly affiliated with the opposition party.

In 2019, security challenges persisted in Cameroon's Far North, North-west and South-west region. Boko Haram terrorists and separatist terrorists in English-speaking areas killed nearly 300 civilians and displaced hundreds of thousands more. Nearly 1 million are in need of humanitarian aid due to the conflict. Tensions have escalated in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, which decry the lack of representativeness in the predominantly French-speaking government. As a result, violent conflicts between separatists and the national armed forces have urged over 435,000 civilians to flee from their homes. In May the United Nations (UN) Security Council held an informal meeting on the deteriorating human rights situation in the North-west and South-west, and in September President Biya convened the Grand National Dialogue (GDN) to address the crisis. Chaired by the Prime Minister, the GDN led to the release of hundreds of imprisoned separatist fighters and political activists. In December, the government adopted Law 2019/024 of 24 December 2019 on the General Code of Decentralised Local Authorities, which gives the two English-speaking regions more local autonomy and replaces government-appointed mayors with elected mayors.

Many observers saw these actions as a political gesture intended to prove to the international community that the government was "making an effort" but these actions had little real impact. During the year, humanitarian organisations were deployed in English-speaking regions under the aegis of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

These organisations have become the target of secessionist violence. It is in this wake that an employee of the organisation Community Initiative for Sustainable Development will be murdered.

According to the World Bank, the Cameroonian economy grew by 4.3% in 2019. The resource-rich country received a fifth round of disbursements under the International Monetary Fund's Extended Credit Facility, which helped bail out the treasury and eased cash flow pressures. In 2019, the poverty rate varies across the country and peaked at 77 percent in the Far north. In 2019, Transparency International ranks Cameroon 153rd out of 180 countries on its corruption perception index. Cameroon's Vision 2035 development plan, adopted in 2009, aims to scale down poverty, industrialise the country, consolidate democratic processes and enhance national unity.

In 2019, Cameroon's first year in the CSOSI, the overall sustainability of the country's CSO sector was in the evolving sustainability range. Advocacy was the strongest dimension. Indeed, CSOs conducted several effective advocacy campaigns and cooperated with the government within strategic frameworks. Service performance was also relatively robust, and was distinguished by a variety of services, particularly for vulnerable communities in need of humanitarian assistance. Although the legal environment is shaped by a national legal framework harmonized with international human rights conventions, it has posed obstacles to freedom of association and expression, including the prohibition of certain demonstrations and activities. The public image of CSOs was generally positive, although the public did not adequately identify the role of civil society. The organisational capacity of CSOs was in the impeded range. A small number of large organisations showed good capacity, while it was weaker among the majority of CSOs that had difficulty finding sources of funding. In terms of sectoral infrastructure, CSOs had access to training opportunities, but there was little cooperation among CSOs through the intervention of coalitions or networks. The financial sustainability of CSOs was the weakest dimension, as most CSOs depend on their members for funding, and few organisations receive external funding.

According to the National Governance Programme, about 55,602 associations are registered in Cameroon. The Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT), the government body in charge of overseeing CSOs, reports that Cameroon has about 40 international CSOs and about 50 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with separate legal status. Nearly 500,000 grassroots community-based organisations, private associations, common initiative groups (i.e. economic and social organisations formed by individuals with common interests), development committees and economic interest groups, many of which were not registered, are estimated to exist in 2019.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK: 4.9

Cameroon's national legal framework is harmonised with the international conventions to which it is a signatory, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the International Covenant relative to Civil and Political Rights; the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights; Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise; the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural

Rights. The preamble of 1972 Constitution and Law No. 96/06 of 1996 revising the Constitution confirm the country's commitment to the fundamental freedoms enshrined in these conventions.

All CSOs are governed by Law No. 90/053 of 1990 on Freedom of Association, which sets out procedures for their establishment, operation, governance and dissolution. NGOs are governed by Law No. 99/014 of 1999, sports associations are governed by Law No. 96/09 of 1996, and cooperatives and common initiative groups are governed by Law No. 92/006 of 1992. Cooperatives, common initiative groups and economic interest groups are governed by the Organization for the Harmonization of Company Law in Africa (OHADA) adopted by seventeen West and Central African countries in 1993. International CSOs have NGO status.

CSOs can register in a departmental representation of MINAT in their place of residence. To do so, a CSO must provide a declaration as well as the minutes of the meeting during which it was created, its statutes and internal regulations and a list of its leaders. The registration process is relatively simple for most CSOs. However, CSOs working on governance, anti-corruption and human rights issues may experience delays or difficulties in obtaining their registration receipt or may be arbitrarily denied registration, giving the impression that the relevant authorities are not applying the laws fairly and consistently. The government practises 'administrative tolerance' in that it allows many organisations to operate outside the regulatory framework because they carry out activities without prior registration and without reprisals. Community and cultural organisations can operate without being registered. Unregistered CSOs may not interact with government or donors.

All CSOs must file annual activity reports to MINAT within sixty days following the end of the fiscal year and be subject to external evaluation. This arrangement is stricter with NGOs, especially those working in the field of human rights and governance. Most other CSOs do not file reports, exposing themselves to potential harassment.

The law allows MINAT to dissolve any organisation that undermines public order and state security. In the event of dissolution, a CSO can appeal to the court of his place of residence. Although organisations that criticise government policies or express opposing views are sometimes subject to sanctions such as dissolution, no organisation is known to have been dissolved in 2019.

The authorities require organisers of public events to obtain permits for public demonstrations and prior notifications for public meetings, in accordance with Law No. 90/055 regulating public meetings and events. They sometimes use this rule to restrict the freedoms of assembly and expression, which are enshrined in the Constitution. Many demonstrations and marches were banned in 2019. For example, all public meetings to debate election results were banned; separatist activists in the northwest and southwest were often banned from demonstrating. More than 300 suspected separatists were arrested for defying these bans in 2019. Local authorities inconsistently implement the provisions of Law No. 90/053 on Freedom of Association. In the Far North region, local authorities subjected international humanitarian CSOs to differential treatment in 2019, with some authorities denying them access to places for food distribution or multi-sectoral money transfers on the grounds that they were complicit with armed gangs operating in the region. CSOs sometimes self-censor themselves in response to these restrictions. Although the media were generally free to operate in 2019, some journalists were arrested during separatist activities in the northwest and southwest, and one was still in prison without due process at year's end.

CSOs can bid on government tenders, accept foreign funding and generate revenue. Under Law No. 2019/004, passed in 2019 to govern the social economy in Cameroon, CSOs working in the social economy can receive grants, donations and legacies, as well as income from fundraising.

Article 11 of Law No. 90/053 provides that only organisations recognised as being of public utility may receive public subsidies, donations and legacies from private persons. Any CSO that has been operating for three years and demonstrates the significant impact of its activities on socio-economic development can apply for public utility status, granted exclusively by decree of the President of the Republic. Very few CSOs obtain this status. In addition, CSOs working with UN agencies on humanitarian response and with donors such as USAID often enjoy administrative tolerance for donations from private companies and individuals who are not members, thanks to UN advocacy on the right of vulnerable populations to receive support.

CSOs are exempt from customs duties, value-added tax and payroll taxes for non-contributory social protection programs. CSOs benefit from tax deductions on income from grants, subsidies, grants for the development of new technologies, and the provision of social services.

donations, costs and economic activities in the economically affected regions (i.e. the Far North, North West and South West regions). These deductions operate in accordance with the relevant laws and regulations.

CSOs have access to legal expertise in major cities. Quality legal advice on relevant laws and regulations is available in the country, but CSOs generally do not have the financial means to benefit from these services.

ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY: 5.2

The organisational capacity of Cameroonian CSOs generally depends on their sources of funding. Because grants are usually conditional on transparent management, CSOs that depend on external funding have better organisational capacity than those that depend on funding from their members. Donors usually fund the same CSOs, which widens the capacity gap between CSOs that receive foreign funding and those that do not.

Most CSOs identify their target groups through local contacts and surveys of people in the areas where they intend to work. For example, in the development of vocational training in agriculture, cattle breeding and fisheries, the National Centre for Digital Agricultural Knowledge (CNNCA) has sought to reach young people with primary or secondary education, adults intending to work in these fields, producers working in them, and managers and trainers involved in agricultural and rural training. The CNNCA carried out an information campaign in the major agricultural basins of the ten regions to encourage individuals to express their interest in working with the project.

Other local organisations, such as the National Youth Council (CNJC), which is made up of 4,500 youth associations in 360 districts, can be assisted in their activities by local elected officials such as mayors and parliamentarians, including government officials serving in departmental delegations, and traditional chiefs. At the same time, local officials sometimes hinder the activities of CSOs working in the areas of anti-corruption and human rights. Donor-

funded CSOs often carry out monitoring and evaluation activities in accordance with Law No. 2018/011 on the code of transparency and good governance in public financial management. Other CSOs generally lack clearly defined monitoring mechanisms, trained staff and funding to assess the effectiveness of their activities.

CSOs generally have internal laws and regulations that specify their missions, target groups and means of intervention. CSOs with good organisational capacity work according to their stated missions, but others often stray from theirs in order to obtain funding. Some CSOs use strategic planning processes to define their priorities, but the majority of CSOs simply follow donor interests and develop strategic plans to meet donor requirements.

Cameroonian CSOs are generally governed internally by general assemblies, supervisory bodies, administrative boards, management bodies and various committees and working groups. The effectiveness of these bodies is mixed and depends on a handful of active members. Only the so-called fourth-level CSOs, or large networks and merged federations, such as the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon, the Council of Protestant Churches of Cameroon, the Council of Imams of Cameroon and the CNNCA, develop and follow written policies.

Due to financial constraints, most CSOs face difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified staff. The governing structure of a CSO usually consists of a president, general secretary, treasurer and financial secretary. Due to financial constraints, CSOs generally do not fill communication, human resources and financial management positions. The majority of CSOs use support staff as needed. As the culture of volunteerism is developing in Cameroon, CSOs rely heavily on volunteers.

Most CSOs have rented offices, which are often poorly equipped. They generally use external services for office secretarial tasks such as data entry, printing and scanning. CSOs rely heavily on the Internet to access information and conduct advocacy. The cost of internet connection is widely accessible, thanks to the presence of several mobile phone companies.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY: 5.8

The financial sustainability of CSOs remains weak. Most CSOs depend on funding from their members, and relatively few CSOs receive external funding.

CSOs with better organisational capacity, such as Action Against Hunger, CODAS Caritas Cameroon, the Cameroon Red Cross, the International Bureau for Children's Rights and Plan Cameroon, receive funding from international agencies, diplomatic missions and religious organisations. The main donors are the UN, the European Union (EU), the African Development Bank, the World Bank and USAID. The projects funded focus on areas such as gender based violence, education, health care, food security, agriculture and livestock, advocacy and empowerment. For example, the EU Civil Society Support Programme aims to involve CSOs in development programmes and policies, and USAID supports food and security stakeholders in the Eastern region through the World Food Programme (WFP).

Most CSOs are poor at fundraising, especially since Law No. 90/053 prohibits CSOs other than those with public utility status from accepting private donations. Most CSOs thus depend on voluntary donations from members to support their activities. Other local sources of funding are scarce and ad hoc.

CSOs, particularly social enterprises, cooperatives and joint initiative groups, can derive significant funding from the sale of goods and services. For example, 100 cooperatives, members of the CNNCA, earned revenues of approximately \$5 million in 2019 by marketing their products to agricultural industries. Most CSOs use revenues from the sale of goods and services to cover operating costs such as rent, electricity, office supplies and salaries.

The private sector sees CSOs as partners in their corporate social responsibility efforts, which may result in funding for some projects. For example, the Orange Foundation supports digital centres for women. Very few CSOs partner with local companies or market goods or services for them.

Only CSOs that receive funding from international donors adopt and adhere to rigorous financial management systems. Other CSOs may have written financial management procedures, but tend to ignore them in practice. Staff members responsible for financial management often lack the necessary skills and are mostly poorly paid. CSOs usually find the cost of professional financial services unaffordable.

ADVOCACY: 4.5

CSOs conduct advocacy to the extent permitted by the government. Most CSO advocates focus on sectoral issues, such as health care, women's rights or improving the delivery of basic services. There is little public mobilisation.

Several consultative frameworks provide opportunities for CSOs to formally interact with government. In accordance with Decree No. 2013/7987/PM of 2013, the government has institutionalised a participatory monitoring system to promote transparency in the management of public investments. Within this framework, CSOs are key actors in the committees that oversee "Publish What You Pay" in the extractive industry, public financial management, and Cameroon's participation in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. CSOs, such as the Digital Accessibility Support Network and Multipurpose Community Telecentres (ADEN/TCP), sit on the Public Investment Budget Oversight Committee, where they oversee the proper implementation of projects.

Through these and other mechanisms, CSOs are able to protest against government actions that they consider harmful to local communities. However, CSOs may encounter difficulties with some government officials. For example, after exposing corruption in a livelihood and food security project run by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the CSO ADEN/TCP was excluded from the project. Some CSOs expressed disappointment that donors such as USAID and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations were not involved in this situation.

CSOs are conducting awareness campaigns to influence public opinion and legislators and to call for greater government accountability. Their efforts depend on their financial capacity, their actions towards local communities and marginalised groups, and the localities in which they operate. Successful advocacy initiatives in 2019 include the actions of the Bayam Sellam Women's Association to reduce food imports and the campaign of the National Union of Road Transport Workers of Cameroon to revise driving license and vehicle inspection requirements. These CSOs have achieved their objectives by designing advocacy strategies (meeting with government officials, parliamentarians, the private sector and civil society) and developing communication tools used in the mobilisation of the mass media.

CSOs such as Human Rights Watch and Transparency International help shape public policy by producing periodic studies on advocacy issues such as corruption, quality of health services and human rights, and by widely disseminating their reports. Other CSOs working for more accountable governance in 2019 include the Dynamique Citoyenne, which lobbied for greater financial accountability in project management; Réseau des défenseurs des droits de l'homme en Afrique centrale, which worked on GBV in conflict zones; Initiative de l'Organisation humanitaire collective, which led advocacy for humanitarian responses, such as respect for humanitarian principles by all actors; and CNJC, which advocated for youth employment.

CSOs are aware of the importance of reforming laws affecting the sector and regularly denounce the inadequacies of the legal and regulatory framework governing their activities. In particular, they seek to revise the provisions of Law No. 90/053 relating to subsidies, the capacity of MINAT to suspend and dissolve organisations and the requirements for reporting public events. In 2019, CSOs such as the Collectif des artistes du Cameroun and the International Federation of Musicians met with government officials to discuss amendments to this law. As a result of these discussions, the Government committed to revising the law. These revisions are expected to be completed by 2020.

SERVICES PROVISION: 4.6

Cameroonian CSOs are distinguished by the diversity of services provided to vulnerable communities and target groups. The CSO sector provides a wide range of services in many sectors including: health care, education, governance, water, energy, environmental protection and economic development. For example, CSOs such as the Local Association for Participatory and Self-Directed Development, ADEN/TCP and the Association to Combat Violence against Women provide Central African war refugees in eastern Cameroon and the far north with food, logistical and legal support, health care, education, GBV services, food security, water and sanitation, and protection. CSO service delivery activities emphasise depth and breadth, but ensure the organisation's survival by providing donor funding.

CSO services respond to the needs and priorities of beneficiary groups and contribute to improving their living conditions. CSO activities are informed by national policy documents, analyses such as the Humanitarian Response Plan, studies by the National Institute of Statistics, field experiences, household surveys and consultations with traditional authorities and community members. For example, LandCam organised "Land Week" in Yaoundé in January 2019 on the theme of local land management in Cameroon, where participants representing government, parliament, municipalities, local communities and CSOs shared their

experiences and suggestions. Among the CSOs working effectively to respond to the needs of communities is CODAS Caritas, which drills wells, builds classrooms, equips health centres and carries out many other activities with funds raised locally and from international donors.

The rigorous identification of the needs and priorities of the target groups enables CSOs to respond effectively without any form of discrimination. Legal provisions prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity or religion.

Few CSOs seek to recover the costs of the services they provide. Most CSOs are ill-equipped to analyse market demand, and their target groups are generally unable to pay for technical assistance. Women's organisations such as the Catholic Women's Association sometimes carry out modest income-generating activities.

The government recognises the role of CSOs in its economic policy document Vision 2035 and its community development plans. In 2019, CSOs and the government worked together to assess the delivery of basic social services as part of the medium-term economic and fiscal programme for 2019-2021.

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 5.3

Infrastructure support to the CSO sector in Cameroon is varied. Several support organisations, such as Inades-Formation, Pan African Institute for Development (IPD), Junior Chambers International Cameroon and AIESEC, provide training, IT services, information and support to communities. Inades-Formation and IPD host libraries and resource centres open to CSOs. In all departments of Cameroon there are faith-based CSOs, multi-purpose community telecentres and other structures that offer training and information services.

Local grants are scarce and inconsistent. In 2019, a handful of intermediary organisations provided grants to CSOs. For example, the Centre for Environment and Development provided grants in forest and land management with EU funding.

CSO networks and coalitions are not common in Cameroon. In general, CSOs do not share information, mainly due to the lack of accountability and transparency. However, initiatives in this direction are emerging. For example, under the leadership of OCHA, local organisations and international donors working in the humanitarian sector are sharing information and engaging in joint projects.

Competent local trainers provide capacity building for CSOs. Training usually covers management and fundraising as well as sectoral topics in agriculture, climate change, gender and development. The modules developed usually respond to the needs of local CSOs. Organisations such as CNNCA organise capacity building seminars for their members. In 2019, the German Agency for International Cooperation offered training and technical assistance to about 20 Cameroonian organisations as part of its programme to support decentralisation and local development.

CSOs are aware that it will be difficult to evolve without engaging with actors in other sectors. Therefore, several Cameroonian CSOs are working with the private sector, public authorities and the media to achieve common goals. For example, the Cameroonian Red Cross partners with government, business and the media to strengthen child rights, education and first aid services. Youth Connekt Cameroon, a CNNCA e-agriculture platform launched in December 2019, is the result of a partnership between the public and private sectors, civil society, the UN and technical and financial partners.

PUBLIC IMAGE: 4.7

The public image of CSOs in Cameroon is ambiguous. Media coverage by private print and broadcast media is expensive and usually unaffordable for most CSOs. CSOs tend to seek coverage of their activities only if they have a strong impact on the community. Coverage of CSO activities by the public media is often controversial, especially if they are seen as incompatible with the publicity efforts of politicians.

The central government generally has a negative perception of CSOs that campaign for human rights. But, in line with Vision 2035, it has a positive perception of CSOs providing basic social services. Local authorities are often unaware of the range of services offered by CSOs due to their low visibility and failure to share information about their activities.

Public perceptions of CSOs are generally positive, and their activities are known to benefit communities and target groups. However, public understanding of the role of CSOs is often lacking, largely due to misinformation spread through social networks (for example, allegations that CSOs are linked to political parties) or the lack of visibility of CSOs. The corporate sector sees CSOs primarily as partners in their corporate social responsibility efforts.

CSOs publicise their activities by cultivating relationships with journalists and having an active presence on social media. CSOs generally prefer to use internet platforms to promote their activities because of their low cost. CSOs realise that they need to improve the authorities' appreciation of their services by communicating more about their activities, but only a few CSOs have taken concrete steps in this direction. For example, More Women in Politics, which works with political parties to empower women, received an EU grant in 2019 with a communication and media access component.

Only NGOs are required to submit annual activity reports, but CSOs seeking NGO status must submit activity reports for the previous three years. CSOs usually have a code of conduct or code of ethics in their internal regulations. CSOs usually have a code of conduct or code of ethics in their internal regulations.

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