

A civil society review of progress
towards the Millennium Development
Goals in Commonwealth countries

National Report:

Cameroon

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A civil society review of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals in Commonwealth countries

National Report: Cameroon

This project aims to encourage and articulate civil society analysis of: progress towards the MDGs; the usefulness of the MDG framework for civil society; the contribution of civil society to the attainment of the MDGs; issues for a post-2015 agenda to consider.

This report documents the outputs of a two-stage process: desk research to review UN, government, civil society and other multilateral reports on national progress towards achieving the MDGs; and a national consultation workshop with civil society, which tested the findings of the desk research and enabled a deeper discussion on MDG progress, utility and post-2015 agenda setting.

This project was undertaken as part of a programme with the UN Millennium Campaign (UNMC), which supported country-level research by civil society organisations in 20 countries.

The Commonwealth Foundation led this process for the following 14 countries: Cameroon, Ghana, Grenada, Jamaica, Malawi, New Zealand, Pakistan, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda and Zambia. The UNMC led in the following six countries: India, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Philippines and The Gambia.

Commonwealth Foundation

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UN Millennium Campaign

The UN Millennium Campaign was established by the UN Secretary General in 2002. The Campaign supports citizens' efforts to hold their governments to account for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Millennium Development Goals were adopted by 189 world leaders from rich and poor countries, as part of the Millennium Declaration which was signed in 2000. These leaders agreed to achieve the Goals by 2015. Our premise is simple: we are the first generation that can end poverty and we refuse to miss this opportunity.

Executive Summary

Project rationale and process

This summary presents perspectives from civil society in Cameroon on progress made and challenges experienced in relation to the national efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the extent to which MDG processes have provided opportunities to enhance participatory governance and civil society relations with government. Based on their reflections, Cameroonian civil society organisations (CSOs) have made a number of recommendations to accelerate progress on the MDGs and improve future development frameworks.

Initial research and consultation, led by the African Development Interchange Network in the first half of 2012, consisted of: a review of reports and documentation, including government data; interviews with CSOs, government representatives and development agencies; and a focus group meeting. Collectif des ONG pour la Sécurité Alimentaire et le Développement Rural (COSADER) and CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation then convened a national consultation in December 2012 to verify and enrich the research findings and make further recommendations.

Civil society review of the MDGs in Cameroon

The assessment of CSOs is that progress on the MDGs has been uneven since the last civil society review in 2005, with different levels of achievement in different parts of Cameroon. The areas in which most progress has been made are Goals 2 and 3, while Goals 7 and 8 are assessed as unlikely to be achieved. The achievement of other goals is viewed as uncertain; on the issues covered by some goals, particularly Goal 5, there seems to have been regression in recent years. Obstacles to achievement identified by civil society include disconnected sectors, a lack of transparency among political actors, economic exclusion and a tendency to concentrate resource inputs at the top of structures, eg in healthcare. More broadly, CSOs believe that economic growth has not brought about clear and sustained improvement in the living conditions of many. They point to continuing unemployment and heavy reliance on the informal sector, particularly among young people.

CSOs feel the MDG framework's principal value is as a tool for holding government to account, rather than as a direct driver of CSO development interventions. The framework means that government has clearly based some policies around MDG attainment, making monitoring of government development initiatives easier than if the framework did not exist. Perception of the MDGs as a legitimate framework for implementation and monitoring of development seems to have strengthened over time. Cameroonian CSOs assert that since the previous civil society review, they have shown more visibility in engagement on the MDGs, and increased their work in the field, advocacy activities and networking.

The MDGs were acknowledged to have offered CSOs a platform to press claims that they should be full partners in development, and as such to have improved the legitimacy of CSOs and their negotiation opportunities. CSOs also believe the MDGs have created new scope for them to fundraise from donors. CSOs feel that the principle of the value of civil society partnerships for development is now more accepted within government, and that the debate has moved on to the question of the degree of co-operation.

Challenges identified include the accuracy and reliability of official data and difficulties in access to information. Further, while CSOs acknowledge recent government efforts to tighten laws on corruption, they still see corruption as an intrinsic part of the political landscape that hampers attainment of the MDGs, and feel the governmental system remains opaque, hindering proper oversight of progress on the MDGs. Another persistent challenge for civil society monitoring is attracting sufficient financial resources for sustained and comprehensive sensitisation of the public and for advocacy initiatives.

CSOs therefore suggest that any new development framework should pay attention to improving access to information and tackling corruption. They also stress the importance of focusing on issues beyond economic matters, and of placing human rights at the centre of the realisation of the MDGs. Among other topics identified as needing to be addressed in any new development framework are land-grabbing, which has emerged as an issue where law reform is needed, and addressing youth unemployment, including through the promotion of youth entrepreneurship opportunities. Recent decentralisation, with the transfer of some areas of competence and financial resources from central government to municipal councils, also suggests a changed context that offers new opportunities for engagement, and this needs to be taken into account in any new national development framework.

Recommendations

Recommendations made by CSOs to accelerate progress on existing MDGs include:

- Prioritising infrastructural development, particularly of roads and social housing.
- Improving clean water provision to reduce incidence of water-borne disease.
- Enhancing access to credit for small farmers.
- Providing tax incentives for the import of computer equipment.
- Disaggregating MDG data to enable better targeting.
- Publishing full details of official development assistance (ODA) supplied to Cameroon for the MDGs.

Recommendations made by CSOs to improve future development frameworks include the following:

- Institute a civil society development observatory as a citizen-owned and led monitoring and evaluation mechanism, parallel to official efforts. This would connect with the decentralisation process to capture and convey assessments of development achievements by communities at a local level.
- Ensure that a portion of financing for development flows directly to local communities, through CSOs, to mitigate against corruption and avoid the delays that can characterise projects solely controlled by government.
- Prioritise linking civil society across all stages of socio-economic policy design and strengthen the fundraising capacities of CSOs.
- To encourage these positive changes, international actors, including UN and Commonwealth agencies, should engage in more dialogue with the government to encourage it to improve its level of co-operation with CSOs.

1. Introduction

This report presents perspectives from civil society in Cameroon on progress made and challenges experienced with the MDGs, and the extent to which MDG processes have provided opportunities to enhance participatory governance and civil society relations with government. Initial research and consultation, led by the African Development Interchange Network in the first half of 2012, consisted of: a review of reports and documentation, including government data; interviews with CSOs, government representatives and development agencies; and a focus group meeting. Collectif des ONG pour la Sécurité Alimentaire et le Développement Rural (COSADER) and CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation then convened a national consultation in December 2012 to verify and enrich the research findings and make further recommendations.

Ahead of the late 2000s financial crisis, Cameroon experienced a severe economic shock of its own in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, with a sharp deterioration in its economy leading to increased poverty. Alongside the economic efforts to improve the situation that followed, many of which, such as public utility privatisation and basic commodity price hikes, harmed the poor, there was some renewed civic mobilisation and unleashing of new potential for civil society, given government pledges to enhance democracy, good governance, social equity, gender equality and the eradication of corruption. Freedom of association legislation passed in 1990 boosted the civil society movement, which was already active in fighting poverty, and this was followed by legislation on non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the NGO Act, in 1999. The political scene also evolved from a single party to a multi-party system, with the creation of more than 80 political parties, albeit only six of which are represented in the 2007–2013 National Assembly.

While the promulgation of the NGO Act helped encourage a growth in civil society groups, CSOs note that clauses are embedded in the laws, and in other legal instruments such as the Penal Code, which can be used selectively to restrict CSOs' activities. For example, state authorities have the power to dissolve particular associations if they perceive that the activities of those associations are not constitutional or that they are a threat to national security. Penalties for non-compliance are heavy and the power to ensure compliance means that state authorities can interfere in the activities of civil society groups, especially those regarded as politically sensitive. According to some civil society practitioners and academics, the government has exercised something between caution and repression towards civil society in Cameroon.¹

The review of progress on the MDGs offers a fresh opportunity to assess how participatory the political culture of Cameroon now is after these early milestones, and the extent to which civil society is now able to play multiple roles of service delivery, mobilisation of the public, monitoring, advocacy, advice and policy influence as part of the enabling of participatory governance.

¹ See Temngah Joseph Nyambo, 'The Legal Framework for Civil Society and Social Movements', in Emmanuel Yenshu Vubo (eds), *Civil Society and the Search for Development Alternatives in Cameroon*, CODESRIA, 2008; Francis Nguendi Ikome and David Kode, 'The Legislative Environment for Civil Society in Cameroon', in Bhekinkosi Moyo (ed.), *(Dis) Enabling the Public Sphere: Civil Society Regulation in Africa*, Southern Africa Trust and TrustAfrica, 2010; P T Tanga and C C Fonchingong, 'NGO-State Interaction and the Politics of Development in Cameroon in the Context of Liberalisation', in *International NGO Journal*, 4 (4), <http://www.academicjournals.org/INGOJ/pdf/pdf2009/apr/tanga%20and%20fonchingong.pdf>, 2009

2. Civil society perspectives on progress towards the MDGs

From the time of the previous civil society review in 2005 to the present, progress towards achieving the MDGs has been uneven, and there have been different levels of progress in different parts of Cameroon. Goals where civil society assesses there has been most progress and where there is still some prospect of their being achieved by 2015 are Goal 2 on universal primary education and Goal 3 on the promotion of gender equality. On the other hand, Goal 7 on the environment and Goal 8 on partnership for development are unlikely to be achieved. The achievement of other goals is assessed as uncertain, and on some there has been regression in recent years. Table 1 offers a summary of civil society perspectives on the progress of each MDG, as gathered in this review, in which the headline assessments by civil society and government are quite consistent.

Table 1: Civil society assessment of progress towards the MDGs

Goals, targets and indicators ²	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
<p>Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger:</p> <p>1a. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1.25 a day</p> <p>1b. Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people</p> <p>1c. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger</p>	Off track	Unlikely	<p>According to the UN Human Development Report 2011, the proportion of the population living on less than US\$1 per day was 9.6 per cent (between 2000 and 2009), while the proportion living below the national poverty line was 39.9 per cent over the same period.³</p> <p>CSOs believe that economic growth has not brought about clear and sustained improvement in the living conditions of many, in part due to the poor distribution of growth. People are stuck in persistent poverty.</p> <p>The employment rate stands at 80.2 per cent and the proportion of employed people who earn less than US\$1 a day is 38.3 per cent. Youth unemployment was assessed at 14 per cent in 2010,⁴ and is considered a factor in high rural to urban migration. Potential young entrepreneurs find it difficult to access credit. Government development approaches as set out in its Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP) seem to focus mostly on the formal sector, yet 90 per cent of the Cameroonian economy is informal⁵ and youthful,⁶ and decent work⁷ is rare. CSOs assert that Cameroon is not making the most of its strategic position in Central Africa that could see it become a major agricultural exporter to neighbouring countries.</p> <p>The prevalence of underweight children under five years of age is 5.2 per cent. There are early indications of a potential hunger crisis in northern Cameroon.</p>

² Unless otherwise stated, government assessments, targets, indicators and quantitative data used in this table are drawn from the Country Report on Progress in Achieving the Millennium Development Goals, Republic of Cameroon, 2008, http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/MDG/english/MDG%20Country%20Reports/Cameroon/Cameroon_MDGReport_2008_FR.pdf. Unless otherwise stated the deadline for targets to be achieved is 2015

³ United Nations Human Development Index 2011

⁴ 'Towards Policy Reforms in Cameroon: Agriculture and Vocational Training as Gateway to Youth Employment', policy paper, Cameroon Youth and Students Forum for Peace, December 2011

⁵ Less than 10 per cent of the labour force has been in formal employment since the 1990s. Source: Cameroon Economic Update, Unlocking the Labour Force: an economic update on Cameroon, World Bank, Cameroon Country Office, January 2012, Issue No. 3

⁶ The population under 24 years old is estimated to be 60.7 per cent of the total population. Source: Cameroon, The World Factbook, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cm.html>

⁷ See <http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/decent-work-agenda/lang-en/index.htm> for the International Labour Organisation's definition of decent work

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Goals, targets and indicators	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
<p>Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education:</p> <p>2a. Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling</p>	Potentially achievable	Potentially achievable	<p>Enrolment in primary education stands at 83 per cent, but completion rates are between 72.6 and 56 per cent.⁸ The literacy rate for 15–24 year olds is 83 per cent. Quality of education, shortage of trained teachers and the lack of vocationally-oriented education are identified as problems by civil society.</p>
<p>Goal 3. Promote gender equality and empower women:</p> <p>3a. Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015</p>	Potentially achievable	Potentially achievable	<p>The ratio of girls to boys across primary, secondary and tertiary education is 0.7. The share of women in paid employment outside agriculture is only 27.3 per cent. Women held 13.9 per cent of seats in the 2007–2013 parliament, up from 8.9 per cent in the previous election held in 2002.⁹ Women constitute 18 per cent of the 360 municipal council mayors. Some jobs, such as those in politics, seem to be effectively out of reach for women.</p> <p>Civil society acknowledges that improvements have been made in the relevant institutional frameworks for women and family affairs.</p>
<p>Goal 4. Reduce child mortality:</p> <p>4a. Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate</p>	Off track	Unlikely	<p>The mortality rate for under five year olds has improved only a little, from 144 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2004 to 136 per 1,000 in 2010. The proportion of one-year-old children immunised against measles stands at 78.8 per cent. The east and south-west regions are of particular concern here.</p>
<p>Goal 5. Improve maternal health:</p> <p>5a. Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio</p> <p>5b. Achieve universal access to reproductive health</p>	Off track, and there has been regression	Unlikely	<p>The maternal mortality rate was 669 per 100,000 live births in 2004, but rose to 1,000 per 100,000 in 2010. This regression may be due partly to a rise in fertility rates, and within this, to increased fertility rates among young women, combined with the higher chances of death among young pregnant women.¹⁰ The high maternal mortality ratio indicates that access to, and quality of, emergency obstetric and neonatal care remains a challenge.¹¹ Poor rural transportation, user fees at clinics and women working in the household during advanced stages of pregnancy are also put forward as factors. Antenatal care coverage is 61.8 per cent.</p>

8 The first figure is from the 2008 MDGs Progress Report, op. cit.; the second, lower, figure is from the World Bank economic update for Cameroon, 2011

9 Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in National Parliaments database, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif310107.htm>

10 Reproductive Health at a Glance: Cameroon, World Bank, April 2011

11 Ibid

Goals, targets and indicators	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
<p>Goal 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases:</p> <p>6a. Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS</p> <p>6b. Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it</p> <p>6c. Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases</p>	Off track	Unlikely, but potential to meet malaria targets	<p>HIV/AIDS and malaria are two of the main causes of death in Cameroon.¹² HIV prevalence is 4.3 per cent and seems to be a particular challenge in urban areas. According to the government progress report for 2008, malaria prevalence rates at a national level were 15 per cent in 2005, down from 40 per cent in 2004. The proportion of people with advanced HIV infection who have access to antiretroviral drugs is 46.5 per cent.</p>
<p>Goal 7. Ensure environmental sustainability:</p> <p>7a. Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources</p> <p>7b. Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss</p> <p>7c. Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation</p> <p>7d. Achieve, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers</p>	Off track	Unlikely	<p>The proportion of people with access to clean drinking water rose from 50 per cent in 1990 to 74 per cent in 2008, meaning that 8 million people obtained access to an improved water source over this period. However, CSOs note that progress in and funding for the water supply and sanitation sector in Cameroon is still sporadic.¹³ During a National Committee of Water Supply Leasing Contracts meeting in May 2012, the Minister of Water and Energy described the situation of water supply in Cameroon as 'difficult and financially unbalanced'. New initiatives to increase water supply will still fall short of current demand when they come on line and will not reach rural areas.</p> <p>CSOs have expressed concern about deforestation linked to timber exports, which they believe calls into question Cameroon's land sovereignty.</p>

¹² See Cameroon Health Profile, <http://www.worldlifeexpectancy.com/country-health-profile/cameroon>

¹³ *Water Supply and Sanitation in Cameroon: Turning Finance into Services for 2015 and Beyond*, Water and Sanitation Programme, 2010

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Goals, targets and indicators	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
<p>Goal 8. Develop a global partnership for development</p> <p>8a. Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system</p> <p>8b. Address the special needs of least developed countries</p> <p>8c. Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing states</p> <p>8d. Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries</p> <p>8e. In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries</p> <p>8f. In cooperation with the private sector, make available benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications</p>	Off track	Probably	<p>Between 2006 and 2011 the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Cameroon from 2.2 to 2.5, a consistently low score that designated Cameroon as 'highly corrupt'.¹⁴ One measure that can be taken to reduce high-level corruption would be to enforce Article 66 of the Constitution on the declaration of assets.¹⁵</p> <p>The proportion of households with internet access in 2008 was estimated at only 5.2 per cent. According to the UN, the internet users indicator (per 100 inhabitants) has increased from 0.3 in 2000 to 3.8 in 2009.¹⁶</p>

Despite efforts made by the government, CSOs and development partners to accelerate the achievement of the MDGs, Cameroon is still performing below the average for developing countries.¹⁷ This is consistent with the views of another national consultation on the progress of the MDGs in Cameroon, organised in July 2010,¹⁸ which assessed that out of the eight goals, visible progress had only been made on Goals 2 and 3.

Cross-cutting challenges identified by CSOs consulted for this review included disconnected actors, bias and lack of transparency among political actors, economic exclusion and a tendency to concentrate resource inputs at the top of structures, eg in healthcare.

Two other issues were understood to cut across and hinder progress on the MDGs. Land-grabbing was raised by civil society as a major problem that hinders the achievement of Goals 1, 4, 7 and 8. Loss of land impacts most heavily on the communities that are already the most vulnerable, leaving them even more powerless, less secure and more vulnerable to exploitation.

A second hindrance to the realisation of the MDGs has been conflict; until recently there was a simmering low intensity conflict with Nigeria over the Bakassi Peninsula, a stretch of land between the two countries over which sovereignty was disputed for many years. This conflict stemmed from colonial times. The disagreement hindered local communities from experiencing development opportunities. There are also local level conflicts between farmers and graziers.

For a full list of the MDGs, along with the targets and indicators, see: <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/host.aspx?Content=indicators/officialist.htm>

¹⁴ Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, <http://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/overview>

¹⁵ Article 66 of the Constitution of Cameroon stipulates that government officials should declare their possessions

¹⁶ Cameroon, World Statistics Pocketbook, UN Data, data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=CAMEROON

¹⁷ The United Nations Human Development Report 2008–2009, for example, rates Cameroon's efforts as below average, as progress has been limited to some areas, with others left lagging

¹⁸ Consultation organised by Africa Development Interchange Network (ADIN), Cameroon Youth and Students Forum for Peace (CAMYOSFOP) and Human Rights Focus (HRF)

3. Usefulness and challenges of the MDG framework to civil society

The CSOs consulted for this review principally viewed the MDG framework to be most useful as a tool for holding government to account, and as more valuable for enhancing their development knowledge than for driving their own development efforts. For the most part, involvement in civil society and in development initiatives preceded the MDGs. However, it was acknowledged that the existence of the MDGs meant that the government had clearly based some policies on MDG attainment, which made attempts to monitor government development initiatives easier than if those targets did not exist.

It was agreed that the perception of the MDGs as a legitimate framework for implementation and monitoring of the international development agenda had become stronger over time.

There is felt to be real engagement across a range of Cameroon civil society with the MDG agenda, and there have been attempts to network and synchronise priorities with the MDGs. One example of this was the formation in 2010 of the Cameroon National Platform of CSOs (PLANOSCAM), which attempts to sit at the apex of different thematic networks and stand as the civil society counterpart in relationships with national and international stakeholders.

The MDGs were also acknowledged to have offered national CSOs a platform to press the claim that they should be full partners in development and for accessing global information on development. As such they have improved the legitimacy of CSOs and enhanced CSOs' opportunities to negotiate with the national government on socio-economic matters. CSOs also believe the MDGs have created more opportunities for them to fundraise from international donors.

CSOs consulted believe that the principle of the value of partnerships for development with CSOs by government and other agencies is now accepted. While access to government-led development processes as a full partner is still a challenge, the debate has now at least moved on to the question of the degree of co-operation.

It was felt by CSOs consulted that the MDGs as originally set out offered sufficient depth for a good appraisal and monitoring of Cameroon's situation, provided there could be some tailoring to make them better fit the national context. However, the extent to which official data and statistics tell the full story about the MDGs remains questionable. The concern raised in the previous Commonwealth civil society review about the reliability of the national MDG reporting process has not been addressed, and this new review threw up similar concerns about incomplete information. This is bound up with larger questions about lack of access to information as a structural issue, with concern expressed about an apparently ingrained 'culture of secrecy'. Even in cases where appropriate techniques have been applied and the resulting figures can be trusted, data is often still limited in their geographical coverage and lack continuity, given resource constraints affecting the national statistics system. Timelags in information are a constant challenge. For example, the last

general population census was conducted in 2005 but results were not made available until 2010, while long gaps have been noted between population health surveys. Beyond statistics, qualitative information on progress at the community level, in particular, is scarce.

For instance, in the case of Goal 5, where different indicators are available, there has been much disagreement between CSOs and government over which figure for maternal deaths is more accurate, with government preferring the lowest figure. There was a similar dispute over Goal 6, where the figure given by the National Committee on the Fight Against Malaria of a malaria prevalence rate of 36.03 per cent is notably higher than the 29 per cent figure used by the Cameroonian Minister of Public Health.

Participants noted that such disparities often caused CSOs to doubt the validity of government data more generally. Inaccurate data can only hinder the planning of interventions and the exercise of accountability. Civil society is left to question whether, in Cameroon, indicators and targets that are not being measured under the current MDG framework are more reliable than those that are.

CSOs also expressed concern about the time-bound nature of the MDG framework, which has highlighted broader questions about contextualisation: put simply, 2015 always seemed too close for many MDGs to be achieved in Cameroon, given the low starting point. In this regard it is interesting to note that failure has already been anticipated by restating some MDG targets in the current Growth and Employment Strategy Paper,¹⁹ but with a new target date of 2020.

Here it should also be noted that CSOs have expressed scepticism about the achievability and effectiveness of the GESP, and the weak public ownership of it, something that also characterised its predecessor. CSOs consulted took the view that 2020 would be a feasible deadline for full realisation of the targets covered by Goals 2 and 3, but only if a convincing, results-based, deadline-driven and inclusive strategy is adopted.

Further, it is impossible to assess the full impact of corruption on the MDGs. While government efforts to tighten laws and introduce special courts were acknowledged, CSOs still see corruption as an intrinsic part of the political landscape. They feel that the opacity of the governmental system is not conducive to good governance or to the exercise of proper oversight on progress on the MDGs.

In critiques of the MDGs, CSOs have urged the importance of focusing on issues beyond economic ones, and of placing human rights at the centre of the realisation of the MDGs. This issue was stressed ahead of the September 2010 intergovernmental MDG Summit, in a Central African forum held in Yaoundé in August 2010. Participants agreed that key human rights principles, such as non-discrimination, effective participation and accountability, as enshrined in international human rights agreements, should refine MDG targets and indicators, and allow for a more realistic assessment of progress at national level. Specific human rights, such as the right to education, as defined by the UN Committee on Economic and Social Rights (which states that education should be accessible, affordable, adaptable and acceptable) should be used to guide national actions, monitoring and reporting on MDGs.

¹⁹ The Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP) succeeded the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in 2009 as the national strategic development framework, covering the period 2010 to 2020

The MDG framework is, moreover, not the only international agenda with which Cameroonian CSOs have engaged and from which they have derived advocacy opportunities. For example, they have also tracked the progress of and entered into partnerships relating to the financing for development agenda that came out of the 2002 Monterrey Financing for Development conference, and CSO advocacy has continued through subsequent meetings in Doha (2008) and the New York review processes (2010), with at least five Cameroonian CSO networks participating in New York. Cameroonian CSOs are also active in national processes and global civil society coalitions, such as BetterAid, on the development effectiveness agenda, and have participated in the High Level Forums on Aid Effectiveness, most recently in the Fourth High Level Forum in Busan, South Korea in 2011.

A recent change in the governance context of Cameroon is decentralisation. 2010 saw the transfer of some areas of competence and financial resources from central government to municipal councils. This potentially offers a new opportunity for engagement and calls for a change in civil society response.

4. Contribution of CSOs to the MDGs and their delivery

Many CSOs reported that they naturally addressed areas covered by the MDGs even before the MDGs were initiated, given their work on poverty alleviation and their connection with vulnerable groups of people, such as rural communities, indigenous people, young people and women.

Examples of ways in which CSOs have contributed to the MDGs that were identified during this review include through capacity building at community and grassroots levels; out-of-school vocational training; mobilisation and education; advocacy and sensitisation; monitoring; and other work in the field, eg project implementation in agriculture for food security. At local level, a particular CSO focus seems to be on HIV/AIDS and malaria prevention, perhaps reflecting the funding that is available from international agencies, while in northern Cameroon, where gender equality in education is an issue, much CSO attention is given to attempts to redress this.

Since 2005, when the previous review was conducted, Cameroonian CSOs assert that they have shown more visibility in their engagement on the MDGs. CSOs consulted as part of this review perceived that their level of work in the field and their number of advocacy activities have significantly increased. The methodology of engagement is also felt to have improved, for example, through more networking. At the level of faith-based organisations, for instance, some churches now come together within a national development platform, the Council of Protestant Churches in Cameroon (CEPCA), in order to improve co-ordination of their work on education and health.

Indeed, faith-based organisations are important in the delivery of the MDGs. For example, in 2012 the Catholic Church provided 1,556 schools serving 379,526 students, up from 1,166 schools serving 360,440 students in 2005, and 278 health centres reaching over 3 million people, compared to 211 health centres serving over 2 million people in 2005. They administered projects, typically involving out-of-school training, community infrastructure development and women's empowerment, costing XAF 1.2 billion,²⁰ from funding released under the Debt-Reduction Development Contract that came as a result of heavily indebted poor country (HIPC) completion in 2006. This demonstrates the importance of faith-based structures as part of civil society in Cameroon, and the need for other actors to engage with them as part of any concerted effort to realise the MDGs and any future development goals.

The example of Dynamique Citoyenne, a network of CSOs that seeks a civil society voice in poverty policy processes, and tracks national budget execution and debt-related policies, offers a good example of how CSOs are engaging in new ways, as monitors and scrutinisers of development activities. Since 2008 they have conducted a yearly review of Cameroon's budget alongside periodic cross-sectoral analyses on themes such as corruption and poverty. These are seen to have sparked much debate through focusing continued attention on maintaining the percentage of the government's budget that goes to pro-poor initiatives. Dynamique Citoyenne has also exposed misuse of government subsidies for small farmers, winning a promise from government that it would look into how such funds could be managed by civil society in future.²¹

Other CSOs that work to influence and inform on public policies, including policies on the MDGs, include ASOAL on health issues and the Global Socio Economy Group Cameroon (GSEG-Cameroon), led by Africa Development Interchange Network (ADIN), on financing for development, development effectiveness and the MDGs in general.

Cameroon Youth and Students for Peace (CAMYOSFOP), a member of GSEG-Cameroon, offers an example of how CSOs are involved in advocacy on MDG issues, in this case on youth employment. With the support of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Cameroon, they have delivered policy papers that are acknowledged to have influenced national youth and women's empowerment policy. Their policy papers on Youth Unemployment and Migration (2009) and Agriculture and Vocational Training as a Gateway to Youth Employment (2011) were discussed seriously within government, and three ministries are presently in discussion with CAMYOSFOP on youth employment issues. CAMYOSFOP was also instrumental in the creation of the Cameroon National Youth Council.

In a further example of how CSOs can advance a policy position, some CSOs have recently been promoting the right to food as something that should be recognised by government. Collectif des ONG pour la Sécurité Alimentaire et le Développement Rural (COSADER) put forward a proposed framework for a Law on Agriculture,²² which is being reviewed by the government, and for which received praise from the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. CSOs are also active in publicly drawing attention to land-grabbing and calling for changes to antiquated laws.

²⁰ US\$2,467,356 as at January 2013 exchange rates

²¹ 'Irregularities in the budgeting process are usually not reported by the legislative body, but rather by CSOs who have an independent view in following the budget: independent investigation reports by Dynamique Citoyenne about the budget execution in the education sector show quite well irregularities detected in public expenditure', Open Budget Questionnaire: Cameroon, International Budget Partnership, September 2007

²² 'Since 2009, COSADER has been organising consultations through the local committees on food security. The results of these consultations with producers' organisations, civil society and local government will be used in the negotiations for the elaboration and adoption of an agricultural law that should take into account the concerns and priorities of men and women producers. ... The Chamber of Agriculture is COSADER's main partner and ally in these activities', quotation from Aziz Elbehri and Marie Lee, *The Role of Women Producer Organisations in Agricultural Value Chains, Food and Agriculture Organisation*, 2011

There has also been some CSO participation in government-led planning processes. Dynamique Citoyenne and ADIN took part in one official process conducted by the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2004, and in the subsequent process that informed the recommendations that led to the GESP. As part of this, their role included collecting information at the community level and serving on national and regional multi-stakeholder consultative committees. Since then there has been continuing representation of civil society on committees within ministries concerned with environment and forests, health, social affairs, and women and family affairs, and on the Technical Committee for Monitoring Economic Programmes.

A recent development to improve monitoring and co-ordination has seen the appointment of a social mediator, under the umbrella of the Democracy Forum, to foster peace and dialogue across a range of actors, including in the neglected area of civil society dialogue with political parties. Initially suggested in 2003, CSOs elected the first social mediator in 2008.

However persistent challenges remain for civil society's work in monitoring and advocacy, including those of attracting sufficient financial resources for sustained and comprehensive advocacy and sensitisation of the public; and of developing a permanent monitoring and reporting system that adequately captures and conveys public opinions.

5. Lessons learned and recommendations

Despite some positive steps already taken, this review suggests that much remains to be done to foster greater CSO participation in MDG and general development processes, both at local and international levels, including by:

- Linking civil society across all stages of socio-economic policy design, with a view to getting the best possible knowledge on perceptions at the community level
- Ensuring that part of financing for development flows directly to local communities, through CSOs, to militate against corruption and to avoid the delays that sometimes characterise projects fully controlled by government
- Establishing a combined sensitisation and monitoring system, by and for civil society, with assistance from international institutions, to go in parallel with the government-controlled information system, which can offer people an opportunity to speak out on development issues in general and progress towards the MDGs in particular
- Building the fundraising capacities of CSOs

CSOs involved in this process feel that progress on the MDGs would be helped by a stronger fight against corruption, including enforcement of the Constitution's Article 66 on the declaration of assets held by state officials, and the promotion of greater community participation. For this to happen, however, both CSOs

and government need to work towards policies, procedures, practices and institutional arrangements that enable CSOs to engage positively and fully in the design, implementation and evaluation of development policies. This is consistent with the view of the Commonwealth Expert Group on Development and Democracy.²³

In tandem with this, much also needs to be done to foster the greater accountability of CSOs to the people they serve or claim to speak for, including by encouraging increased access to CSOs and the sharing of more information. There is a need for divisions within civil society to be bridged to help build a critical mass of civil society consensus. As part of this, CSOs must develop greater financial independence and improve their capacities and effectiveness.

This review process suggests that there is great need for a citizen-owned and led monitoring and evaluation system, parallel to official efforts, that aims on a continuous basis to capture and convey the perception of development achievements by communities – in short, a civil society development observatory. Such a parallel mechanism should be able to capitalise on the opportunity offered by decentralisation processes, for example, by collaborating on a community level monitoring process between CSOs, citizens and municipal councils. As part of both monitoring and promoting the MDGs, more information should be made available in more local languages.

More generally, decentralisation suggests that there is a need to improve collaboration with municipal council mayors, to encourage more actions to be taken at local level and make decentralisation deliver in practice as a new cornerstone of development implementation and policy-making.

To help bring about these positive changes, international actors, including UN and Commonwealth agencies, could engage in more dialogue with the government to encourage it to improve its co-operation with CSOs to accelerate progress on the MDGs.

A number of specific recommendations also emerged from the review process that could accelerate progress on the MDGs and prepare the ground for future goals. These are set out below.

Goal 1:

- Participants in this review believe there is a need to encourage both domestic and foreign direct investments, and the development of promising economic value chains and industrialisation, for example by supporting agro-industries and mining transformation structures.
- CSOs suggest that the government should pursue a target on the development of infrastructure, such as 'build a minimum of 500 km of tarred road per year for the next ten years in order to boost economic activity and contribute to reducing poverty in Cameroon. More tarred roads would be likely to bring about increased agricultural productivity by helping more farmers get their products to market.

²³ 'Making Democracy Work for Pro-Poor Development', report of the Commonwealth Expert Group on Development and Democracy', Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003, <http://www.thecommonwealth.org/files/36861/FileName/MakingDemocracyWork.pdf>

- One suggestion for addressing unemployment that emerged from this review is to set a new minimum wage threshold of 50,000 XAF (approximately US\$100) per month, compared to the current level of under US\$60.
- The informal sector would benefit from simplified procedures to register and formalise informal initiatives into small businesses, and from measures to ease access to capital resources, including state-backed guarantees.
- The government should encourage more private sector investments through fiscal incentives to create more jobs and self-employment opportunities.
- Encouraging public and private sector investments in cereal production, particularly in northern Cameroon where the situation is worse, would help to address hunger.

Goal 2:

- CSOs suggest that it is critical to invest in the construction of more classrooms, and the training and hiring of more primary school teachers. There is also a need for more investment in adult literacy to increase overall literacy.
- More needs to be done to encourage equal enrolment of Muslim girls in northern Cameroon, where the disparity is higher, partly for a range of ingrained cultural reasons and partly because of specific concentrations of poverty.²⁴

Goal 3:

- CSOs suggest that there needs to be more vocational education for women, as part of an approach to increase women's employment opportunities in the non-agricultural sector. Greater steps are also needed to encourage women to stand in elections at all levels.
- CSOs believe that there is a need to strengthen messages around non-discrimination against women and their recruitment in non-farming sectors. The situation in northern Cameroon requires special attention and extra resources.

Goals 4 and 5:

- CSOs believe there should be investment in the training of more medical personnel and the construction of more medical district hospitals to build on what was achieved under the HIPC project implementation process that helped increase the number of child delivery centres between 2005 and 2010. To alleviate the cost of ill health for the poor, it is critical to ensure free healthcare in rural areas. Health facilities should also be under community management.
- CSOs believe there should be more investment in the training of midwives.
- Good governance and the realisation of the right to development are also important elements that could contribute to the achievement of this goal, as well as to Goal 2.

²⁴ For a brief background on this issue, and an example of a civil society response to it, see 'Mothers' campaign promotes girls' right to schooling in northern Cameroon', UNICEF, 2009, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/cameroon_51788.html. For a more extensive background, see 'Why girls leave primary school before having passed the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC), and why many of them are never enrolled at school', Network for Research and Evaluation on Education and Development, http://www.netreed.uio.no/articles/Papers_final/skaar.pdf

Goal 6:

- CSOs involved in this review suggest that free HIV screening for all and encouragement of all infected HIV people to attend treatment are needed, and that sufficient antiretroviral drugs should be provided to those who do not have access. A training curriculum on HIV should be institutionalised in all primary and secondary schools.
- The use of treated mosquito nets should be increased, with campaigns aimed particularly at pregnant women; clean environments around households should be enhanced.

Goal 7:

- CSOs suggest that there is a need to increase investment in potable water projects for remote and slum communities and to ensure greater facilitation of the intervention of non-state actors, and harmonisation of the approaches of different actors. Investment should be increased in social housing and primary and secondary school toilet facilities; slum building should be discouraged and hand-washing promoted in schools.
- Further, CSOs suggest that local municipal councils should increase access to potable water by investing a minimum of 30 per cent of their budgetary resources in this. Clean potable water would help to prevent cholera infections, typhoid and other water-borne diseases prevalent in Cameroon.²⁵ Reducing the impact of diseases would also increase productivity in key economic areas such as agriculture.
- CSOs recommend that more forest reserves should be created and maritime zones protected, and more agro-forestry activities should be initiated and supported.
- CSOs suggest that the government should devolve the construction of social housing to local councils, in partnership with private companies, in order to increase the construction of social housing to a minimum 40,000 houses per year; this would meet one-third of the national housing demand.

Goal 8:

- Full details should be made available of all official development assistance provided to Cameroon within the framework of the MDGs.
- Special tax incentives, particularly import incentives, should be introduced for computers, internet equipment and accessories entering Cameroon, to foster greater access to computers and online resources. The development of computer accessory assembly plants in Cameroon could also be promoted.

Recommendations for all goals:

- A civil society network for the collection of development data should be set up to help bridge the information gap of uncollected MDG data, and to prepare for data collection on future development goals. This network should work in collaboration with municipal councils in order to ensure that information received matches the reality in the field.

²⁵ Cameroon has faced several cholera epidemics over the past few years, including in 2009, 2010 and 2011. The 2010 outbreak infected over 10,000 people and killed 650. Source: 'Cameroon: Cholera outbreak', International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, April 2011

- It is suggested that regularly updated and geographically disaggregated data be obtained to enable greater accuracy and to identify more targeted possible interventions.
- Considering the great disparities that continue to exist between levels of attainment of different goals in different countries in Central Africa, participatory prioritisation in collaboration with communities is needed to guide more targeted, effective financial allocations.

Further, potential solutions put forward during this review to address the cross-cutting problem of land-grabbing include building participation routes for small-scale farmers in policy design and decision-making, improving access to credit and establishing an independent observatory.

6. Post-2015 development framework

In an assessment of the progress of the MDGs in Cameroon since the previous review in 2005, it appears that the gap between the goals, the results achieved in the field and the real needs of the population remains wide. A different approach is necessary, both in the way needs are assessed before development goals are set and in the way achievements are monitored. It is helpful to go back to the six core values set out in the Millennium Declaration: freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility.²⁶ Any new goals must be consistent with these values.

As well as the recommendations made in the previous section, emerging issues identified by this review process as having become more urgent since the formulation of the MDGs include:

- Improving access to information
- Tackling corruption
- Taking into account the impact of conflict on development and taking measures to minimise conflict
- Mitigating the high impact of land-grabbing – there is a need to reform the law on land tenure, pass the CSO-proposed law on agriculture discussed above and introduce protection measures for communities which rely on the land for their livelihoods
- Addressing youth unemployment, including through the promotion of small and medium enterprises, microfinance and public-private partnerships

To underpin development efforts, laws need to be made fit for purpose and to be properly applied, and all global conventions that Cameroon has signed must be respected.

²⁶ United Nations Millennium Declaration, UN General Assembly, 8 September 2000, <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>

7. Conclusion

2015 now appears to be too close a target date for the MDGs to be achieved in Cameroon. Losses appear to have been made even on some of the limited progress reported in the previous review in 2005. The government needs to be more ambitious and take stronger action, in partnership with civil society, to ensure better prospects beyond 2015 and the realisation of Cameroon's potential as a strategically positioned Central African country.

The notion of civil society as a legitimate development partner is gaining ground, and there is potential to capitalise on this to better influence development policies. As part of this, CSOs need to be more proactive and to make clearer demands. More active advocacy towards all stakeholders, including international agencies, is also necessary to promote more effective partnerships for development.

Participating organisations

Original research partner:

- Africa Development Interchange Network

Focus group participants, draft report consultation participants and key informants:

- Africa Development Interchange Network
- BASC Caritas
- Banque des Etats de l’Afrique Centrale (BEAC) – Central Bank of Central African States
- Bureau for Economic and Technical Studies
- Cameroon National Platform of Civil Society Organisations (PLANOSCAM)
- Cameroon Youth and Students Forum for Peace
- Commonwealth Foundation
- Dynamique Citoyenne
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
- Ministry of Commerce
- Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Programming
- Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife
- National AIDS Control Committee
- National Institute of Statistics
- National Malaria Control Committee
- NWADO Bamenda
- Reach Out Cameroon, Buea
- Roots and Tuber National Development Programme
- United Nations Development Programme
- World Bank Cameroon

Press conference participants:

- Cameroon Tribune
- Eden Newspaper
- The Guardian Post Newspaper
- Hot News
- The Median
- The Post
- The Star

Consultation partners:

- Collectif des ONG pour la Sécurité Alimentaire et le Développement Rural (COSADER)
- CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Consultation participants:

- Alliance Nationale Contre la Faim et la Malnutrition (ANCFM)
- Actions Vitales pour le Développement durable (AVD)
- BVD
- Cameroon National Platform of Civil Society Organisations (PLANOSCAM)
- CDD
- Chamber of Agriculture
- Centre Régional Africain pour le Développement Endogène et Communautaire (CRADEC)
- Cercle de Recherche et d'Appui à l'Entreprenariat des Femmes et des Jeunes (CRAFEJE)
- CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
- Collectif des ONG pour la Sécurité Alimentaire et le Développement Rural (COSADER)
- Community Initiative for Sustainable Development (COMINSUD)
- Council Support Programme (CSP)
- DIALOGUES
- Féd Handicapés
- FJNC
- GICAPIEBO
- Governance and Entrepreneurship Consultation Group (GECOG)
- Les Jeudis de Cotonou
- Mission Clarté
- North West Association for Development Organisations (NWADO)
- South West Civil Society Organisations (SWECSON)
- Promoting Local Innovation in ecologically-orientated agriculture and natural resource management: PROLINNOVA-Cameroon
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