



Partnering to Reduce Inequalities, Attain Peace, Justice and Build Strong Institutions in Cameroon

Atangcho Akonumbo, Albert Mbiatem, and Emile Sunjo
(University of Buea, Cameroon)

Abstract

This study examines the role of Sustainable Development Goal 17 on partnerships in reducing inequalities, building strong institutions and attaining peace and Justice in Cameroon. Partnerships have been increasingly considered to be crucial in implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). 19 targets have been identified by the United Nations (UN) on goal 17. This study essentially relies on target 17.17 meant to encourage effective partnerships. Meeting this target can potentially contribute to reducing inequalities in particular, building strong institutions and attaining peace and justice in Cameroon. Local, regional and international partnerships have been put in place to address questions of inequality, peace and justice and building strong institutions found respectively under goals 10 and 16. Cameroon, seven years into the SDGs agenda, is yet to show a clear path to the realization of goals 10 and 16. These challenges can be attributed to the limited success in putting in place effective partnerships envisaged by target 17.17 of Goal 17. Peace, security and justice in particular have experienced significant challenges in recent years and inequalities have been on a rise. Using a qualitative case study research design, this study sought to examine the relevance of partnerships in the attainment of SDGs 10 and 16; understand the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of partnerships on the achievement of the Goals based; and explore the best strategies for the implementation of partnerships that may contribute to the attainment of SDGs 10 and 16 in Cameroon. It reveals that much still needs to be done for goals 10 and 16 to be satisfactorily realized in Cameroon. It also shows that partnerships are indispensable for the attainment of goals 10 and 16 in Cameroon and that to be effective, they must involve the active participation of beneficiaries. Finally, the study demonstrates that an advance in one of the three goals contributes to progress in the others.

Keywords: Partnerships, Sustainable Development Goals, Inequalities, Peace, Justice, Institutions

Introduction

Partnerships have been considered to be vital in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (MacDonald et al 2018; United Nations 2020 58). Partnerships in the SDGs context are captured by goal 17 that recognizes multi-stakeholder partnerships as important vehicles for mobilizing and sharing knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, particularly developing countries such as Cameroon. The SDGs were adopted in 2015 by the United Nations to address 17 most urgent challenges to sustainable development in the world. The SDGs are a collection of

17 global goals set by the United Nations (UN) to be implemented by the year 2030. The goals cover the following areas: Poverty, Hunger, Health, Education, Gender Equality, Energy, Economic Growth, Industry, Inequalities on all levels, Sustainable Communities, Responsible Consumption, Climate Change, Marine Life, Environment, Social Justice, and Partnership.

Among the SDGs are goal 10 to reduce inequalities; goal 16 to promote peace, justice and strong institutions and goal 17 to strengthen the means of implementation and build effective partnerships for sustainable development. Goal 17 can thus be considered a watershed goal since it is perceived to be necessary for the realization of others, including goals 10 and 16. In addressing the limitations of traditional state-led and top-down development approaches, partnerships have gained ground to become an indispensable paradigm in sustainable development (Stibbe et al, 2018). The scale and ambition of the new agenda requires a revitalized global partnership to ensure its implementation. Cameroon like many other African countries has been a party to the universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and to ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030 (UNDP, 2022). In practice however, in spite of the commitment to, and implementation of the SDGs agenda for almost seven years in Cameroon, sustainable development is yet to be a reality.

Cameroon is a country located in Central Africa and has an area of 475,440 km². It is a low income country with a population of 26,545,864 inhabitants and has a moderate population density of 56 people per km². Cameroon is endowed with rich natural resources, including oil and gas, mineral ores, and high-value species of timber, and agricultural products, such as coffee, cotton, cocoa, maize, and cassava. In spite of such natural resource endowments, poverty rate has been on an increase as shown by recent World Bank statistics: rate growing from 24.5% in 2019 to 25.3% in 2021. (World Bank, 2021). Poor governance mainly characterized by corruption hinders the development of the country. The 2021 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index ranks Cameroon 144 out of 180 countries, with a score of 27/100 (Transparency International, 2021).

Cameroon remains lowly ranked on development classifications as it continues to encounter numerous challenges on the realization of the goals. It is ranked 150th out of 187 countries on Human Development Index classification (World Population Review 2022). The nineteen targets of goal 17 partnership broken into five categories – finance, technology, capacity building, trade and systemic – have not considerably impacted in fostering equality, peace, justice and strong institutions in Cameroon. After a low performance on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – with only two targets (target 1.c and target 6.a) out of seventeen targets concretized –, Cameroon now into the SDGs agenda, encounters operational and functional challenges towards realization of goals.

Cameroon has in the image of most Central African states, been facing wide-ranging challenges relating to economic development, social cohesion, administrative capacity and political governance (Southern Voice 2019). The country which has for over five decades since independence been considered as the island of peace in the tumultuous Central Africa is currently affected by pockets of instability mainly in its regions of North West, South West, Far North, and

East. The country is equally host to societal inequalities between citizens of varied social ranks and such have contributed to the lack of fair access to justice in a context where institutions need to be strengthened. The literature reveals that ineffective partnerships for goals in Africa has been characterised by poor collaboration across societal sectors. Kumar et al argue that, the four major challenges that need to be addressed for achieving the SDGs across the African continent are financial, maintaining peace, measuring progress and accountability (Kumar et al, 2016). Vera discussed the implementation challenges as being linked to limited capacities on national planning agendas, evidence-based prioritisation and sequencing of policy interventions in a way that leverages intersectoral collaborations and minimizes policy trade-offs (Vera, 2018). Another study deplored the lack of confidence in the ability of universities to contribute meaningfully to economic development, which was exacerbated by weak investments in research infrastructures and the pervasiveness of poor governance (Akpezi, 2018). Gender disparity and gender based violence was identified among the most challenging forms of inequality with women encountering disadvantages in access to work, economic assets and participation in private and public decision-making (Esuna and Nergis, 2017).

Over half a decade following the adoption of the SDGs, their necessary interlinkages and interdependencies ascribed to goal 17 remain ineffective in Cameroon, thus the need to fill the gaps on partnership for goals strongly arises. This study examines the extent to which the partnership dimension drawn from goal 17 provides the required interlinkages and interdependencies among goals and specifically with respect to Goals 10 and goal 16. It is fundamentally an assessment on the aspects of inequalities, peace, justice and strong institutions in line with partnership prescriptions. This study seeks to answer the following three research questions: why are partnerships important for the attainment of SDGs 10 and 16? What makes partnerships to achieve the goals – effectiveness/ineffectiveness? What strategies for the implementation of partnerships can contribute to the attainment of SDGs 10 and 16 in Cameroon? The rest of this paper is structured into three main sections as follows: Methodology and Conceptual Framework, Results and Conclusion.

Methodology and Conceptual Framework

The approach adopted for this study was qualitative and inductive. Cameroon was used as a case study because of the rich experience of the country with both international and local partnerships for the SDGs. An interview guide was developed and pre-tested to generate initial data. Pre-testing the interview guide and carrying out a preliminary review of literature, helped in identifying patterns and relationships. This process was useful in developing a conceptual framework for the study as presented in Fig 1 below.

The qualitative approach was useful in gaining an understanding of the views of stakeholders on the importance and motivations for engaging or supporting the use of partnerships in addressing goals 10 and 16. The case study design adopted for this study was particularly useful because the study sought to obtain an in-depth appreciation of the role of partnerships in the attainment of SDGs.

Field data was collected using key informant semi-structured interviews with local community leaders, government officials, senior staff of United Nations Agencies and academics in Buea, Douala and Yaoundé in Cameroon. Participants were recruited using the snowball sampling method. The researchers first carried out interviews with people they already knew. The initial contacts recommended other persons to the team based on their experience and knowledge of partnerships for the SDGs. To ensure that the right data was collected, open-ended questions were developed and pre-tested and reviewed before the effective commencement of the interviews. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour. Data saturation was used as a criterion to determine the number of interviews to ensure that all shades of opinion on the subject were covered. This means that the interviews were conducted up to a point when no new information was being obtained.

Data collected were processed via thematic content analysis. The first step in the process was the transcription of the recorded interviews. The transcription process helped gain familiarity with the data to facilitate the identification of common themes. The transcripts were re-read and significant statements that directly addressed the research questions were underlined and extracted. The meaning of each significant statement was formulated and written down. These meanings were constantly compared with the original transcripts to ensure that they accurately reflected what the respondents had said. The formulated meanings were then organized into clusters and themes. Reliability was ensured by recording interviews and taking notes and reviewing each tape and all notes together with the transcripts to ensure they were accurate. Consistency was sought by ensuring that a guide was developed and pre-tested to ensure that the views of participants were solicited for the same questions.

Fig.1. Conceptual Framework for the Role of Partnerships in the Realization of Goals 10 and 16

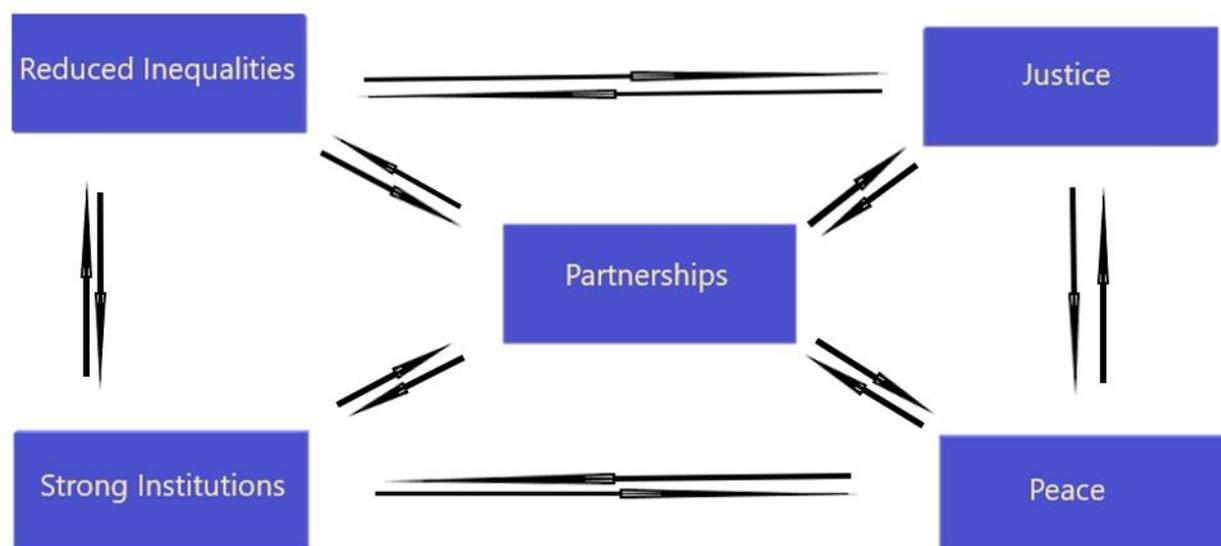


Figure 1 above conceptually visualizes the interactions among goals 10, 16 and 17, by illustrating the central role of partnerships to respond to issues of inequalities, peace justice and institutions.

Partnerships are projected as key means to have the objectives attained. What is essentially drawn from the conceptual representation of figure 1, are the mutual interconnections among activities relating to reduced inequalities, peace, justice and strong institutions. This is to say that, the building of strong institutions, the reduction of inequalities and the attainment of peace and justice are mutually supportive to one another and overall facilitated by effective partnerships. The various meanings given to the concepts – partnerships, reduced inequalities, peace, justice and strong institutions – in line with the three SDGs under study, strongly depict interconnections among the goals.

According to the UN system, partnerships for sustainable development as prescribed by goal 17, are multi-stakeholder initiatives freely undertaken by governments, intergovernmental organizations, major groups and other stakeholders, which efforts are useful to the implementation of inter-governmentally, agreed development goals and commitments. This partnership is mainly guided by three dimensions: exchange, integrate and transform (Stibbe et al, 2018). Goal 10 on Reduced inequalities, calls for efforts towards reducing disparities in income as well as those based on age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status within a country. Also, there are inequalities among countries, including those related to representation, migration and development assistance (United Nations, 2022).

Peace, as reflected by goal 16 is very much aligned with Johan Galtung's positive peace that refers to the integration of human society (Galtung, 1964) mainly guided by the following aspects: structural integration, optimism, prevention and peace by peaceful means. The peace proposed by SDGs is development inclined with much attention given to human and structural development. Justice as captured by goal 16 specifically covers targets 16.3 and 16.C which are: "promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all"; and "promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development." The aspect of strong institutions by goal 16 is mainly captured in target 16.6 which refers to "developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels." Thus the suppression of the over-personalization in policy making, decision making process and public service delivery will contribute to strengthening institutions.

Results

The objective of this qualitative study was to examine the role of partnerships in reducing inequalities, building strong institutions and attaining peace and justice in Cameroon. As represented in Fig 1 above, we sought the views of stakeholders on the relationship between partnerships on attaining goals 10 and 16 of the SDGs in Cameroon. Cameroon ratified in September 2015, at the UN headquarters in New York, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The country had previously joined another UN agenda on development known as MDGs.

Participants in the study came from diverse backgrounds. All participants had knowledge or experience of partnerships for the SDGs. Meanings were formulated from the interview transcripts and organized into themes. The analysis revealed main themes that were important in

understanding the role of partnership in attaining goals 10 and 16 in Cameroon. These were: common goals are better achieved through collaboration, importance of partnerships, partnerships should include all stakeholders, their motivations for engaging in them, strategies for effective partnerships to attain the goals and factors that can undermine the success of partnerships. Thus, this section on results will cover the sub-sections: low scale of realization of goals 10 and 16 in Cameroon; reasons why Cameroon needs partnerships to attain goals 10 and 16; challenges to partnerships in achieving goals 10 and 16; strategies for the effective implementation of partnerships to attain the goals in Cameroon.

Low Scale of Realization of Goals 10 and 16 in Cameroon

All participants were of the view that more needs to be done to attain peace, justice, reduce inequalities and build strong institutions in Cameroon¹. Cameroon was also considered by most participants to have not met the targets set for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agenda that preceded the SDGs². The literature shows that this low level of realization of the goals is however not unique to Cameroon (Crossette, 2019). It has been observed that most countries, especially in the developing world are lagging behind in efforts to attain the goals.

Under the 2015 agenda for MDGs, Cameroon concretized only two targets out of the seventeen. Cameroon had pledged to specifically track 17 targets and ultimately only materialized two targets. This is target 1.c (“Halve in 2015 the proportion of people suffering from hunger”) and target 6.a (“By 2015, have ended the spread of HIV/AIDS and begin to reverse the current trend”). Indeed, the proportion of the population living below the poverty line effectively fell from 40.2% in 2001 to 37.5% in 2014, registering a drop of 2.7 points for this period (INS, 2015). While the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate has fallen from around 5.5% to 3.0% in 2014 (INS, 2015). A participant from the National Institute for Statistics (INS) made the following observation of the country’s performance: “Yes poverty has certainly declined on 2.7 rate but in terms of mass it has rather increased with the rise in the number of poor people. Models specific to the social context must be adopted.”³

This low scale achievement led the country to renew the MDGs for the 2020 deadline. (CAMERCAP-PARC, 2020). At the same time, the country embarked on the new 2030 agenda for SDGs. Cameroon joining the current development agenda without having considerably achieved the goals of the previous agenda, has logically raised many doubts on its readiness and capacity to perform efficiently on SDGs. Besides, Cameroon on its SDG journey has been seriously affected by the COVID-19 pandemic which has unprecedentedly affected the 2030 Agenda. (CAMERCAP-PARC, 2020).

Economic growth in Cameroon since 2010 has not met expectations as projected by the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper. The country has performed well below the 7%, the expected annual average over the period of the strategy for growth and employment, supposed to mark the

¹ Interviews in Buea, Douala and Yaounde, March 2022

² Interviews in Yaounde and Douala, March 2022

³ Interview in Yaounde, 16 March 2022.

first phase towards the vision of being an emerging country in 2035. (CAMERCAP-PARC, 2020). The SDGs agenda in Cameroon is very much in line with Cameroon Vision 2035 initiated in 2009. The overall objective of the vision is to make Cameroon an emerging country over the next 25-30 years which is the period required to move from one generation to another. The vision also has medium-term objectives, notably: poverty alleviation; becoming a middle income country; becoming a newly industrialized country and consolidating democracy and national unity while respecting the country's diversity. This vision in principles further matches the SDGs in the sense that it promotes the cooperation between the government, civil society, private sector and development partners (Ministry of the Economy Planning and Regional Development, 2009). But in practice, the collaboration between these key sectors is still to meet societal expectations in a context where the government remains every much dominant and as a result the civil society and private sector have limited margin for manoeuvre to influence the development goals.

The 2020 UNDP's Human Development report – a key benchmark in measuring sustainable development – describes the encouraging Human Development Index (HDI) trends in Cameroon from 1990-2019. During this period, Cameroon's HDI value increased from 0.448 to 0.563, an increase of 25.7 percent. Cameroon HDI's score according to the World Population Review is maintained to 0.563 in 2022. Table 1 below reviews Cameroon's progress in each of the HDI indicators. Between 1990 and 2019, Cameroon's life expectancy at birth increased by 5.9 years, mean years of schooling increased by 2.8 years and expected years of schooling increased by 4.1 years. Cameroon's GNI per capita increased by about 15.5 percent between 1990 and 2019. Cameroon's HDI of 0.563 however remained below the average of 0.631 for countries in the medium human development group (UNDP, 2020).

Table 1: Cameroon's HDI Trends Based on Consistent Time Series Data and New Goalposts

	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capita (2017 PPP\$)	HDI value
1990	53.4	8.0	3.5	3,101	0.448
1995	51.6	7.5	4.2	2,400	0.432
2000	51.0	7.3	4.8	2,589	0.440
2005	52.8	8.4	5.1	2,902	0.470
2010	55.1	10.2	5.3	3,056	0.505
2015	57.6	12.2	6.0	3,410	0.549
2016	58.1	12.1	6.1	3,465	0.553
2017	58.5	12.1	6.2	3,487	0.557
2018	58.9	12.1	6.3	3,526	0.560
2019	59.3	12.1	6.3	3,581	0.563

Source UNDP, Human Development Report 2020

The increase in Human development measurement does not however imply Cameroon's realization on key constituents of sustainable development. For instance, the minimum wage in Cameroon is very low. That is 36,270 CFA (USD 61.73) francs per month, applicable to all employees in all sectors. (Federal Minimum Wage, 2022).

The 2021 Sustainable Development Goals Report has raised serious concerns on the attainment of goals 10, 16 and 17 mostly in low and middle income countries. On goal 10, the report states that, "inequality persists, whether in income, wealth, opportunities or other dimensions...The pandemic is exacerbating existing inequalities within and among countries and hitting the most vulnerable people and the poorest countries hardest." (United Nations, 2021: 46). It states on goal 16 that, "The world is still a long way from achieving the goal of peaceful, just and inclusive societies... the average prevalence rate of bribery in low income countries is 37.6 per cent, versus 7.2 per cent in high income countries." (United Nations, 2021:59). The report on goal 17 indicates: "The pandemic is further testing multilateral and global partnerships that were already shaky. Although Official Development Assistance (ODA) increased and remittance flows declined less than expected in 2020, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) dropped by 40 per cent." (United Nations, 2021: 60).

A recent report on countries' performance has captured the different levels of achievement of goals in Cameroon. Almost seven years down the line, only two out of the seventeen goals are on track. That is goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and goal 13 (Climate Change). For the goals under study, goals 16 and 17 are stagnating meanwhile goal 10 lacks enough statistics on its performance. Cameroon on attaining SDGs is ranked 134 out of 165 countries with a score of 53.5 (Jeffrey et al, 2021).

The country on goal 10 is yet to be effective on income distribution as the Gini coefficient has only been adjusted for top income. It is important to note that the higher the Gini coefficient, the greater the gap between the incomes of a country's richest and poorest people. A country's Gini coefficient is important because it helps identify high levels of income inequality, which can have several undesirable political and economic impacts (World Population Review 2022). A respondent from a civil society organization gave a sad picture of the gaps on incomes:

The incomes of many Cameroonians are close to the minimum wage. Those who do not occupy influential administrative positions only rely on their relatively low salaries while those in charge rely not only on their salaries but also on extravagant allowances. This has continued to widen the gap between the rich and the poor. Recently, the minister of Territorial Administration gave brand new cars to Divisional Officers while teachers on the other hand are unheard when requesting their incomes restored duly and on time.⁴

Another respondent explained the low level of realization in the following words when asked whether there were successful example of partnerships to address goals 10 and 16 in Cameroon:

⁴ Interview in Buea, 2 March 2022.

Not sure there are successful examples which could be cited as we still have visible inequalities and some parts of the country are still not that peaceful. However we see trends towards public collaboration with civil society organizations. We also see a trend of civil society organizations working with one another. External partners often involved in the collaborative path include UN, AU institutions and other international development organizations.⁵

The trends in collaboration mentioned by this participant however show that there are efforts being made to attain goal 17 in Cameroon which can be helpful in effectively addressing goals 10 and 16. The difficulties in identifying successful partnerships to address 10 and 16 pointed to by the participant show that the level of realization cannot be considered significant or visible.

The SDG 2021 report on goal 16 has given a picture of not good performance relating to aspects of peace, justice and institutions. It mainly reveals the country's poor record on access to and affordability of justice, press freedom index, corruption perception index and penitentiary detention. Peace in Cameroon is seriously affected as the current situation contrast with the rather positive feedback of the report on homicide. The Anglophone conflict in the North West and South West regions has led to the rising number of killings since October 2017. In the space of less than five years, death toll has ranged between 4000-12000 (CHRDA, 2021), hundreds of villages have been burnt and pillaged (CHRDA 2021), over 750,000 people have been internally displaced (UN OCHA, June 2021), with a further 60,000 Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria (UNHCR, September 2020), and an estimated 2.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance within Cameroon as a result of the conflict (UN OCHA situation report July 2021). This crisis in particular has affected the justice system and institutional mechanism with victims of violence not obtaining due reparations.

Reasons why Cameroon Needs Partnerships to Attain Goals 10 and 16

All participants said partnerships were indispensable for Cameroon to achieve goals 10 and 16⁶. The literature reviewed also shows that partnerships are needed for the attainment of the SDGs. There reasons were advanced for the need of partnerships by Cameroon. These were: to avoid duplication and waste of efforts, effectively and efficiently address common goals and sharing experiences on best practices⁷.

According to all participants, partnerships are necessary because common goals are better fulfilled through collaboration. They explained that such goals as peace, justice, reducing inequalities and building strong institutions were of interest to both national and international actors who can best realize them by working together. One respondent in Douala for example said partnerships are needed because:

⁵ Interview in Yaounde, 16 March 2022

⁶ Interviews, Yaounde, Buea and Douala, March 2022

⁷ Interviews in Yaounde, Buea and Douala, March 2022

SDGs 10 and 16 are common problems in many societies, especially in less developed ones such as Cameroon. As such, partnering with countries that have attained at least 70% of SDGs 10 and 16 will help Cameroon to accelerate their attainment by taking advantage of their experiences.⁸

Similarly, another respondent said partnerships are necessary to effectively carry out the volume of work that needs to be done to address these goals. According to this respondent:

There is so much that needs to be done to address goals 10 and 16 that Cameroon cannot do working alone. In addition to working with international partners, stakeholders within Cameroon need to be involved to effectively tackle the problems addressed under goals 10 and 16. This need for broad-based collaboration is important because these issues affect not only people of Cameroon, but also other countries and those who are involved in different relations with the country.⁹

These findings are in line with those found in the literature. (Stibbe and Prescott, 2020) for example see common goals as a reason why partnerships are needed. Both authors however caution that it is not in every case that stakeholders may engage in partnerships because there is a common challenge that should be addressed. According to them, some stakeholders are not natural collaborators that will instinctively act towards achieving common goals. For such actors they contend, “a partnering mindset is something that may need to be actively cultivated” (Stibbe and Prescott, 2020, 47).

Challenges to Partnerships in Achieving Goals 10 and 16

Partnership is designed to facilitate an intensive global engagement in support of implementation of all goals and targets bringing together government, private sector, civil society, UN system and other actors and mobilizing all available resources (United Nations, 2015). Partnering to achieve goals is a fundamental prescription of the 2030 agenda. In Cameroon, partnership to reduce inequalities, attain peace and justice, and build strong institutions has for the past seven years since SDGs adoption in 2015 encountered numerous challenges as collaborative efforts among stakeholders are yet to show a clear path in achieving goal 10, 16 and 17.

Participants for interviews largely raised the aspects of structural deficiencies affecting mostly vulnerable strata of the population in Cameroon. They are of the opinion that, amidst infrastructural and security deficiencies in Cameroon, inequalities have deepened for vulnerable populations having at their disposal weaker health systems and facing existing humanitarian crises. Refugees and migrants, as well as indigenous peoples, older persons, people with disabilities and children are particularly at risk of being left behind. And hate speech targeting vulnerable groups is rising.¹⁰ Participants also described as difficult the journey to achieve peace

⁸ Interview in Douala, 12 March 2022

⁹ Interview in Yaounde, 16 March 2022.

¹⁰ Interviews in Douala, Buea, and Yaounde, March 2022.

given that Cameroon is currently affected by pockets of instability in four out of ten regions of the country.¹¹

The inequalities were very striking on health aspects as a respondent from the Ministry of Health laid emphasis on the lack of access to health facilities: “Despite collaborating with good number of international partners, access to health facilities remains extremely difficult among low income Cameroonians and those living in remote or rural areas. Urban areas equally encounter serious medical equipment challenges.”¹² Recently in March 2022, a mainstream media in Cameroon revealed the reproachable medical care given to quarantined cholera patients in public medical centres. It reported on medical equipment shortage in terms of beds, drips and other essential equipment to administer treatments to patients in Limbe Mile1 and Bota Hospitals¹³

The security crisis in the northern regions of the country with the Boko Haram phenomenon, the socio-political crisis in the North-West and South-West regions transformed into a secessionist crisis and the uncontrolled influx of Central African refugees, all constitute the pockets of instability in Cameroon. (CAMERCAP-PARC, 2020). For almost five years, the crisis in the two Anglophone regions, threats posed by Boko Haram in the northern regions, and conflicts in the CAR and the DRC have been creating and posing obstacles to peace and internal security. This situation greatly weighs on state budget and funding that can be allocated to development projects.

Implementation challenges are largely presented from governance and institutional capacity perspectives. The lack of clarity around ratification, reporting, accountability mechanisms, and roles and responsibilities is a result of poor governance and weak institutionalization. (Belay, 2019). In many countries, capacity needs and gaps represent a critical obstruction to meaningful SDG 16 implementation and follow-up. These capacity issues are often, though not exclusively, felt in countries that are post-conflict, transitioning out of conflict, fragile, or least developed. Issues such as social cohesion, illicit financial flows, corruption and many forms of discrimination remain grave challenges. (High Level Political Forum, 2019).

A civil society organization respondent described challenges ascribed to goals 10 and 16 as closely interrelated and linked to cause-effect analogy:

The country is rife with inequalities between sexes & gender; exercise of authority between the arms of governance (Executive, Legislative, Judiciary); various professional corps, tribes, regions, people with disabilities or vulnerabilities and others as the case may be. The exercise of authority is not democratic, not transparent and often corrupt. These inequalities directly impact peace and the quality of institutions which has resulted in the national conflicts as with the Separatist movement, intertribal wars, injustice and abuse of human rights.¹⁴

¹¹ Interviews in Douala, Buea, and Yaounde, March 2022.

¹² Interview in Yaounde, 15 March 2022.

¹³ Equinox TV news, 25 March 2022.

¹⁴ Interview in Buea, 17 March 2022.

Another respondent, from a civil society organization described the challenges pertaining to goal 16 from a peace, justice and institutional perspectives:

In the Cameroonian context, SDG 16 is based on the understanding that conflicts, insecurity, weak institutions, and limited access to justice are threats to sustainable development. Crisis in 2016 in the CEMAC zone, leading all the countries to a program of economic reforms under supervision by the IMF and other partners. In addition to the so-called objective reasons, it is our duty to recognize the weaknesses of our essentially extroverted economic model, with a trade balance structurally in deficit for more than a decade, the weak competitiveness of the Cameroonian economy to which is added poor governance, in particular in the public sector with its corollary that is Corruption. All this environment was not already very conducive to a resumption of growth in the country and sub-region.¹⁵

Similarly, a respondent from the Ministry of Water Resources and Energy insisted on the so far poor performance of goal 16 in Cameroon amidst partnership:

“I strongly believe more has to be done to attain these goals and most especially goal 16. I say so because we are in constant quest for peace in our country, our judicial system is very corrupt, thus, the exacerbation of the unjust Cameroon in which we live. Our institutions are mere window dressing. A good goal 16 will solve goal”¹⁶

According to a respondent in charge of cooperation at the ministry of Agriculture, the predominance of the government on partnering with local actors does not ease collaboration.¹⁷The required collaboration between the government, the civil society, the private sector and citizens has been described by most interviewees as lacking necessary mutuality. The government dominates the interactions with the other sectors thus leaving them limited margin for manoeuvre to influence SDGs and their implementation.

The challenges as discussed above in an indication of the remaining long journey for Cameroon in using goal 17 to attain goals 10 and 16. Thus, strategies to respond to the challenges linked to inequalities, peace, justice, and institutions must be centered on effective implementation of partnerships

Strategies for the Effective Implementation of Partnerships to Attain the Goals in Cameroon

The partnership journey starts with building an understanding of an overlap of alignment of interest among the partners which allows them to together build an overarching vision – the big picture change that the partnership wants to contribute to. (Stibbe et al, 2018). A successful sustainable development agenda entails partnerships between governments, the civil society and the private sector. These inclusive partnerships built upon principles and values, a shared vision,

¹⁵ Interview in Yaounde, 16 March 2022.

¹⁶ Interview in Yaounde, 16 March 2022.

¹⁷ Interview in Buea, 7 March 2022.

and shared goals that place people and the planet at the center, are needed at the global, regional, national and local level (SDG Tracker, 2020). Participants were of the view that an inclusive and participatory strategy that ensures local ownership or leadership is necessary for the effective realization of goals 10, 16 and 17 in Cameroon.

The importance of an inclusive and participatory strategy to partnerships was emphasized by all participants. The participants believed that beneficiaries are seldom involved in the setting-up of partnerships, the definition of issues to be addressed by the partnerships and decisions regarding the resources required and how projects are to be implemented. Partnerships set-up this way according to most participants, tend to serve the interests of the donors or the government and as such, make it unlikely that problems such as inequalities and the near absence of peace that are felt more by communities will be effectively attended to.¹⁸ One respondent from an international governmental organization in Yaoundé for example said:

Partnerships need to be based on the needs expressed by the beneficiaries to succeed. The only way to ensure the needs of intended beneficiaries will be effectively expressed, is to involve the supposed beneficiaries in the partnership from the very beginning when the partnership is being set-up. To guarantee such active participation of beneficiaries, it is essential their needs are clearly expressed in policies designed to achieve goals 10, 16 and 17.¹⁹

The above statement is much in line with the statement of a respondent at the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional development:

The relative growth paths for each country should be implemented so that developed countries can assist less developed countries specifically with their shortcomings. Adopt a growth path specific to concerns of the countries in need. Adopt path which would guarantee a sustainable development in line with endogenous means.²⁰

Still in the same vein, a participant of the Ministry of Secondary Education suggested inclusive education strategies to accommodate everyone in schools: “Creation and running of schools that take into account the needs of all including that of disabled persons in the construction of school infrastructure; provide persons with disabilities with appropriate materials for their education.”²¹

The top-down approach to attaining the goals is therefore one of the main obstacles to their realization. The criticism of this approach in the literature shows that many authors such as Manning (2009; 2010) and Hák et al. (2016) recommend the participatory strategy that participants believed will be more useful. Decisions regarding partnerships, the attainment of peace and justice, the reduction of inequalities and the development of strong institutions thus need to be made with adequate knowledge of the context so that grassroots support is obtained and the right issues are addressed.

¹⁸ Interviews in Douala, Yaounde and Buea, March 2022

¹⁹ Interview in Yaounde, 16 March 2022.

²⁰ Interview in Yaounde, 17 March 2022.

²¹ Interview in Yaounde, 17 March 2022.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the views of stakeholders in Cameroon on the role of partnerships in attaining goals 10 and 16. To achieve this aim, the research focused on understanding the reasons why different actors in Cameroon including the government prioritize partnerships, what motivates them, the challenges they face and the strategies that can be used to overcome them.

The study reveals that partnerships are indispensable for the realisation of common goals such as peace, justice, reducing inequalities and building strong institutions. Without partnerships, participants believed it would be difficult to realise the goals. The reasons advanced as to why they are important or why Cameroon needs partnerships to attain goals 10 and 16 included increased agency to address these goals for the government and increased legitimacy for international partners to operate in, or access some communities in Cameroon which would otherwise be inaccessible. The results also show that the attainment of goals 10 and 16 would create a space that is conducive for the initiation and development of effective partnerships. The relationships between goals 10, 16 and 17 is therefore one of complementarity.

In spite of the importance of partnerships, the study shows that there are important challenges that need to be overcome for Cameroon to effectively benefit from the opportunities they offer in its bid to realise SDGs goals 10 and 16. The design of the partnerships has been a major challenge to ensuring success. Poignantly, participants believed that current partnership structures have failed to ensure participation of beneficiaries in decision making and that communication with beneficiaries in the conception and implementation processes was also limited.

In spite of the contributions of this study, it has some methodological limitations. As with other case studies, the sample includes only participants within a very specific context. The generalization of conclusions from this study should thus be made with reservations. It is necessary to undertake more research and extend the sample to other countries. The study has nonetheless answered some interesting questions. It has shown how differences in views have not undermined interest in and engagement in partnerships to achieve SDGs 10 and 16, although their achievement and sustainability were not investigated in this study.

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