

# Country Report

June 2019

Progress towards peaceful, just and inclusive societies

# SDG 16+ in Cameroon



WAA CAMEROON



Global Partnership  
for the Prevention of  
Armed Conflict

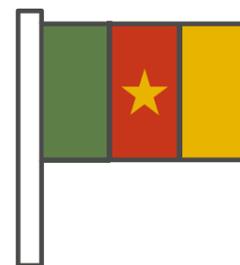
16 PEACE, JUSTICE  
AND STRONG  
INSTITUTIONS



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# Cameroon at a glance



## Population

**24,100,000**

source: Human Development Index, Cameroon, UNDP, June 2019



**170** Villages have been destroyed since 2017 in the South- and North-West

source: www.crisisgroup.org, May 2019 report



at least **1,850** people killed and **473,000** internally displaced people since september 2017

source: www.crisisgroup.org, May 2019 report, UNHCR, IDP response December 2018



of 237,000 students in the South-West only **63,000** students enrolled for the 2017/18 academic year

source: Humanitarian Weekly Regional - OCHA, Septemebr 2018

**With its specific focus on good and inclusive governance, peace and security policies, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 addresses the core of sustainable development issues in Cameroon. This is the reason why Women in Alternative Action (WAA) Cameroon in cooperation with the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) carried out an independent civil society led Voluntary National Review (VNR) of Goal 16 and related peace targets – called SDG 16+.**

This review provides a civil society perspective of Cameroon's progress towards creating a peaceful, just and inclusive society. It complements the official VNR submitted to the United Nations by the government of Cameroon. The United Nations' VNR process is conceived as a regular and inclusive review of progress on SDGs, undertaken by all countries. This process serves to strengthen policies and institutions and to mobilize multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for the accelerated implementation of the SDGs. But the official VNR did not have wide and deep involvement of CSOs required to achieve broad support and partnerships. The CSO review seeks to fill this gap and serve as a basis for further conversations with the government on achieving progress on SDG 16+. Both the official and the civil society reviews therefore evaluate the progress towards achieving SDG 16+ as well as Cameroon's own long-term development framework "Cameroon Vision 2035". Although this vision was formulated before the SDGs,

the targets are very much aligned, highlighting inclusive governance, access to justice and peace as a basis for sustainable economic development.

Lack of progress on SDG 16+ will hamper progress on all other goals as well as progress in achieving "Vision 2035", as without peace, justice and inclusive governance reduction of hunger, poverty or women's empowerment will not be achieved.

To review Cameroon's progress the civil society study focused the five (out of twelve) most relevant targets covered by SDG 16+ considering Cameroon's current geo-political realities. The review also considered the broader SDG 16+ targets and identified overall integrated actions needed to further progress and drive implementation. The study critically looked at three levels of progress and implementation. At the strategic priority setting level, it considered the way Cameroon prioritized SDG 16+ goals and how it translated them into policies. At the operational level, it looked at the translation of SDG 16+ into practice and the Cameroon's progress towards a more peaceful, just and inclusive society. Finally, it considered the partnerships level and, in particular, how civil society had been involved at operational level and in the official review. The study also documented critical gaps and hindrances to progress, captured in the key findings below, and identified key recommendations for government, civil society and the international community.

The review found very little progress in implementing and achieving SDG 16+. Key issues are:

- **A combination of political, socio-economic and institutional factors exacerbated by a lack of political will slowed down the effective implementation of SDG 16+ in Cameroon.**
- **Local democracy and development are limited. In local councils, politically appointed officials (government delegates) impose their decisions about the management of their council's activities on legitimately elected officials. This constrains the autonomy and discretionary power of the elected officials, leading to legal contradictions and a crisis in legitimacy and trust.**
- **Involvement of civil society is limited and the space for civil society is "restricted and constrained." This also limits the scope for them to engage or collaborate with the government in its implementation of the 2030 agenda.**
- **On-going violent conflicts (in the North-West, South-West and Far North regions of the country) compromise Cameroon's efforts to achieve the SDGs by 2030. The government has favoured a military solution over an inclusive and people-centric approach, driving the armed conflict and radicalising more young people. Civil society organisations and citizens consulted during this research indicated that they believe a genuine and inclusive dialogue that leaves 'no conflict party and stakeholder behind' will put an end to the current crisis.**
- **The needs of many women and girls are structurally under-addressed and institutions are not responding adequately. According to the survey undertaken as part of this study, 42.4 percent of the respondents believed sexually assaulted persons currently do not have access to justice.**
- **Most of the respondents were ignorant of the SDGs and legal frameworks that protected them.**

## 1.2 Key Recommendations

### Government should:

- Promote strategies that strengthen inclusive, legitimate and accountable public institutions as part of its ongoing decentralisation process.
- Ensure accountability, expediency and transparency in judicial processes, and put in place mechanisms that expedite the effective implementation of existing laws and revision of outdated and oppressive laws.
- Protect fundamental freedoms and guarantee citizen access to information, including on topics covered by SDG 16+.
- Increase the participation of women and youth in decision-making processes as well as in conflict prevention and management. It should urgently implement Cameroon's 2017 National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 and UNSCR 2250.
- Facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement and collaborative work for delivering economic opportunities to the vulnerable and disaffected youth groups.
- Suspend military operations and initiate inclusive talks with leaders of the Anglophone armed and political movements and the local populations affected by the conflict. It should establish a national action plan for an inclusive and democratic dialogue involving all the conflict parties with the assistance of a trusted internal or external mediator for a peaceful resolution of the armed conflicts.
- Provide a protective and secure environment for civil society organisations and a meaningful, inclusive coordination and partnership with civil society organisations.
- Together with civil society, develop joint, inclusive overall and sectoral strategies to address the pressing human security needs of the people at local and national levels.

### Civil Society Organisations should:

- Maintain non-partisanship and build transparent and accountable alliances for policy development, for the implementation of national action plans and ratified international instruments, and to accompany relevant government SDG 16+ related actions.
- Establish strategic research, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, also through establishing a watchdog mechanism, and develop their own data to track the implementation of SDG 16+ and inform government actions.

### International Community should:

- Encourage and support a conducive civic and social climate, including an active civil society and open civic space.
- Support partnership building between state and civil society actors for the effective planning, implementation and monitoring of SDG 16+.
- Support collective, inclusive efforts to address the pressing human security needs of the people at local and national levels, including potential inclusive talks between the government and the Anglophone armed and political movements and the populations affected by the conflict.

Achieving SDG 16+ in Cameroon needs much more than the implementation of specific priorities. A holistic framework that brings together the efforts of multiple stakeholders in country and strengthens their interrelations is required. It is imperative that Cameroon facilitates open space for partnerships and collaboration between local, national and international development partners. In this, Cameroon must include civil society and citizens as key stakeholders, by adopting holistic and people-centred national strategies. Only then can the objectives of Cameroon's Vision 2035 and the country's commitment to the 2030 Agenda be achieved.

## 2 Introduction

### 2.1 Background and Context to the Report

**Cameroon continues to face protracted violence and armed conflict. Too many people are poorly supported due to weak institutions and lack of access to justice, information and other fundamental freedoms. Election violence, secessionist and rebel activities have increased dramatically in recent years, and fuelled tensions between ethnic communities, interrupted development, frightened investors and alarmed the local, regional and international community.**

In its preamble, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda states: "We are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development." Agenda 2030 therefore, particularly SDG 16, is a logical global response to the problems of exclusionary governance, peace and security policies that Cameroon faces. It is a milestone because it frames the promotion of sustainable peace and security as a development issue.

Cameroon's long-term development framework "Cameroon Vision 2035" (adopted in 2009) is roughly aligned

with the SDGs in terms of content and timeline. It outlines Cameroon's goal of becoming an emerging economy by 2035, and recognises rapid urbanisation, an ageing and increasing population, poor governance and widening gap between the rich and poor as some of the key challenges that need to be addressed through the development framework. Given the congruence between Cameroon's Vision 2035 and SDGs, it goes without saying that striving to achieve the various targets outlined in 2030 Agenda would go a long way in achieving Vision 2035. The existence of a nationally owned Vision 2035 with similar goals will provide greater traction for the SDGs.

In tracking progress on the SDGs, the fundamental question is: How can individual countries, national and international organisations, and others interested in promoting sustainable development, prioritize and translate the agenda into reality in their various contexts? To address this core issue, WAA Cameroon, in partnership with GPPAC conducted a field-based research to monitor the progress on SDG 16, in particular five of the listed twelve targets.

## The five targets selected for review were:

**16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere;**

**16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture of children;**

**16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels;**

**16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements; and,**

**16B Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.**

Why was this civil society report necessary? While the national government's own Voluntary National Review consulted some stakeholders, it did not have wide and deep involvement of CSOs, which is required to achieve broad support and partnerships. This shadow spotlight report seeks to complement the government report by creating greater CSO awareness about and participation in the VNR process. This is envisaged as a first step towards strategic and operational coalitions between the government and civil society to achieve progress on SDG 16+. WAA Cameroon therefore decided to undertake this independent report, which captures the views of a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including those from the government. Beyond 'simply' providing an alternative civil society perspective on SDG progress the research allowed WAA Cameroon to share its key findings with government, contributing to the national VNR and its associated validation workshops also.

In addition, adapted national and sub-national indicators are needed to ensure relevant issues at hand are measured and addressed. This is what the civil society review did. In the process, it uncovered key areas of attention that were not highlighted in the government's own VNR main messages to the UN. Through the research and workshops key potential areas of current and future programmatic work among civil society and between CSOs and government were identified also. It is hoped that through continued engagements, some of the key civil society findings points not fully recognised by government yet will be integrated in future government reviews and actions also.

## 2.2 Methodology

Before undertaking the research, WAA Cameroon organised an inception workshop where the research teams, who went on to conduct both desk reviews and field research were created. They also expanded the SDG 16+ indicators, contextualising them to the country realities.

The study was conducted in the ten regions of Cameroon, especially in their respective capital cities. A semi-structured questionnaire was used as one of the main tools for data collection. The study population of 500 respondents included people of both sexes, from all walks of life and of diverse ages. It also included civil society organisations, jurists, politicians, members of international organisations, public policy stakeholders and academia. Quantitative data was collected using stratified random sampling and based on respondents' availability and consent. Data collected through questionnaires was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The data was subjected to descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, tables and percentages. The results of the quantitative data were used to graphically support the information collected during fieldwork.

An initial analysis of this research findings culminated in a draft report that was presented to key stakeholders from the government, civil society organisations, academia and international community for validation during a three-day workshop in Yaoundé from 13 to 15 of May 2019. This further informed the key findings and recommendations of the final report.

## 2.3 Structure of the Report

This report has five main sections and a conclusion. Sections 1 and 2 introduce and flag the highlights of the study. Sections 3, 4 and 5 detail the research and results of the field survey. A review of existing legal frameworks that are relevant to the SDGs, and those which facilitate the SDGs, is presented in Section 3. The following section, focuses on the implementation and progress of overall and specific SDGs. Section 5 includes an assessment of the civic space available and how government and CSOs have partner on the peace goals.

# 3 Assessment of legal and legislative frameworks

## 3.1 Key Findings

- Cameroon’s “Vision 2035” with its long-term development framework is roughly aligned with the SDGs in content and timeline.
- Cameroon’s legal framework reveals a broad spectrum of laws, some of which show a significant number of weaknesses that in part account for the current conflict situation in the country.
- Laws are gender neutral without any affirmative action to address the challenges faced by women and marginalized groups.
- The country’s legal framework remains weak due to its conflict with customary law and cultural practices, and it is being challenged by strong leaders with tribal and political affiliations who violate the laws with impunity.
- Cameroon’s legal space provides limited opportunities for expression against marginalization and exclusion.

## 3.2 Assessment of Frameworks<sup>1</sup>

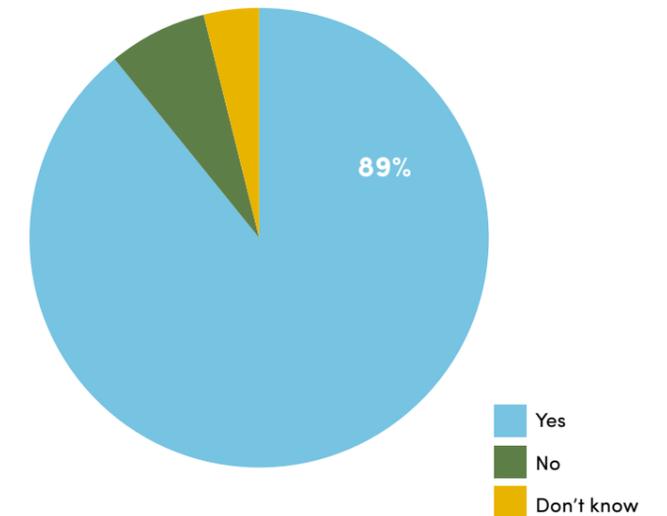
### Cameroon Vision 2035, and the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper

“Cameroon Vision 2035” adopted in 2009, provides a development framework for Cameroon to address some of the challenges it faces. It aims to turn the country into an emerging economy by 2035. Poverty reduction, attaining the level of middle-income economies, an industrialized country with sound consolidation of democratic process, the rule of law and national unity with respect for diversity are some of the intermediate goals listed in the document. The Growth and Employment Strategy paper (GESP), also adopted in 2009, is a revised version of the 2003 Poverty Reduction Strategy paper. Like the SDGs, both these policy documents have as their core focus democratic inclusion of civil society and citizens participation, promotion of partnerships between the State, private sector and civil society, and the integration of ‘marginalized groups.’

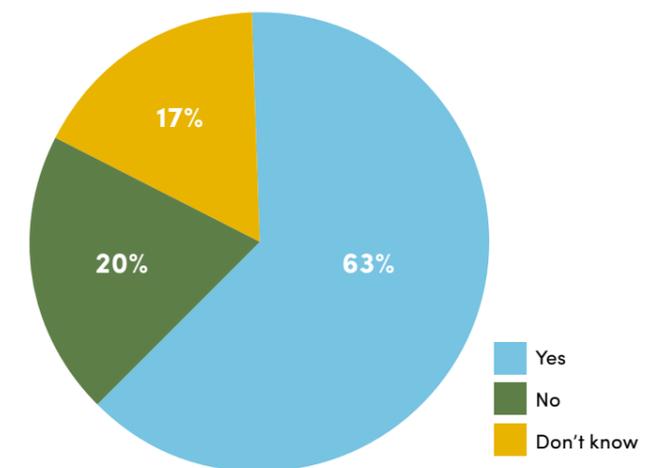
### National Gender Policy

Cameroon’s 2015 National Gender Policy Paper (NGP) aims at providing an environment that protects women, provides them equal access to social services and equal rights and opportunities overall. However, there are still important shortcomings. For instance, Cameroon has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); however, it is yet to implement national measures to fulfil its international treaty obligations. In the survey conducted as part of this study, an overwhelming number of women and girls pointed out that they still suffer from the consequences of exclusionary policies and institutional violence.

**Diagram 1:** Existence of Cultural norms that discriminate against women.



**Diagram 2:** Identified discriminatory laws against women



Source: Fieldwork, WAA-Cameroon/GPPAC 2019

<sup>1</sup> When reviewing the overall progress of SDG 16, focus has been on the five selected targets. This section reviews the current legal frameworks against Target 16.b - promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development, and Target 16.2 - end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture of children.

## Penal code and its provision on physical and sexual violence against women

Despite adequate and relevant provisions in its Constitution, Cameroon has failed to protect women and girls from rape, sexual assault, and harmful practices such as breast ironing and female genital mutilation. The data from fieldwork (Table 1) shows that there are significant cases of rape or sexual assault. Out of 94 respondents, more than 75 percent had heard of at least one case of rape and sexual assault in recent months, and 26 percent said that they had heard about four or more cases.

**Table 1:**  
Perception of approximate number of girls or women sexually assaulted (rape) over recent months

Responses	Frequency	Percent
None	22	23.4
One	15	16.0
Two	8	8.5
Three	3	3.2
Four and above	25	26.6
Don't know	21	22.3
	<b>94</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## 2004 Laws on decentralisation

In 2004, the National Assembly passed three laws on decentralisation stipulating, among others, that decentralization shall constitute the basic driving force for the promotion of development, democracy and good governance at the local level. However, provisions of these laws are yet to be implemented. Currently, there are increasing calls not just for decentralisation, but for an outright federal system.

Other relevant policies with respect to decentralisation include the National Youth Policy and Law on the Suppression of Acts of Terrorism. Relevant institutions include the elections management body – Elections Cameroon and the Electoral Code, the National Commission for Human Rights and Freedoms, the National Commission on the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism and the National Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Committee.

**Table 2:**  
Whether sexually assaulted persons have equal access to justice

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Yes	32	37.6
No	36	42.4
Don't know	18	21.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## 3.3 Challenges

**The study revealed several challenges in the legal environment, which when overcome, will contribute to building a more peaceful, just and inclusive society.**

- Lack of synergy between practitioners of modern law and customary law leads to tensions between cultural norms and the legal provision.
- Laws are published mostly in French to the detriment of the English-speaking population who do not have access to relevant information.
- Many poor people and marginalized segments of the population find it difficult to have access to justice.
- Prolonged pre-trial detention periods constitute a breach of human rights and a threat to peace.
- Delay in appointing legal assistance commissioners and insufficient sensitization of the population on their right to legal aid restricts the effective implementation of justice.
- Inadequate human rights education training for law enforcement and judicial officers limits their understanding of their responsibility in the promotion and protection of people's rights.
- Human trafficking is perceived as a significant issue. Most victims of human trafficking are often unaware that they are in a situation of trafficking and of legal mechanisms through which they could seek protection.
- A vast majority of the population are ignorant of the existence of national legal instruments that promote and protect their human rights. Most persons with disability are unaware of the provisions available to them and are unable to avail the opportunities provided for in these laws.

## 3.4 Recommendations

**The government should:**

- Include in each law a mechanism that ensures its effective enforcement.
- Develop a mechanism to monitor the implementation of the signed treaties and meet its international treaty obligations.
- Introduce new laws relating to child trafficking, movement of children by transport agencies, house helps/ housemaids/baby sitters, etc. This will help reduce forms of violence and end abuse and trafficking of children.
- Establish Family Units in police stations to handle cases of sexual violence, sexual abuse and discrimination.
- Ensure that the cases of detainees are processed and considered within a reasonable time.
- Put in place an institutional framework instituting a community-based approach to fight drug trafficking and drug abusers. This would require strengthening local capacities and mechanisms.
- Review its anti-terrorism law to ensure its compliance with the individual and collective freedoms inscribed in the constitution.
- Reform the electoral law in order to ensure a more inclusive and participatory democracy that promotes consensus.
- Adopt and implement laws and national strategies for the effective implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security. This is very important for the effectiveness of the National Humanitarian Emergency Plan, which targets 2.3 million people in 2019 to save lives and meet the acute and chronic needs of the most vulnerable populations.

## 4 Review of implementation

### 4.1 Key Findings

- Cameroon has undertaken several measures for achieving SDG 16+, notably in the policy domain relating to inclusive governance, development, peace and security, human rights, women, children and youth rights as well as on issues of disabilities. The problem lies in the implementation of policies, plans and strategies.
- The political will to effectively work towards SDG 16+ is particularly weak. Cameroon's justice system has not been efficiently and effectively managed for example, and this creates a gap in measuring progress towards and achieving SDG 16+ targets.
- The implementation of laws and policies is politicized. This leads to legal discrimination. Strong public transparency and accountability mechanisms are lacking, affecting the implementation of policies.
- Inclusivity, be it of women, youth or other marginalised groups, remains elusive across all domains in Cameroon. Social and political exclusion, along with an absence of a sense of belonging are some of the biggest drivers of radicalisation among youth.
- Allegations of military excesses in conflict zones, which are not investigated and remain unpunished, has led citizens to question the government's commitment to its Responsibility to Protect.

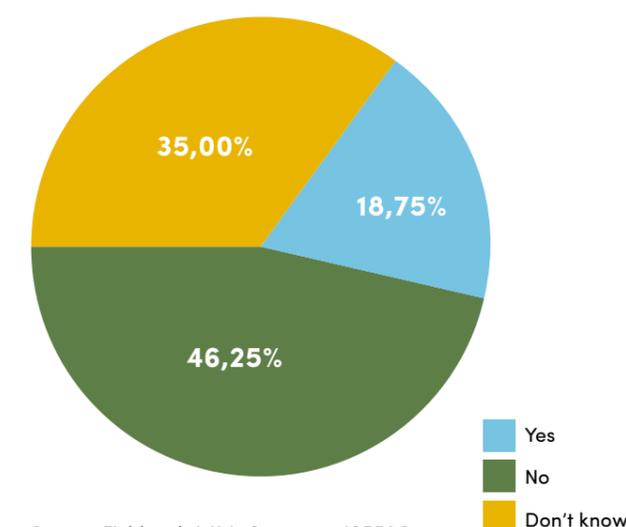
### 4.2 Assessment of overall and specific progress in SDG 16+

Political will to effectively implement the SDGs, especially Goal 16 is weak.<sup>2</sup> The system of governance is highly centralized with almost every power vested in the hands of the President who appoints and dismisses people, and creates and dissolves institutions at his discretion. Voter apathy is growing, with many not seeing elections as a true representation of their voices. Moreover, the separation of powers between the executive, legislative and judiciary arms of government is not strict as the former controls the others. Since the advent of multiparty politics in 1992 in Cameroon, no private member bill has been entertained in the Parliament. All bills are from the Executive, which appoints judges in all courts as well.

In most cases, the implementation of laws and policies is politicized leading to discrimination. Favouritism and tribalism adds to the discrimination. Strong public transparency and accountability mechanisms are missing, affecting the implementation of policies. A huge gap exists between the policies and the beneficiaries of the policies. This is linked to the absence of monitoring and evaluation systems tracking effective implementation. Inclusivity is mainstreamed throughout the SDG agenda and forms a fundamental criterion for the achievement of SDG 16. However, inclusivity remains elusive in the context of Cameroon. In the study survey, almost half the respondents affirm that the government does not ensure inclusive participatory decision-making. The government lags behind in providing

responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making at all levels (as illustrated in diagram 3).

**Diagram 3:** Government of Cameroon ensuring responsive inclusive participatory and representative decision making at all levels

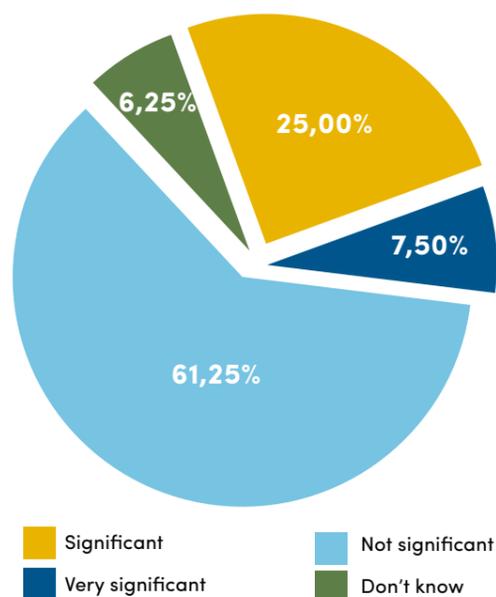


Source: Fieldwork, WAA-Cameroon/GPPAC 2019

Regarding the participation and inclusivity of women in public offices and mainstream politics, in Cameroon, no woman has held the position of President, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly or any high-ranking office. This contrasts with other countries in Africa, such as Rwanda or Ethiopia, where women occupy key positions in government. The survey results show that more than 60 percent of the respondents believed that there was no significant number of women occupying decision-making positions in Cameroon.

<sup>2</sup>When reviewing the overall progress of SDG 16, focus has been on the five selected targets: 16.1 - the need to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere; 16.2 - end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture of children; 16.7 - ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels; 16.10 - ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms in accordance with national and international agreements; and, 16.b - promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development. The previous section reviewed the legal frameworks with regard to Target 16.2 and 16.b. This section reviews the remaining three targets.

**Diagram 4:**  
Rating the proportion of women who occupy decision making positions



Source: Fieldwork, WAA-Cameroon/GPPAC 2019

Although Cameroon has adopted its National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 on Women, peace and security, its implementation is questionable. The National Commission on the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism (NCPBM), the National Disarmament,

Demobilisation and Reintegration Committee (NCDDR), the Emergency Humanitarian Assistance Plan (EHAP), Regional Coordinators, the Governors of the North-West and South-West regions, and even Divisional Administrators in these regions, are all headed by men.

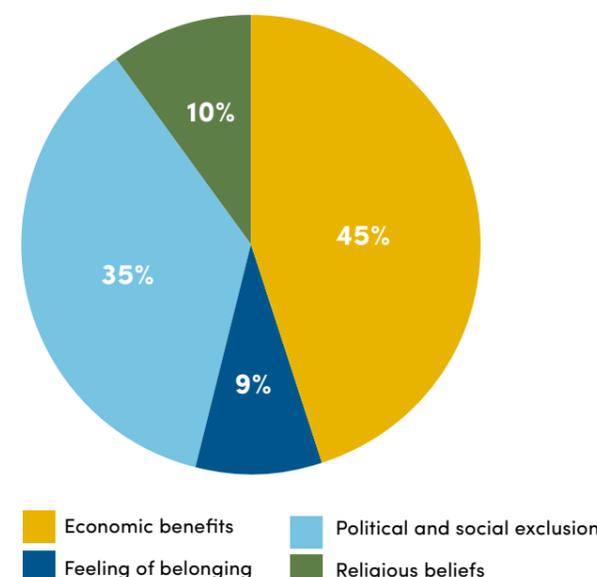
Active participation of youth in political and decision-making institutions has been very low. Ten years after the creation of the National Youth Council, it is being criticized for not transforming the lives of the Cameroonian youth. According to the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family, 64 percent of Cameroonians are under 25 years old. Yet, in the current government of 72 ministers and vice ministers there is not a single member of cabinet aged below 40. This could be attributed to lack of a meaningful political will of the executive. The table below shows the views of interviewees on the proportion of youth by sex who are appointed to key positions in Cameroon. Of the 80 people who responded to this specific question, close to 25 percent were of the opinion that young people are not significantly occupying appointed positions. Less than 2.5 percent believed youth held significant positions.

Young women		The proportion of young women who are appointed in responsible positions at all levels in public institutions			Total
		Significant	Not significant	Don't know	
The proportion of young men who are appointed in responsible positions at all levels in public institutions	Significant	0	2	0	2
	Very significant	0	7	2	9
	Not significant	0	19	17	36
	Don't know	1	1	31	33
Total		1	29	50	80

**Table 2:**  
Proportion of young men and women who are appointed in responsible positions at all levels in public institutions

The exclusion of youth has had other consequences as well. In Cameroon's Far North region many young people are joining extremist groups. Interviewees believe that 45 percent join for economic reasons, 36 percent join due to political and social exclusion, and an additionally 9 percent join due to a lack of belonging. Just 10 percent argue that they are lured by religious beliefs and narratives.

**Diagram 4:**  
Reason for joining terrorist groups



It is apparent that the issue of recruitment into extremist groupings in these areas is an extremely complex phenomenon, which includes factors linked to poor governance as well as religious and ethnic discrimination. It is clear that religious beliefs alone do not provide sufficient reasons for this radicalisation. Most Cameroonians also believe that government has not respected its international obligations on its responsibility to protect its citizens. This is compounded by growing allegations of military excesses in conflict zones which do not get investigated and unpunished. There has also been a lack of political will to manage the conflict, which is unfolding

in the North-West and South-West Regions of the country as well as the political impasse born out of the 2018 Presidential elections. Cameroon has not appreciated attention and calls for actions from the international community to these unrests, which it has described as 'an attempt to undermine our institutions'<sup>3</sup>. It has also sought to discredit media reports covering the conflict.

## 4.3 Challenges

Various challenges stand in the way of Cameroon achieving the SDGs by 2030 as well as its own developmental vision by 2035. Principal among them is the weak political will to drive key areas of policy implementation, as well as an over powerful executive. Despite recent legislation on decentralisation, its implementation has not been effective. The issue of effective implementation is prevalent across all sectors and all policies, which again is linked to a weak political will to take these issues forward. Cameroon's justice system has not been efficiently and effectively managed. This creates a gap in measuring progress towards and achieving SDG 16+ targets. In most cases, the implementation of laws and policies is politicized thus leading to legal discrimination. Strong public transparency and accountability mechanisms are lacking, affecting the implementation of policies. Additionally, there is lack of effective collaboration between the government of Cameroon, international institutions and CSOs especially at the level of implementation. These institutions and the Cameroon government mostly just work together at the planning and inception level but differ sharply in the field.

<sup>3</sup>Cameroon anglophone: un conflit oublié, une grave crise humanitaire; <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20190509-cameroon-anglophone-conflit-arme-crise-humanitaire>; Accessed 18 June 2019

## 4.4 Recommendations

- To address the conflicts in the North-West and South-West of the country, Cameroon should go slow on its military approach that continues to drive the conflict, and instead provide amnesty to all those unjustly arrested. Thus, ensuring that the Rule of Law has been applied.
- Military operations must be suspended and the government should initiate inclusive talks with the populations affected by the conflict, and leaders of the Anglophone armed and political movements. The government should establish a national action plan for an inclusive and democratic dialogue involving all the conflict parties with the assistance of a trusted internal or external mediator for a peaceful resolution of the armed conflicts.
- The National Commission on the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism should be transformed to a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its powers reinforced. Its members should be independent personalities with no party affiliations.
- The government should systematically investigate, publish and punish acts of violence and inform the public of the fate of the culprits, as impunity is responsible for the persistence of violence in its society. Repeated government denials of cases of repression breed further frustrations and more violence.
- There should be effective decentralization of policies to enhance the discretionary power of elected officials to allow them to work without constraints from appointed government officials
- There is a need for a fundamental review of the separation of powers of various institutions of governments – the executive, the legislative and the judiciary, and ensure they are balanced. This is necessary for a strong vibrant democracy, for the realisations of SDGs as well as the country's own Vision 2035.
- The government should focus on income generating activities and promote inclusive good governance and accountability of administrative and traditional leaders. This will help to address mass recruitment of young people by extremist groupings and the rampant risk of radicalisation.
- The government should encourage and intensify its supports for programs and projects for the continued education of children and employment opportunities of youth, particularly in the North-West and South-West as well as the Northern Regions also as part of a long term action to prevent the rise in violent extremism.

## 5

# Civil society space and partnership with government in SDG 16+ implementation

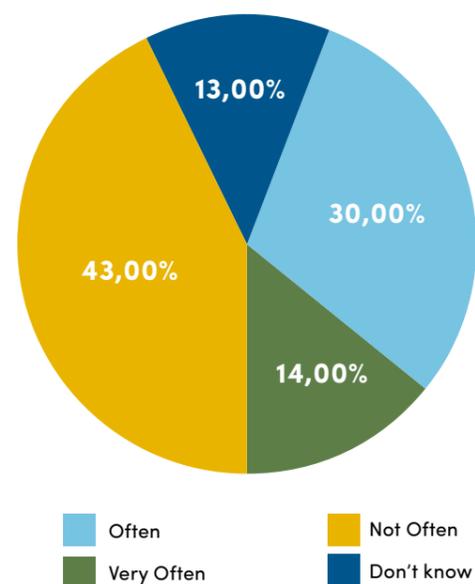
## 5.1 Key findings

- The crucial role of civil society is explicitly recognized in Cameroon's national development policy documents and in national policies linked to SDG implementation. However, civil society is not involved effectively in the conceptualisation, implementation and monitoring of all policies, notably those involving the promotion of a peaceful, just and inclusive society. This includes the VNR process.
- Civil Society space is restricted and constrained overall. As a consequence partnerships between governments and civil society are limited. But civil society organisations can work on Gender Based Violence issues more freely.
- No institutionalized mechanisms exist in Cameroon where the governments can engage with non-governmental actors in dialogues for peace during times of conflict.
- National and international civil society organisations and human rights organisations are systematically barred from taking part in investigations of gross human rights abuses, a situation which is worse in ongoing conflicts.
- The role of civil society organisations is repeatedly highlighted in the SDGs, yet most international institutions, including the UN, often restrict their interactions to the government. A broader more inclusive process is required.

## 5.2 Assessment of Civil Society Space and Partnership with Government

Civil society organisations (CSOs) have obtained a degree of success engaging in consultations with government officials on the ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and the implementation of the Kinshasa Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW).

**Diagram 5:**  
The frequency of civil societies organisation given the opportunity to collaborate in the progress of the implementation of the SDG process



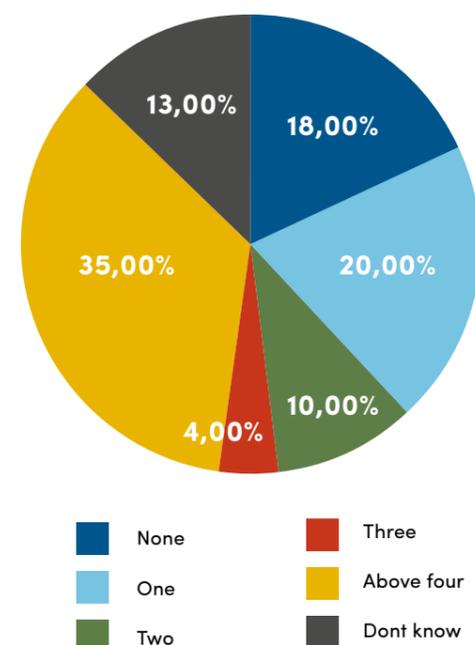
In general, there is a degree of partnership with CSOs in some government programs, but when it comes to the area of peace, justice, inclusion and conflict resolution; CSOs in Cameroon, including churches and their leaders face challenges trying to be directly involved. Calls for inclusive multi-stakeholder processes and dialogues on key issues have usually not been heeded to. Human rights abuses and violations by the Cameroonian security forces in their fight against Boko Haram and in the crisis in the North and South-West regions have been documented. However, access to conflict

zones is restricted for CSOs. National and international CSOs and human rights organisations are systematically barred from taking part in investigations of gross human rights abuses, a situation which is worse in places with ongoing conflict. Based on the responses from the survey, gender tools and national action plans are not adequately implemented. Few CSO are generally included in the government platforms on peace and justice, and there is no means to ensure that their contributions are upheld. There is no clarity in the process of selecting CSOs which participate in the implementation and review of SDGs in general and SDG 16 in particular. The SDG VNR process is a case in point. WAA Cameroon – through this independent SDG 16+ review – reached out to government to participate in this process, with the SDG contact person joining. WAA Cameroon was then invited to participate in the validation workshop of the government the next day but there had not been a systematic, strategic involvement of CSOs throughout the process. There is no national platform for civil society participation in peace, justice and conflict resolution processes. When it comes to media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in Cameroon, the situation has been worsening since the Anglophone crisis started in October 2016. A significant number of media personnel are facing obstacles in their work. Journalists' trade unions like Cameroon Union of Journalists, Cameroon English Speaking Journalists Association (CAMASEJ), Association of English Language Newspaper Publishers and many international press syndicates have been witnessing obstacles and shabby and harsh treatment while reporting on the conflicts in Cameroon. Major trade unionists in the North-West

## 5.3 Challenges

and South-West Regions have either been jailed, are on the run or have gone in exile. Media associations continue to decry the wanton arrest and imprisonment of journalists. Diagram 6 below indicates that close to 70 percent of the respondents acknowledged the torture of media personnel, and nearly half of them knew at least four journalists who were tortured in the last twelve months. This highlights alarming incidence of torture of journalists and a worrying state of press freedom in the country.

**Diagram 6:**  
The number of journalists or media associated personnel whom have tortured for doing their job in the last 12 months



CSO participation in the planning, implementation and monitoring of SDG 16 related issues in Cameroon faces a number of challenges. The attainment of SDGs in general and SDG 16+, may suffer some setbacks if these challenges are not properly addressed by the various stakeholders involved in the implementation process. Specific challenges include insufficient funding for CSO programs, insufficient CSO-specific programs in collaboration with international partners especially the UN agencies, and difficulties accessing information by CSOs especially during sensitive moments of on-going conflict. Additionally, CSOs are constrained when they attempt to collect and report on sensitive issues like the fight against the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons, violent extremism, terrorism or radicalization. CSOs also find it particularly challenging to participate in investigations of human rights violations and investigations on financial misappropriations by senior state officials. Other challenges include the lack of effective and strategic coordination between the government and CSOs as witnessed during the VNR process. CSO also faced obstacles during advocacy work and frequent negative perception of CSOs by some state actors.

## 5.4 Recommendations

- The role of CSOs is repeatedly highlighted in the SDGs, yet most international institutions including the UN limit their interactions to the government. The international community should ensure an equal partnership between the government and CSOs in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the SDGs and SDG 16+ in particular.
- The government should provide a protective and secure environment for CSOs working in crisis areas and conflict zones. It should ensure a meaningful, inclusive coordination and partnership with CSOs and effectively involve a broad range of CSOs from the start in the elaboration and implementation of development strategies or their monitoring, for example their participation in the VNR process.
- The government should ensure the full access to information from government structures like councils and ministries. A priority should be to provide information on the internet as currently most of these structures do not have websites and the few that have, their sites are not regularly updated.
- CSOs must maintain a high level of neutrality and provide adequate reporting to parties in conflict, especially relating to the current crisis in the North-West and South-West regions.
- CSOs should undertake conflict analyses, come up with a database and statistics on the actual number of IDPs to help carry out a gender-sensitive need analysis to inform government action.
- The government together with civil society and other partners should develop joint overall and sectoral strategies to ensure sufficient funds for programs and projects to address the pressing human security needs of the people (including protection from conflicts, access to health, justice and education) at local and national levels.

## 6 Conclusion

The 2030 Agenda highlights inclusivity and partnerships as a goal in itself (SDG 17) as well as a process to achieve all SDGs. It is in this spirit that this independent civil society review of Cameroon's progress towards achieving a more peaceful, just and inclusive society was undertaken. The review found some positive developments related to the five targets (16.1, 16.2, 16.7, 16.10 and 16.b) reviewed as well as SDG 16+ more broadly. This included, for example, legislation on decentralization and adopting Cameroon's 2015 National Gender Policy Paper aimed at providing an environment that protects women, provides equal access to social services and equal rights and opportunities as well as the strong alignment between Cameroon's Vision 2035 and the 2030 Agenda.

This indicates clear national ownership of SDG 16+ goals. However, the review of existing frameworks and progress achieved so far also highlighted significant shortcomings in both legal and policy frameworks and practical implementation. Much remains to be done and goals will not be met if progress continues in a similar fashion.

The main challenge in achieving the SDGs lies in the lack of political will and lack of actual implementation of policies, plans and strategies. Cameroon urgently needs to implement existing progressive laws and policies on the ground and adopt or adapt inclusive legislation and strategies to further peace, justice and inclusion in a non-partisan way. The recommendations highlighted throughout this review provide concrete suggestions on issues to prioritise. It is clear that meaningful joint actions by the government, the international community and civil society with a focus

on access to justice, inclusive governance and enhancing prospects for a peaceful Cameroon are required to ensure Cameroon meets the SDG 16+ goals and fulfils its people centred Vision 2035.

# Annex 1

## Civil society contributions to SDG 16 reporting: approaches, methodologies and lessons

To make the global SDG agenda relevant at local levels an important step for policy setting, implementation and analysis alike is to contextualise the agenda. To achieve this WAA Cameroon first selected, with their researchers and taking Cameroon's own national development vision into account, five SDG 16 targets<sup>1</sup> for which they would track progress. They then organised an inception workshop, during which research teams for desk reviews and field researches were established. These multi-disciplinary teams then undertook the important step to develop context specific indicators for the five overall targets. This step was both important and necessary to translate the targets to the local realities and ongoing conflict situation. It ensured the report 'measured what is treasured' locally and that the findings can still be linked up to the overall indicators and targets. This contextualisation and development of localised indicators to complement the official ones is an important step to ensure relevant progress on SDG 16 and other SDGs is measured. WAA Cameroon ensured geographical coverage by conducting the study in all of the 10 regions in Cameroon. A total number of 500 respondents, selected in a way to include women and men from all walks of life and of diverse ages, participated in the research in Cameroon. A semi-structured questionnaire was used as one of the main tools for data collection in Cameroon,

complemented with an interview guide and focus group discussions with key informants and members of CSOs and the general public. These tools were chosen to enable a collection of a wide range of data and information related to the implementation of the SDG 16 in Cameroon.

Initial analysis of the research findings culminated in draft report that was presented to key stakeholders from the government, CSOs, academia and the international community for validation during the workshop on National Reviews on the progress in SDG 16+ implementation in country and the role of CSOs, in Yaoundé from 13 to 15 of May 2019. This workshop also served as initial strategy, planning and advocacy sessions with the government of Cameroon for example taking up some of the recommendations from CSO's and inviting WAA Cameroon to be part of their validation meeting.

A number of challenges arose during the fieldwork. One challenge was security. The ongoing crisis in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon, caused some delays in data collection. This did not impede the results and the overall field research but points to a key issue facing SDG peace goals implementation and monitoring in more fragile environments, namely the need for responsiveness and agility while keeping on track. A second challenge was the time constraints for data collection. This was partially linked to the lack of knowledge and information on the government lead VNR process and timelines

for providing input in a useful way. This points to a third challenge, – namely the lack of structural CSO involvement in the official VNR process in Cameroon.

In Cameroon, there was no official civil society counterpart involved throughout the VNR. WAA Cameroon was invited ad-hoc to the government validation meeting after the government took part in the CSO lead one.

GPPAC also facilitated interactions between WAA Cameroon and relevant UNDP individuals in country. In Cameroon this led to further engagements with the UNDP lead for the VNR as well as the SDG coordinator inside government as well as a range of other stakeholders. WAA Cameroon for example provided CSO inputs, based on its own national review, to the key VNR messages that government submitted to the United Nations. After the civil society validation workshop in Cameroon, which was attended by the government coordinator for SDGs among others, WAA Cameroon participated in the VNR technical committee set up by government.

This was very welcomed and should be built on. In the future the government of Cameroon should take further steps to open up civic space and have regular engagement with civil society on SDG priority setting, in its official VNR and future actions. Civil Society participation in government led SDG processes should be ensured throughout the review process (not only for validation) and go beyond the monitoring to joint analysis, strategy setting and implementation.

When it comes to the global level, WAA Cameroon and GPPAC participated at the Rome Conference in preparation for HLPF 2019: "Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies: SDG 16 implementation and the path towards leaving no one behind" being able to share their preliminary findings and advocate for the recommendations that came out from the civil society VNRs. The country report and main GPPAC recommendations on how to take the SDG 16+ agenda further will also be shared at the High Level Political Forum.

<sup>1</sup>The five targets were 16.1; 16.2; 16.7; 16.10; and, 16.b.

## About the authors



Global Partnership  
for the Prevention of  
Armed Conflict

### GPPAC

The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) is a network of civil society organisations active in conflict prevention and peacebuilding practice world-wide, promoting a fundamental shift in how the world deals with violent conflict: moving from reaction to prevention. GPPAC members work together to inform policy, improve practice and facilitate collaboration amongst civil society, intergovernmental organisations and state actors.

[www.gppac.net](http://www.gppac.net)



**WAA CAMEROON**

### WAA

Women in Alternative Action Cameroon (WAA) is a Non Governmental Organisation based in Yaounde, Cameroon working to promote human rights and peace in the Central African region. WAA Cameroon is a member of GPPAC's Eastern and Central African Region. WAA's mission is to promote gender equity, peacebuilding, innovative and sustainable opportunities for women, youth and girls. The organization undertakes locally, women led peacebuilding, social cohesion, equal opportunity and empowerment as well as innovative early warning and response initiatives such as the Queens for Peace, a network of women in traditional institutions committed to community peace-building.

<https://womeninalternativeaction.org/>

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