

Sustainable synergies impact: Cameroon – United Nations – International Financial Institutions strategic engagement

By Issa Sanogo

Issa Sanogo is the United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Cameroon, with 28 years of experience in development and humanitarian affairs across the United Nations (UN), World Bank, and national governments. He previously served in the same role in Madagascar and held senior positions with the World Food Programme (WFP), including Deputy Country Director and founding Director of the Regional Centre of Excellence against Hunger and Malnutrition (CERFAM) in Côte d'Ivoire. Issa Sanogo has

led strategic planning and implementation of large-scale food assistance, resilience, nutrition, and school meals programmes, reaching over a million people in Lebanon and Chad. Earlier in his career, he was an economist at the World Bank in Guinea and the Government of Côte d'Ivoire. He holds a doctoral degree in Development Economics and two master's degrees from the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur le Développement International (CERDI) at the University Clermont Auvergne, France.

Introduction

The Funding Compact outlines mutual commitments between United Nations Member States and the UN development system, emphasising that quality funding – core, pooled or softly earmarked – quality funding is crucial for a more effective, efficient, and coherent UN in accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) achievement. It focuses on building trust through improved results reporting, transparency, visibility, and efficiency.

In Cameroon the focus is on strengthening coherent actions via 14 funded and seven planned joint programs that addresses food security, climate change, education, and employment as well as digital connectivity. There are currently 14 UN entities and agencies working together with five development banks. Together they leverage coherence, alignment, trust, confidence, and efficiency as key elements of the Funding Compact.¹

The role of the United Nations system as implementing partners within this collaborative framework offers a significant comparative advantage to enhance the effectiveness of international financial institution-funded initiatives, negotiated by the government. At the country level the United Nations coordination groups operate under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator and is providing a valuable platform for fostering this coordination which brings together UN agencies, government counterparts from relevant ministries, and international finance institution representatives to align development efforts, share information, and maximise impact at the national and sub-national levels. The United Nations to United Nations tool, better known as the UN-to-UN agreement, is designed to facilitate fund-transfers between UN agencies, to promote closer coordination and to foster joint programming among the diverse UN agencies operating within the country.

In Cameroon it serves as a powerful example of the significant potential for internal collaboration to enhance the United Nations engagement with international financial institutions, facilitating such fund transfers nationally, thus ensuring integrated actions.

However, the success of this strategic engagement in the country hinges on a foundation of genuine co-creation and co-planning. This necessitates early and meaningful dialogue between the UN Country Team, the government at various levels, and the relevant international financial institutions.

Furthermore, trust-building dialogues on the Funding Compact implementation are planned for July 2025, following preliminary discussions with the government and the international finance institutions in February 2025. These actions support large-scale SDG acceleration, contributing to strengthened food security, enhanced education quality, and functional youth entrepreneurship mechanisms.

An early example is the Joint Sustainable Development Goal Fund programme on localisation and implementation of the Humanitarian-Peace-Development Nexus with coordination platforms. In this context, three joint strategic notes on food security, climate change, and energy are finalised with entry points for UN joint-support. Amongst the initiatives is a private sector collaboration in the form of a national hydroelectric project with the Kikot-Mbebe Hydro Power Company.²

Focus on gender mainstreaming

Cameroon has seen the strengthening of partnerships between UN agencies and the international financial institutions, including the acceleration of gender promotion and women's economic empowerment. This is further demonstrated with decent employment opportunities within the agro-industrial sector, and access to essential services is fostered along the design and implementation of road projects to date. It also enables the development of livestock and fish farming value chains through the revival of sustainable agricultural entrepreneurship around infrastructure projects.

Robust incubation centres are established, fostering the development of comprehensive value chains, generating sustainable job creation opportunities and nurturing viable businesses.

Figure 1: Cameroon background**1. Cameroon population⁴**

Population in 2019: 24 348 251

Female: 50,6%

Male: 49,4%

2. Youth Unemployment⁵

- Total youth unemployment (15-24 years): 6.2%

- Male: 5.1%

- Female: 7.5%

3. Internet Access⁶

- Total Population with Internet Access: ~40%

- Male: 45%

- Female: 35%

4. Energy Access⁷

- Total population with access to electricity: 71%

5. Debt-to-GDP Ratio⁸

- Debt-to-GDP: 44.7%

6. Tax-to-GDP Ratio⁹

- Tax Revenue as % of GDP: 14%

7. Illicit Financial Flows (IFF)¹⁰

- In 2023, CFA 1,665.4 billion in suspicious financial flows, representing a 180% jump from the previous year according to the Conac (National Anti-Corruption Mission) report drawing on statistics from the National Financial Investigation Agency (ANIF).

8. % of Population Receiving Pensions¹¹

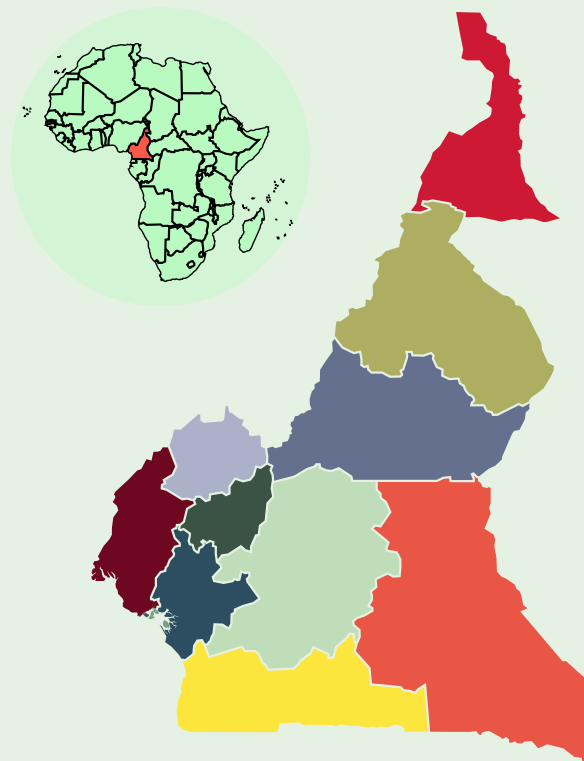
- 10% (covered by the National Social Insurance Fund (CNPS) in 2022 – only formal sector employees) – International Labour Organisations' Social Protection Platform.

9. Size and Composition of the Private Sector¹²

- Formal versus Informal:
 - 90% of business units are in the informal sector.
 - Over 80% of the labour force is involved in informal activities: 68.3% of Women and 48.2% of Men.
- Business leadership: 56.2% of enterprises are led by men, and 43.8% by women.
- It is estimated that 60-70 of GDP is produced by the private sector.

10. Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF)

- The INFF has been finalised with UN support, but yet to be validated at the strategic level; Some actions in the INFF are ongoing.



Source: UNCT Results Report Cameroon 2024.³

The United Nations agencies possess an extensive and deeply rooted on-the-ground presence across Cameroon's diverse landscape. It is coupled with an understanding of the intricate local context, including cultural nuances, social dynamics, and political realities. It can also be said that the operational capacity and extensive logistical expertise of United Nations agencies in the country are indispensable in ensuring the timely and efficient delivery of essential assistance, particularly in challenging and remote areas.

Over time, experience has shown that operational and financial aspects, including resource allocation, implementation modalities, and robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks, must be negotiated transparently and agreed upon upfront.

In support of greater coherence with regards to the major elements in the Funding Compact between the donor and UN coordination, the main lessons and criteria to ensure successful partnerships between the UN and international finance institutions can be summed up as follows:

- Regular and consistent information sharing between the Resident Coordinator, the UN Country Team (UNCT), the representatives of these international financial institutions, and the government, proves to be an effective mechanism for ensuring coherence and synergy;
- Joint assessments of needs and vulnerabilities, conducted collaboratively by the United Nations and the AfDB in Cameroon, as well as dialogues within the framework of the Risk and Resilience Assessment by the World Bank in partnership with the United Nations, play a vital role in informing evidence-based planning and targeted interventions; and
- The concerted joint advocacy efforts undertaken by United Nations agencies in Cameroon and international finance institutions are proving to be instrumental in driving policy change and promoting a more conducive environment for sustainable development. Key themes emerging from the regular dialogues between the United Nations Resident Coordinator, the UNCT together with international financial institutions such as the World Bank, AfDB, and IsDB include the need for improving public spending quality and enhancing development coordination mechanisms.

Illustrative cases show that the interventions lead to tangible benefits, and this is thanks to a government decision to have this synergistic approach. One such example is the African Development Bank initiatives with UN Women and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) that are dedicated to women's economic empowerment and employment opportunities around a road project.

Similarly, a project with the International Labour Organization (ILO) focuses on sustainable and decent jobs around infrastructure projects in some regions of Cameroon like the Far-North, the North-West and South-West that grapple with persistent fragility and the lingering socio-economic repercussions of conflict. The strategic partnership between the government, United Nations Cameroon and international financial institutions assumes an even greater level of significance. This way of working provides a crucial bridge, connecting immediate humanitarian assistance, longer-term development, and peace initiatives.

One example is the Reconstruction programme in the North-West and South-West regions, financed through a loan of approximately US\$ 35.9 million from the Islamic Development Bank to the Government of Cameroon. This critical programme is effectively being implemented by the United Nations Development Programme, leveraging its extensive operational capacity and local expertise thanks to the partnerships with local organisations and local authorities.

The action began by addressing a fundamental need: helping people recover their lost legal identity documents. From there, we nurtured social bonds through engaging socio-cultural events and empowered communities with crisis prevention and mediation skills.

Another activity was the revitalisation of women's centres by ensuring they were equipped to support their members. This impact reached beyond individuals to the very infrastructure that holds communities together. By rebuilding schools, health centres, water points, and bridges, the support created the foundation for a better future.

This comprehensive development approach breathed new life into the local economy. Farmers gained access to

crucial agricultural equipment and materials with innovative agricultural units taking root, allowing for the restoration of markets and creating space for bustling activity.

Working with a focus on young people, we also provided crucial equipment support for youth led entrepreneurial start-ups, paving the way for a brighter economic landscape. It's a story of holistic recovery, where every effort contributed to a stronger, more vibrant community.

The overall investments were complemented with a regional stabilisation programme with an estimated US\$ 6,2 million financial injection. It underscores the commitment of the United Nations and international financial institutions in the country to address the root causes of instability and fostering long-term recovery. Building on past regional support, it carries a catalytic potential, reinforcing developmental impact.

In the fragile Lake Chad Basin, this work combines skill-building for vulnerable groups, contributing to livelihoods, community security, stabilisation, and regional cooperation. This project is structured around four strategic pillars: (1) enhancing community security and access to justice; (2) revitalising the local economy and creating jobs for women and youth; (3) strengthening gender-sensitive basic social services adapted to climate change; and (4) fostering social cohesion and regional cooperation.

These themes aim to promote good governance, empower vulnerable groups, address climate-security linkages, and build resilience through cross-border collaboration.

Furthermore, there is a comprehensive project focused on enhancing resilience, improving connectivity and promoting social inclusion as a powerful partnership between the national counterpart, the United Nations Refugee Agency and the World Bank, with a substantial financial commitment of around US\$ 50 million. It addresses the critical need for reliable data on forcibly displaced persons. The collaboration encompasses crucial activities such as refugee registration and documentation across all regions within Cameroon that host refugee populations, laying the foundation for informed policy decisions and targeted assistance.

Other noteworthy collaborations in the pursuit of sustainable development in fragile regions include the development of the Sustainable Irrigation System for Agro-pastoral and the Fishery value chain enhancement in the Far North Region of Cameroon.

This initiative, with a total budget of € 50 million with a contribution by Cameroon of € 5 million, is spearheaded through a strategic partnership between the Ministry of Economy and Planning through the Far North Special Programme with the Food and Agricultural Organization and the Islamic Development Bank. The aim is to bolster livelihoods and food security in a region particularly vulnerable to climate change and conflict.¹³

The Islamic Development Bank and the government have also played a significant role in bolstering essential social services, notably through its support for maternal, neonatal, and child health initiatives, working in close collaboration with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for nearly US\$ 18,5 million.¹⁴

Complementing these efforts, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has partnered with IsDB to undertake urgent actions aimed at guaranteeing equitable access to quality healthcare services for vulnerable populations. This UN agency also received € 10 million to support Nutrition Programs in four regions with a grant from KfW, the German Development Bank.¹⁵ This intervention aims to improve the health and nutritional status of over 336,000 children aged 0 to 59 months, over 316,000 adolescents (including 65% adolescent girls), and over 575 thousand pregnant women in the East, Adamawa, North, and Far North, recognised as four vulnerable regions.

The World Food Programme has also forged significant partnerships within the government and the international financial institution context to address food security and resilience. A collaboration with the World Bank with a commitment of US\$ 800,000 supports the development of milk and egg value chains in four priority regions. Additionally, a US\$ 450,000 initiative focuses on enhancing the rice value chain in the Far-North, North, Adamawa, and East regions.

A concrete example that illustrates this crucial role is a significant food security program, with a budget of US\$ 45 million, funded through a World Bank loan to the government, that leverages the World Food Programme as the implementing partner.¹⁶

Similarly, the Food and Agricultural Organisation's food security initiatives, supported by the World Bank with a commitment of nearly US\$ 3 million focuses on enhancing production and reinforcing capacities in key agricultural value chains, addressing the livelihoods of vulnerable agricultural communities.¹⁷ This national program in the North-West and South-West, funded by the IsDB and implemented as a Reconstruction initiative by the UNDP, directly addresses the recovery needs of conflict-affected populations.¹⁸

Furthermore, a loan from the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA), with UNDP as the implementing partner based on a government decision with the value of approximately US\$ 19 million, aims to strengthen the resilience of the private sector, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, against external economic shocks.¹⁹

In the Cameroon context it enhances the UN's credibility and effectiveness as a reliable and impactful partner for international financial institutions, streamlining processes, reducing duplication of effort, and ultimately enhancing the collective impact of development assistance.

A concrete illustration of this is the blood transfusion project financed by the IsDB, initially implemented by the World Health Organisation. Subsequently, a UN-to-UN agreement was developed between the WHO and the United Nations Office for Project Services to leverage the agency's specialised procurement expertise, demonstrating the efficiency gains from internal UN collaboration.²⁰

Another example of where the UN-to-UN collaboration worked well is the agreement between UNICEF and UNFPA as encapsulated in the framework of the elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV and HIV Care for Children and Adolescents, as part of an IsDB financing initiative.^{21,22}

Additional opportunities to enhance support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

The diverse instruments and networks coming together through the international financial institutions offer a significant source of much-needed funding, particularly for the vital small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) sector, which plays a crucial role in economic growth and job creation. On the ground there is recognition for the dialogues aimed at fostering synergies between the project to build business resilience for sustainable and inclusive growth financed through a loan of the government, financed by BADEA and implemented by UNDP, with the active participation of the IsDB, World Bank, and AfDB. This project aims to strengthen the resilience of the private sector, especially SMEs, to the consequences of COVID-19 and other external shocks. This support to the post-COVID recovery is key for the structural transformation of the Cameroonian economy.²³

Furthermore, the development of a digital tool to effectively gather and disseminate information about the diverse funding and partnership opportunities is currently underway, promising to enhance access for Cameroonian SMEs.

Conclusion

In terms of an overview of the current work, the systematic sharing of lessons learned for effectively engaging with international financial institutions is successful within the various United Nations coordination bodies, such as the Program Management Group, UN Results Groups and the United Nations Country Team in Cameroon.²⁴ It is vital for fostering continuous improvement and impactful partnerships.

This success is hinged on the role of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office which is maintaining regular communication with the international finance institutions to gather and synthesise their feedback, share information about funding opportunities and calls for proposals and even raise awareness on potential partnership weaknesses.

Regular discussions in the Program Management Team and the African Development Bank provided opportunities

to share the lessons learned during Program Management Team meetings, UN Results Groups meetings, and the UN Country Team retreat. This strategic engagement by the United Nations system with the international financial institutions alongside the government, as part of the Funding Compact implementation, is an indispensable cornerstone of achieving effective and sustainable development outcomes in Cameroon.

Endnotes

- 1

In alphabetical order the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN Women, UNICEF, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Office for Project
- Services (UNOPS), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO).
- 2

Visit <https://khpc.cm/en> for more information on this partnership.
- 3

United Nations Cameroon, 'UN Cameroon 2024 Annual Results Report', April 2025, p. 6, https://cameroon.un.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/UN%20Cameroon_2024%20Annual%20Results%20Report%20F.pdf, accessed on 17 June 2025.

- 4 Institut National de la Statistique Annuaire Statistique du Cameroun, 'Chapitre 3: CARACTERISTIQUES DE LA POPULATION', Edition 2019 online at <https://www.scribd.com/document/712395728/0chapitre-3-Characteristiques-de-La-Population>, accessed in June 2025.
- 5 Republic of Cameroon, National Institute of Statistics, 'Troisième enquête sur l'emploi et le secteur informel au Cameroun (EESI3), Rapport Principal', (Yaoundé-Cameroun: National Institute of Statistics, 2023), <https://www.scribd.com/document/681707435/EESI3-Rapport-principal-Secteur-Formel-VA>
- 6 International Telecommunications Union, Data Hub Connectivity, Individuals using the internet in Cameroon, online at <https://datahub.itu.int/data/?e=CMR&i=11624>, accessed in May 2025.
- 7 Afam Co / World Bank, 'Cameroon's journey toward affordable, reliable, and universal electricity access for all', 16 January 2025, online, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2025/01/16/cameroon-journey-toward-affordable-reliable-and-universal-electricity-access-for-all>.
- 8 Caisse Autonome d'Amortissement, *Portant loi de finances de la République du Cameroun pour l'exercice 2025 (Containing the Finance Law of the Republic of Cameroon for the financial year 2025)*, online at https://caa.cm/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/loi_n_2024_013_du_23_12_2024-web.pdf, accessed in May 2025.
- 9 OECD/AUC/ATAF, 'Revenue Statistics in Africa 2024: Facilitation and Trust as Drivers of Voluntary Tax Compliance in Selected African Tax Administrations', (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024), online at www.oecd.org/en/publications/revenue-statistics-in-africa-2024_78e9af3a-en.html, accessed in June 2025.
- 10 Business in Cameroon, 'CFA1.7 Trillion in Suspicious Financial Flows in Cameroon in 2023, Up 180%', 07 October 2024, online at <https://www.businessincameroon.com/public-management/0710-14209-cfa1-7-trillion-in-suspicious-financial-flows-in-cameroon-in-2023-up-180>, accessed in May 2025.
- 11 International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT 'Cameroon Country Profile', online at ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/, accessed in June 2025.
- 12 Le Bulletin du Patronat, Le Livre Blanc de l'Economie Camerounaise, l'impératif industriel du Cameroun, GICAM, Edition No 80, November 2020, online at <https://legecam.cm/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/numero-80-decembre-2020-small.pdf>, accessed in June 2025.
- 13 Islamic Development Bank, 'FAO and Islamic Development Bank Strengthen Partnership to Transform Agrifood Systems', 13 February 2025, online at <https://www.isdb.org/news/fao-and-islamic-development-bank-strengthen-partnership-to-transform-agrifood-systems>, accessed in June 2025.
- 14 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 'UNFPA Regional Director Reiterates Commitment to Curb Maternal Deaths to Cameroon's Minister of Public Health', 3 December 2024, online at <https://cameroon.unfpa.org/en/news/unfpa-regional-director-reiterates-commitment-curb-maternal-deaths-camerouns-minister-public>, accessed in June 2025.
- 15 United Nations Children's Fund, 'UNICEF Welcomes KfW Development Bank Grant to Support Nutrition Programmes in Cameroon', 22 April 2025, online at <https://cameroon.unfpa.org/en/news/unfpa-regional-director-reiterates-commitment-curb-maternal-deaths-camerouns-minister-public>, accessed in June 2025.
- 16 Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development of Cameroon (MINEPAT), 'Coopération Cameroun-Arabie Saoudite: Plus de 21 milliards de FCFA pour la reconstruction du Nord-Ouest et du Sud-Ouest', 10 May 2023, online at <https://minepat.gov.cm/fr/2023/05/10/cooperation-cameroun-arabie-saoudite-plus-de-21-milliards-de-fcfa-pour-la-reconstruction-du-nord-ouest-et-du-sud-ouest/>, accessed on 17 June 2025.
- 17 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 'Cérémonie de lancement des activités de la FAO dans le cadre du Projet d'urgence de lutte contre la crise alimentaire (PULCCA)', 30 September 2024, online at [https://www.fao.org/cameroun/actualites/detail/C%C3%A9r%C3%A9monie-de-lancement-des-activit%C3%A9s-de-la-FAO-dans-le-cadre-du-Projet-d-urgence-de-lutte-contre-la-crise-alimentaire-\(PULCCA\)/fr](https://www.fao.org/cameroun/actualites/detail/C%C3%A9r%C3%A9monie-de-lancement-des-activit%C3%A9s-de-la-FAO-dans-le-cadre-du-Projet-d-urgence-de-lutte-contre-la-crise-alimentaire-(PULCCA)/fr), accessed on 17 June 2025.
- 18 Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development of Cameroon (MINEPAT), *Coopération Cameroun-Arabie Saoudite: Plus de 21 milliards de FCFA pour la reconstruction du Nord-Ouest et du Sud-Ouest*, 10 May 2023, <https://minepat.gov.cm/fr/2023/05/10/cooperation-cameroun-arabie-saoudite-plus-de-21-milliards-de-fcfa-pour-la-reconstruction-du-nord-ouest-et-du-sud-ouest/> (accessed 17 June 2025).
- 19 timesnews2, 'post-covid-19-support-cameroon-govt-arab-bank-united-nations-devt-programme-revamp-smes-with-usd-21million-project' 29 September 2022, online at <https://timesnews2.info/post-covid-19-support-cameroon-govt-arab-bank-united-nations-devt-programme-revamp-smes-with-usd-21million-project/>, accessed in June 2025.
- 20 World Health Organization, 'Ten years of blood safety in the WHO African Region. (Brazzaville: WHO Regional Office for Africa, 2025), online at https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/381090?search-result=true&query=ten+years&scope=&rpp=10&sort_by=score&order=desc, accessed in June 2025, Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.
- 21 UNFPA Cameroon, 'UNFPA Regional Director reiterates commitment to curb maternal deaths to Cameroon's Minister of Public Health', 03 December 2024, online at <https://cameroon.unfpa.org/en/news/unfpa-regional-director-reiterates-commitment-curb-maternal-deaths-camerouns-minister-public>, accessed in June 2025.
- 22 UNICEF Cameroon, 'Programme Health & HIV', online at <https://www.unicef.org/cameroon/what-we-do/health-hiv>, accessed in June 2025.
- 23 Based on internal processes and official communication from the UN Resident Coordinator's Office in Cameroon at the time of writing in May 2025.
- 24 This information was collated and verified from meeting minutes of the United Nations Coordination groups in Cameroon.