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Douala Takes Ownership of its Future

Douala is the largest city in Cameroon and home to nearly 20 per cent of the country's population of 19 million. It is also Cameroon's economic hub, with an international airport and one of the biggest ports along the Atlantic coast of Africa.

Despite its immense potential, Douala faces some basic challenges that stunt its economic growth and prevent it from assuming a more influential role in the region. These include poverty, unemployment, crime, lack of basic infrastructure and services such as water, sanitation, roads and electricity. The city lacks the financial resources to cope with these multiple challenges. Combined with rapid and unplanned urbanisation, these factors contribute to the proliferation of slums.

In 2003, Cameroon adopted a **Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)** that focused on economic diversification, infrastructure development and good governance. Recognising that unplanned urbanisation was damaging its cities and the rest of the country, the Cameroon PRSP laid out its government's urban poverty reduction strategy:

"The government of Cameroon is well aware of the extent of the problems and is in the process of drawing an integrated urban development policy. Its objectives are to: (i) improve the living conditions of urban dwellers, a majority of who live under precarious conditions; and (ii) reinforce the economic role of towns by strengthening urban infrastructures."

"A constant dialogue with all actors is required to sustain their commitment and accountability during CDS implementation."

Jean Yango, Director of Studies, Urban Planning and Sustainable Development, CUD

Project: Urban Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy: City of Douala and its Greater Urban Area

Partners: Cities Alliance, *Communauté Urbaine de Douala (CUD)*, the World Bank, *Agence Française de Développement (Afd)*

Duration: 2006 – 2009

Cities Alliance Financing: USD 175,000

Towards a Participatory Development Framework

In 2006, Douala's administrative authority, the *Communauté Urbaine de Douala (CUD)*, approached the Cities Alliance for its support in formulating a City Development Strategy (CDS). The CDS was meant to establish and validate a coherent framework for the long-term development of Douala, towards the goal of poverty reduction and economic development.

CUD took the lead and worked closely with elected local and national government officials, civil society organisations representing the urban poor, women and other vulnerable groups, private sector and the media to formulate a comprehensive development plan for the city. Major emphasis was given to the participation of local stakeholders in every phase of the **CDS process**.

In the first phase, a detailed diagnostic study of Douala's socio-economic conditions was conducted. Next, led by CUD, city stakeholders engaged in extensive dialogue with each other to draw up a strategic development framework for the city. Ten priority interventions were identified in four focus areas: slum reduction and improved quality of life for the poor; sustainable growth, economic development and competitiveness; environmental protection; and improved urban governance and institutional frameworks.

The CDS Yields Positive Results for Douala

The Douala CDS is credited for its role in nurturing effective partnerships at the city level. CUD led the CDS with minimal assistance from external partners such as the Cities Alliance. It launched an extensive advocacy and outreach campaign to include as many as stakeholders in identifying the needs and priorities of the city. Several workshops were held in which local participants - including NGOs representing the poor, women and other vulnerable groups - were encouraged to voice their concerns. As a result of this effort, the Douala CDS is seen as a credible and representative development action plan for the city.

The participatory and collaborative nature of the CDS process also influenced institutional behaviour and produced new management capacities at CUD and other local institutions. Based on consultations with different city stakeholders, CUD has now adopted an integrated urban planning approach. This also helped in the prioritisation of projects, since decisions were based on their level of urgency and available resources. As the CDS progressed, CUD and other local actors developed a sense of ownership and commitment to its process and outcomes.

Another major contribution of the Douala CDS is that it has led to critical financing opportunities for the city. For instance, in 2011, the **World Bank approved a USD 28.5 million loan for a city sanitation project**. Its design was based on the diagnostic study conducted in the first phase of the Cities Alliance-supported CDS. The French development agency *Agence Française de Développement* (Afd) is also financing a Euro 163 million project (approximately USD 212 million) to improve the city's drainage system. In a country with little public funding for sanitation, this is significant.¹ It also keeps the momentum going for the CDS, so that it does not remain a purely academic exercise and translates into action.

Lessons Learned from the Douala Experience

After Douala's rewarding CDS experience, Cameroon's capital city, Yaounde, embarked on its own CDS, again with support from the Cities Alliance. Some important

lessons were learnt in Douala that can potentially improve the impact of the CDS in Yaounde and other cities. While influential local partners like CUD contribute to better project design and implementation, the consistent support of higher-level governments plays an important role as well. However, public funding for urban poverty reduction in Douala remained inconsistent. A 2004 decentralisation law created further challenges in terms of allocation of responsibility and institutional accountability. According to the new law, the national government is no longer responsible for urban decision-making in Cameroon. At the same time, local authorities lack the capacity and resources to take on their new responsibilities. This led to some delays in the initial stages of project implementation and the CDS project was delayed by 18 months.

While the CDS provides a useful platform for coordination among urban stakeholders, effective communication and dissemination of its process and outcomes is critical. This is important for local actors as well as external agencies such as donors as well as the state and national government. CUD's Director of Studies, Urban Planning and Sustainable Development, Jean Yango, who also coordinated the CDS project, concludes, "A constant dialogue with all actors is required to sustain their commitment and accountability during CDS implementation. It also leads to stakeholder accountability."

¹ A World Bank Africa Infrastructure Country Diagnostic (AICD) study estimates Cameroon's public expenditure on sanitation is approximately 0.2% of its GDP, against an average of 0.5% of GDP being invested in new sanitation facilities in Sub-Saharan Africa every year.

Douala's CDS contributes to the long-term objectives of the Cities Alliance by:

- Supporting local partners in leading the CDS with wide stakeholder participation
- Fostering an atmosphere of trust that enabled genuine stakeholder involvement in CDS formulation
- Providing a credible strategic development framework that attracted investments in Douala