

# United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in Women Empowerment Strategies in Cameroon 1976 – 2015

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## ABSTRACT

For the past decades, discussions on African women have witnessed steadily increasing awareness of the need to empower women through measures to increase social, economic and political equity, and broader access to fundamental human rights. The focus on women as a topic of political debate stepped into the international arena during the United Nations (UN) Decade for Women in the 1970s. This led to the establishment of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in December 1976. The vision emerged from the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women in the International Women's Year (IWY) with its first director Margaret C. Snyder. This paper thus aims at assessing UNIFEM's strategies in empowering women in Cameroon's development sectors. The study is informed by primary and secondary data sourced during a field study in some localities (Bamenda, Ebolowa, Kye-Ossi and Douala) and some published and unpublished documents. The findings of the research revealed that UNIFEM's actions improved on women status in various domains. This however, was not optimized due to certain setbacks. Some of the benefits included skill training, adult education and enterprise development. Ultimately, the data derived from the various sources appeared vital to our topic and enabled us to note that within the context of an expanding civil society, the need of women's empowerment to alleviate poverty and foster community development remains crucial.

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment, Development, Strategies, UNIFEM, Cameroon.

## INTRODUCTION

The rights and status of women in traditional African societies have generated great debate among many African and European scholars for a long time. The colonial governments attempted a more objective investigation which was seen in their report as being passive in decision making. Despite the wide interest in the attempts made at studying feminine status and roles in the African communities, it is still controversial to properly examine African women in the domain of politics, and socio-economic activities.[1] Women empowerment is a global and highly complex phenomenon that challenges policymakers, justice systems, service providers, community leaders, activists, families, and individuals concerned with prevention and response of it. Globally, there is wide variation in the prevalence of Women empowerment, both between countries and even within countries that have marked differences. It is particularly important for women, in view of their heightened vulnerability relative to men, and the role that women can play to ensuring adequate social fulfilment. The need for women empowerment arises from gender disparities that result from unequal access to education, lack of attention to women health, lack of political voice and power, patriarchal social systems, unequal access to important resources (notably land), and women burden of care.

The present work focuses on the main objective of UNIFEM to provide services and skills for women's empowerment in Cameroon. Since its inception, UNIFEM has taken a number of actions for socio-economic empowerment of women. However, there exist no independent or third party study to evaluate the impact of UNIFEM on the lives of women in different areas in Cameroon. The paper provide an opportunity to conduct third-party evaluation but also take stock of the strengths and weakness of UNIFEM services and

give it a feed-back on the basis of prevalent trends of women's empowerment in Cameroon. The period under study in this paper extends from 1976 to 2015. The year 1976 was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly as **United Nations' Decade for Women**.<sup>[2]</sup> This was the **United Nations' programme that began on January 1st, 1976; the goal was the promotion of equal rights** and opportunities for women around the world. As for 2015, it was called the Year of Women's Empowerment with the global objectives to go beyond the set quotas, thus fixing the target at 50%. The United Nations' initiative set forth by the UN Women known as "Planet 50-50: step up gender equality" perfectly translates this.<sup>[3]</sup> Still in 2015, the African Union adopted this year as "the African Union Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda".<sup>[4]</sup>

## **THEORY OF EMPOWERMENT AND CONTEXT OF UNIFEM'S CREATION IN CAMEROON**

UNIFEM has become a women friendly global institution in spite of being a forum of governments, the great majority of which until lately has reflected primarily the visions and aspirations of men. Through the concerted efforts of nations and the founding members of UNIFEM, over the decades, the aspirations and visions of women have been brought on the international agenda. This has been through declarations, covenants and programmes for the advancement and empowerment of women.

### **1. The theory of empowerment**

As a term, empowerment originates from American community psychology and is associated with the social scientist Julian Rappaport (1981). The theory of empowerment is propagated by writers such as Perkins, Rappaport, Zimmennan, and Warschausky.<sup>[5]</sup> According to them, Empowerment is both a value orientation for working in the community and a theoretical model for understanding the process and consequences of efforts to exert control and influence over decisions that affect one's life, organizational functioning, and the quality of community life.<sup>[6]</sup> The development of empowerment theory also helps advance the construct beyond a passing fad and political manipulation. A theory of empowerment suggests ways to measure the construct in different contexts, to study empowering processes, and to distinguish empowerment from other constructs, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, or locus of control. One definition of empowerment is useful, but appears to be limited to the individual level of analysis.<sup>[7]</sup> On the other hand, Kanter's empowerment theory includes a discussion of organizational behavior and empowerment. According to this theory, empowerment is promoted in work environments that provide employees with access to information, resources, support, and the opportunity to learn and develop.<sup>[8]</sup> UN Global Compact and UN Women define empowerment theory as principles offering guidance to countries on how to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace, marketplace and community.<sup>[9]</sup>

In the context of this paper, the Theory of Empowerment applies to women's role in Cameroon in increasing their capacities for self-help rather than viewing themselves as passive and helpless. This theory shifts mindsets to be self-empowered and fight oppression. In this "fight," women take on the role of facilitators of the process, rather than "rescuers". It encourages women to participate fully in life across all sectors as it is essential to build stronger economies, achieve international agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improve the quality of life for women, men, families and communities.

Bonnie *Keller* and Dorcas *Chilila Mbewewe*, define women empowerment as "a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination".<sup>[10]</sup> Talking about women empowerment, one of the most vocal promoters of women emancipation in Cameroon, Yaah Gladys Shang Viban who has been a Cultural Affairs Specialist at the US Embassy in Cameroon, asserted that empowerment is that process which is essential to strengthen and activate a person's capacity to satisfy their own needs, solve their own problems, and acquire the necessary resources to take control over their life.<sup>[11]</sup>

Women empowerment in the context of this paper is about women taking control over their lives, setting their own agendas, gaining skills, and solving problems. It is about them having control over their lives, both within and outside the home and having the ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, both nationally and internationally.[12] Thus, the research seeks to evaluate the impact of UNIFEM in the empowerment of women as a strategy in the development of Cameroon.

## 2. Context of UNIFEM's creation

In the 1920s and 1930s women's international organizations, which were still young, had interesting collaboration with the first intergovernmental peace organization, the League of Nations which marked the beginning of organized and institutionalized inter-governmental collaboration. This was the first step in joint foreign policy between governments toward supra-national goals such as peace and security instead of each nation merely defending its own individual interests against the interests of others. Women immediately realized the importance of such cooperation and had good reason to become interested in it as it aimed at ending wars and violence, and the settlement of disputes through negotiations, which corresponded with women's yearning for peace.[13]

Latin American women were instrumental in the International Conference of American States (ICAS) decision in 1928 to create the Inter American Commission of Women (IACW). In 1935 the League of Nations approved the Convention and urged all Member States to ratify it. The IACW encouraged its member governments to establish women's bureaux, revise discriminatory civil codes, and take women's initiatives regarding these issues to the League of Nations.[14] Perhaps the most concrete example of women's ability to make an impact at the international level was the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women. Established by the League of Nations in 1937, it was authorized to conduct a "comprehensive and scientific inquiry into the legal status of women in various countries of the world." The Committee's work had barely begun when the Second World War broke out. But its founding was an important step toward putting women's human rights on the agenda of inter-governmental cooperation. The Committee was also the predecessor of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) later established by the United Nations.[15]

Although the United Nations Charter was the "first international agreement to proclaim gender equality as a fundamental human right," the path toward achieving equality has been challenging. Yet, thanks to the determination of women's rights activists and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the antidiscrimination clause of the UN Charter upholds the equal rights of both men and women. During the time of the League of Nations, women's issues had gained visibility and began to appear more often on the international community's agenda. Due to the actions in the 1920s and 1930s, a substantial number of women gained experience and expertise in the international arena and networking.[16]

The United Nations Blue Book on the advancement of women divides UN work focused on equality and the advancement of women into four different periods: securing the legal foundations of equality (from 1945-1962); recognizing women's role in development (from 1963-1975); the UN Decade for Women (1976-1985); and "Towards Equality, Development and Peace" (from 1986 onwards). After the inception, the United Nations organization moved quickly to affirm that the advancement of women was a major thrust area of its work.[17]

## 3. Origin of UNIFEM in Cameroon

Cameroon is a developing country with a capacity to become an emerging democracy. It prepared the ground for UNIFEM to become a platform for women expression in the country. UNIFEM built long-term relationships with ministries intervening in women's empowerment and the family, health, and justice that

went beyond the work on Violence Against Women (VAW). Further, UNIFEM had established in country offices strong relationships with National Women's Machineries (NWMs), women's organizations, gender advocates, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).[18] Consulted CSO stakeholders noted that, among all UN agencies, UNIFEM tended to have the closest links and be most accessible to CSO partners. While having strong relationships with CSOs and women's grassroots movements, UNIFEM's status as a UN agency also allows it to act as a mediator and facilitator between CSOs, government agencies, and donors, as well as other UN agencies.[19]

In the Central African sub-region, UNIFEM began working on VAW in 2004 through initiatives at local, national, and sub-regional levels. Efforts included awareness raising and networking, capacity building of rights holders and duty bearers, advocacy, as well as action-oriented research. As a result of this, in 2004, UNIFEM established a temporal project office in Cameroon to build long-term relationships with ministries like (Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family MINPROFF, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice) that went beyond the work on VAW. With its project office in Cameroon, UNIFEM established strong relationships with women's organizations, gender advocates, and CSOs.[20]

In 2004, UNIFEM consulted extensively with women throughout Cameroon on their main concerns. They voiced the need for education and healthcare, for economic opportunities and the right to own land, as provisions to ensure political participation and to end gender based violence. Making sure that these priorities are taken into account in planning for the country's future, UNIFEM fed the consultations' findings into the Joint Assessment Mission by the UN. This resulted in the establishment of a guiding framework for the international community's engagement in developing and empowering women in Cameroon.[21] To provide the Cameroonian women with an opportunity to make their voices heard directly, the consulted developers and national partners in Cameroon widely recognized UNIFEM's potential role with regard to gender equality. Their levels of awareness and appreciation of UNIFEM paved a way to the establishment of a UNIFEM full country office in 2008.[22] At the time of its establishment in Cameroon, despite the country's office relatively young age, UNIFEM had progressively been able to build a good reputation and establish its leadership role in relation to gender equality and women's rights.

## UNIFEM AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN CAMEROON

Focused on women's social empowerment in Cameroon, this section examines UNIFEM's actions on VAW and its partnerships with women's organisations. Also, it talks about UNIFEM's policy in domain of domestic workers rights in Cameroon and brings out the political and economic support for women from stakeholders.

### 1. Social empowerment

All of UNIFEM's initiatives to end VAW in Cameroon have been aligned with the broad objectives outlined in national commitments in relation to VAW.[23] In Cameroon, UNIFEM has contributed to strengthening the capacity of MINPROFF for addressing and increasing its engagement in the fight VAW through the 16 Days of Activism.[24] The 16 Days Activism is an organizing strategy for individuals and groups around the world to call for the elimination of all forms of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) against women.[25] The dates for the campaign were chosen to link VAW and human rights and emphasize that GBV is a violation of human rights. Since 1991, the campaign takes place annually from November 25th, the International Day Against VAW to December 10th, International Human Rights Day.[26] In Cameroon, the 16 Days of Activism campaign aims to raise awareness on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) as a widespread social, health and economic issue. The SGBV became an explicit priority in 2008 and since then UNIFEM Cameroon has increasingly worked on VAW, focusing on two key aspects; strengthening the legal framework and the formal and informal justice systems to fight SGBV and VAW prevention, in

particular in relation to traditional harmful practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), early marriage, widowhood rites, and domestic violence. Key strategies employed are advocacy, sensitization, awareness raising and mobilization at the community level. As far as VAW is concerned, UNIFEM's partners in Cameroon have been the MINPROFF, Ministry of Justice (MINJUST), and several local civil society organizations (CSOs). UNIFEM's work with the MINPROFF has included the support for a variety of initiatives, including: popularization and sensitization campaigns on Women Human Rights (WHR) and the legal provisions (including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW) defending them; the production of the CEDAW report. With UNIFEM's assistance, the MINJUST has organized training on CEDAW and its applications for magistrates. UNIFEM has also played an active role in mechanisms such as the UN Gender Group, pushing for UN coordinated initiatives to fight VAW and Domestic Workers Rights in Cameroon.[27]

UNIFEM is working with Governments, unions and the private sector to promote the rights of domestic workers and ensure that their profession is both regulated and covered by social protection. UNIFEM is also working in Africa, through initiatives supported by its Fund for Gender Equality. In Cameroon, UNIFEM supported the formation of women worker's networks and strengthened the capacity of the existing organization to influence policy and claim entitlements. This includes technical and financial support to advocate with local governments for legislation. UNIFEM has also raised awareness at the community level and worked with partners to ensure gender-sensitive provisions in the governing national law and the protection of domestic workers' rights. For instance, in Cameroon, the National Association Supporting Domestic Workers organizes training sessions on labour legislation, the drafting of work contracts, as well as professional ethics. With this training, domestic workers have been able to affirm their social status and better defend their rights. According to UNIFEM, domestic workers comprise a significant part of the global workforce in informal employment and are among the most vulnerable groups of workers.[28]

## 2. Political empowerment

To bring out the political support for women from stakeholders, UNIFEM has long been a partner to women in conflict-affected areas. The forum Brings women together across geographic or political lines to agree on common positions in peace negotiations or post-conflict elections; supporting their engagement with security and justice institutions to stop impunity for VAW. A UN Women fifth edition of the Gender Café was held on 9 October 2014 on the theme "Women's Participation in Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management: Lessons Learned from Mali, Nigeria and Cameroon," followed by a two-day workshop on the same theme, with more than 200 participants from both chambers of the National Assembly, local authorities, civil society, development partners, the private sector and the UN System in Yaoundé.[29] The edition enlightened on Resolution 1325 in seeking solutions for women's participation in conflict prevention and crisis management. The participants at this edition appreciated the humanitarian situation on the two borders of Cameroon and their impact on Cameroonian communities in the East and the Far North Regions. In particular, it observed that women and girls are the first victims of the conflicts and that strong measures must be taken to curb the negative effects. A plan on women's participation in conflict management and resolution for the East and Far North regions was drafted and finalised by mid-November according to the UN Resolution 1325. To conclude the edition, a statement was made by Paul Atounga, Technical Adviser at MINPROFF that "the role of women in conflict prevention and management is fundamental".[30]

The legal framework governing the legislative and municipal elections is Law No. 2012/001 of 19 April 2012 relating to the Electoral Code, including some provisions which were amended by Law No 2012/017 of 21 December 2012. These laws provide that gender is a legal consideration in creating all candidate lists for parliamentary, municipal council, Senatorial, and regional council elections. The 2012 election law appears to have made an impact during the electoral process. The law sought to require that each candidate list have at least one female candidate.[31] A UNIFEM Gender and Elections expert

facilitated the meetings and discussions on ELECAM activity on a regular basis. This involved integrating gender dimension throughout the electoral process, as well as information sharing. With the support of a UNIFEM Gender and Elections expert, the electoral board at ELECAM rejected 48 out of 250 candidate lists from 38 political parties. Twenty (20) of the 48 rejected candidate lists were denied for failing to attain the gender requirement. In addition, at least two of the major political parties of Cameroon introduced the relative 30% quota for female candidates, on the electoral list. On April 14, 2013, Cameroon held its first senatorial elections.[32] Out of the 70 seats elected, women occupied 17 seats. The President of the Republic further appointed three additional female senators out of the 30 appointments within his prerogatives. Prior to the 2013 parliamentary elections, the percentage of women in the National Assembly was below 15%, and women represented only 23 out of 180 deputies in the National Assembly. Results of the September 2013 election, however, showed an increase in female representation in parliament. Women were elected to 56 seats of the National Assembly's 180 positions. This represented 31.1% of all seats.[33]

### 3. Economic empowerment

Donors play a significant role in relation to national development priorities in economic and social policies. The highest proportion of aid comes through bilateral and multilateral co-operation from funding bodies like France – 42.7%, the European Commission (EC) -18.5%, Germany -6%, the World Bank -10% and Global Funds -5.5%, who make up the five greatest technical and financial partners in Cameroon.[34] The EC lends its support to Cameroon within the framework of a co-operation policy defined in the country's strategy documents (Cameroon: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper PRSP 2003 and Growth and Employment Strategy Paper GESP 2010). The EC and UNIFEM have a broader collaboration in the area of "Integrating Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) into the aid effectiveness agenda" launched in 2008 by UNIFEM which was a three-year programme. The programme is funded by the EC and was intended to investigate how GRB tools and strategies have been used in the context of currently used aid modalities in Cameroon. This investigation was intended to deepen the understanding of national partners and the EC on the opportunities for using GRB to enhance accountability to gender equality in aid effectiveness.[35] This partnership supports stronger action on gender equality and women's human rights in national development processes and in cooperation programmes supported by the EC. The second stage of the programme (June 2009 – June 2011) involves targeted technical supporting five countries (Cameroon, Nepal, Peru, Rwanda, and Tanzania) to improve capacity to further institutionalize GRB.[36]

According to one of the representatives of UNIFEM in Cameroon Gorette Nduwayo, economic empowerment of women is one of the key areas of UNIFEM, committed since 2008 through the programme Support for Women in Informal trans-border trade (PAFICIT). She further asserted that this included the construction of a Gender Sensitive commercial structure that permits women to be fully engaged and increase participation and generation of income. In Sub-Saharan Africa, women trade in goods such as food crops, handicraft products, electronics, minerals and clothes across borders. As informal small-business owners, they make vital contributions, helping to reduce poverty by creating wealth and employment. **One of the Current programs of UNIFEM Cameroon is the Program of Women involved in Cross-Border Informal Trade (PAFICIT).** UNIFEM's informal cross-border trade programme draws attention to women's considerable economic contributions, and advocates for favourable tax regimes, supportive institutions and services, and recognition in national development plans. It interacts directly with cross-border traders, and helps communicate their concerns in global trade talks, including at the World Trade Organization.[37]

UNIFEM in collaboration with the Ministry of Trade has been implementing the Support Programme for Women Involved in Informal Cross-Border Trade project since 2012. The aim of the programme is to contribute to poverty reduction in rural and urban areas through the improvement of the socio-economic position of women involved in informal cross-border trade. Three major border areas are covered by this

program, namely: (i) the Cameroon-Nigeria border area, with the Idenau project site; (ii) the Cameroon-Gabon-Equatorial Guinea border area, with the Kyé-Ossi project site; (iii) the Cameroon-Nigeria-Chad border area, with the Mora project site.[38]

## CHALLENGES OF UNIFEM IN EMPOWERING WOMEN IN CAMEROON

In Cameroon, women's poverty level and their comparative lack of leadership and participation in decision making and lack of control over assets are often attributed to a number of personal factors. These factors include low self-esteem, financial insecurity and ignorance of their rights.[39] Due to this, UNIFEM faced a number of challenges which are social, economic and political challenges in Cameroon.

Socially, one of the main challenges for UNIFEM's performance has been the lack of strategic guidance and programmatic coherence on VAW in Cameroon. UNIFEM has not been able to develop explicit strategies in the sub-regions and country level for VAW and UNIFEM country staff has been expressing a lack of strategic direction on how to address VAW. For example; Cameroon hosts the largest number of refugees from the Central African Republic approximately 260,000. By December, 2016, more than 550,000 people, out of which were 276,000 refugees from the Central African Republic, 87,000 from Nigeria and 199,000 internally displaced who were forced to move to Adamaoua, the East, the North and the Far North; approximately 55% of the refugees were women.[40] The vast majority of them (more than 158,000) have arrived since the onset of the latest crisis in the country in December 2013. About 100,000 others have been in Cameroon since 2003.[41] In recent years, more than 65,000 Nigerian refugees have also sought refuge in the country's Far North region, due to the escalating violence in Nigeria's Borno and Yobe States located in North Eastern Nigeria. In Cameroon, approximately seventy percent of refugees live side by side with locals in host communities. The conflict and insecurity have rendered such communities more vulnerable, and has created rifts. As a result, women in particular have been more exposed to violent extremism and intolerance. Thus women are at risk of sexual and gender-based violence and other violations of human rights, inside and outside the camps by men from various backgrounds.[42] Despite UNIFEM investments in human and financial resources to address this situation, the humanitarian challenges, especially related to GBV and poverty, remain persistent.[43]

In the economic domain, women traders in Cameroon specifically face challenges in accessing opportunities due to market saturation. Indeed, an increase in women entering the ICBT often leads to a concomitant increase in informal traders, which increases competition, and can depress earnings as markets quickly become saturated.[44] According to a UNIFEM's study, "Harassment and sexual exploitation by border officials seeking bribes constitute the biggest obstacles for female informal cross-border traders in Africa and Cameroon".[45] UNIFEM's study showed that women traders in Cameroon have limited access to formal credit; reason why they turn to the informal financial intermediaries that are fragmented. Thus information on market prices and other pertinent matters is piecemeal; transactions are small; and interest rates are typically higher than those in the formal sector.[46]

Politically, though women enjoy an edging proportion comprising more than half of Cameroon's population, they continue to be underrepresented in political leadership positions in the country. For over a decade, some women movements like the Women in Politics Network created in 2007 in Cameroon have brought women activists from around the regions together to identify and target barriers to women's political participation, leadership and representation. One such barrier is a lack of information about the degree to which women are fully represented in Cameroon's government decision-making. Even after overcoming hurdles to assuming elected office, women in government often find themselves marginalized in the day-to-day work of developing legislation, enacting policies, and overseeing budgets. [47] Education remains a guarantee of social success and an important factor in access to decision-making spheres where a minimum level of skills is required.[48] Cameroonian legislation with the help of UNIFEM ensures equal

access to schooling in Cameroon but in many cases, women do not have access to quality education and training to enter politics especially in rural areas.[49] In an analysis of national and regional commitments to women in Cameroon, UNIFEM has found that many government and organizational plans and analyses refer to women's vulnerability without recommendations for action. The challenges facing women, such as impoverishment and inequalities in relation to human rights, participation and decision making are recognized, but the underlying causes of gender inequality and women's vulnerability are rarely analysed and actions to address the situation are not formulated.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Before concluding, it will be necessary to outline some recommendations on (VAW, Capacity-building training workshop, code of conduct and the implementation of value chain programmes) for UNIFEM and other organisations operating on similar grounds to meet up with their goals and gain local and international credit.

Socially, UNIFEM Cameroon should develop a strategy that articulates its roles and approaches for combating VAW in Cameroon and communicate its new strategy to all staff, partners and stakeholders. It should also strategically and realistically reflect on how to choose and prioritize VAW interventions in order to maximize their impact over time. It could be beneficial to do so in a participatory way, involving UNIFEM's key partners in the process, or at least ensuring transparent and timely information about strategic decisions. UNIFEM Cameroon has limited human and financial resources to address VAW in order to have significant results. This implies the need for UNIFEM to review the alignment of available resources and programme ambitions in Cameroon. This is not to suggest that UNIFEM must allocate more resources for VAW, but that it should critically reflect on whether available resources are used in the most strategic way. The lack of human or financial resources limits the ability to monitor VAW interventions on an ongoing basis. Thus, basic monitoring should be an intrinsic part of any programming effort and should be planned when making decisions on resource allocations. Monitoring is essential not only in terms of UNIFEM's accountability to its donors and partners, but also in terms of its ability to learn from successes and challenges, generate knowledge, and adjust its approach if necessary.[50]

Politically, UNIFEM Cameroon can promote Capacity-building training to promising women which can help encourage more women to enter into politics and political leadership positions. This strategy is aimed at stimulating women's interest in politics, providing them with critical political skills and knowledge and empowering them to apply these skills in their political careers. As a result, it will help mobilize and capitalize on the knowledge and skills of women who stand as a driving force to nurture a new generation of female leaders in Cameroon.[51] There is also the need for codes of conduct that clearly outline norms of behaviour in line with gender equality standards. This is due to the fact that there have been numerous incidents in some parliaments where women party members have been verbally abused, belittled and/or humiliated.[52] UNIFEM and political parties in Cameroon can further boost the participation and role of women in political parties by introducing or enhancing political party codes of conduct and by mainstreaming a gender perspective into these codes of conduct.

Economically, Women are an essential part of global value chains; as raw material producers, small-business owners, executives, retail workers, and consumers, women help businesses succeed and grow [53] Thus, UNIFEM Cameroon can reinforce women empowerment programmes, through the implementation of value chain programmes, including in a specific way women and men all over the Cameroonian territory. Giving the same abilities to women and men in their action for value chain development is a long-term winning strategy that will contribute to poverty eradication, and to economic and social wealth creation. UNIFEM Cameroon should encourage the creation of sustainability-oriented collective enterprises for women's economic development, and their social care which would integrate their retirement and the implementation of the value chain approach.[54]



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## CONCLUSION

The objective of this research work was to show UNIFEM's partnership with the Cameroon government, local and international NGOs and other civil society organizations. The agency endeavoured has made effort over the past decades to develop policies and programmes, prohibiting discrimination or promoting women empowerment and gender equality in Cameroon. This paper centrally focused on the extent to which UNIFEM made significant contributions to improving women's plights. The study revealed that there is significant shift of UNIFEM's interest in the mainstreaming of gender in institutions and the creation of training opportunities for women as agents of change in Cameroon. Thus, UNIFEM Cameroon has initiated a real extension, as a partner accompanying the implementation of the national gender policy, leader of gender mainstreaming in the humanitarian response, but also leader accompanying gender mainstreaming in major national projects. In this light, the knowledge generated by this paper is useful not only to Cameroonian communities but also to other developing countries in the area of women empowerment and gender equality. Since gender is a crosscutting issue, it is important for UNIFEM to work with a number of Government partners in Cameroon. Once the most suitable partners have been identified, the partnerships should be formal and a participative planning process should be developed and followed.

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