

Non-Formal Education for Socio-Professional Integration: Evaluating PAIRPPEV Project Design and Impact

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ABSTRACT

Effective project design is essential for program success. Even well-meaning initiatives like Cameroon's PAIRPPEV falter over time without robust foundations. Launched in 2006, the Support Program for Professional Insertion and Re-insertion of Vulnerable People (PAIRPPEV) includes three projects targeting socio-professional integration for vulnerable groups, yet integration issues persist nationwide after twenty years. This study examines PAIRPPEV's effects on vulnerable populations' integration, highlighting how design shapes outcomes. Employing mixed methods with quantitative and qualitative data, it finds that quantitative results show positive design impacts on integration in Mfoundi Division. However, qualitative insights reveal two major flaws: no dedicated funding mechanism for activities and a narrow beneficiary scope restricted to National Employment Fund (FNE) database registrants, excluding most vulnerable people. These constraints account for the program's enduring low national integration rates. Consequently, the following recommendations arise: redesign PAIRPPEV for comprehensive coverage of all vulnerable populations, expanding beyond FNE registrants via community outreach to boost reach and integration effectiveness; create a dedicated funding stream solely for PAIRPPEV, to ensure reliable implementation.

Keywords: non-formal education; vulnerability; socio-professional integration; project design.

INTRODUCTION

Project design plays a pivotal role in determining performance: robust designs generally produce strong results. Even ambitious, high-profile initiatives can falter over time, as illustrated by Cameroon's PAIRPPEV program. Launched in 2006, PAIRPPEV encompasses three projects to foster the socio-professional integration of vulnerable populations. Yet, after more than a decade, this challenge persists nationwide. Evidence suggests a clear connection between the program's initial design and its underwhelming outcomes. This paper assesses PAIRPPEV's effectiveness in promoting socio-professional integration for vulnerable groups in Cameroon, with a particular emphasis on how its design shaped results. The study focuses on the Centre Region, specifically the Mfoundi Division, and adopts a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative and qualitative methods.

Study Background

Promoting societal equality has emerged as a top global priority for policymakers. UN General Assembly Resolution Article 15 notes that people with disabilities, one of the world's largest minorities, affecting over one in ten individuals, are often trapped in poverty, unemployment, and social isolation. The UN and various international and national bodies aim to eradicate all forms of discrimination and exclusion faced by vulnerable people worldwide. As stated in paragraph 27 of the resolution, the international community, UN, multilateral financial institutions, regional organizations, local authorities, and civil society actors must contribute their efforts and resources to reduce inequalities. This underscores that social inequality is a pressing reality demanding urgent action. Cameroon's National Development Strategy 2020-2030 (NDS 20-30) charts a path to national emergence by 2035, calling for full citizen participation in line with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It hinges on four core pillars: economic structural transformation; human capital and wellbeing advancement; employment promotion, economic integration, governance, and decentralization; plus strategic state management [11].

In 2006, Cameroon's government, via the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS) and National Employment Fund (FNE), established a partnership convention to advance non-formal education and socio-professional integration for vulnerable communities. MINAS handles disability protection, juvenile delinquency prevention and reintegration, anti-exclusion efforts, and national solidarity; FNE drives employment promotion for both able-bodied and disabled individuals. This collaboration birthed PAIRPPEV, the Support Program for Professional Insertion and Re-insertion of Vulnerable People, comprising three targeted projects:

- PAIRPER: Integration for street children.
- PAIRPHA: Integration for persons with disabilities.
- PAIRMA: Support for marginalized groups like Pygmies and Bororo nomads.

Overall, PAIRPPEV fosters autonomy through empowerment and builds skills via non-formal education and financial aid.

Problem statement

Government efforts to protect vulnerable rights in Cameroon have yielded disappointing results. Persistent high unemployment, poor socio-professional integration, and a surge in street children, evident in cities like Yaoundé, Douala, Bafoussam, Bamenda, Buea, Maroua, and Ngaoundéré, highlight ongoing challenges, including the lack of a clear integration/ reintegration roadmap and deepening marginalization. Central question: Why has socio-professional integration for vulnerable groups stagnated after more than a decade of PAIRPPEV? To what extent did PAIRPPEV's design impact project outcomes in Mfoundi Division? The research hypothesis is that PAIRPPEV's program design significantly contributed to addressing socio-professional integration challenges for vulnerable persons in Mfoundi. This study assesses the program's effectiveness in Mfoundi Division and nationwide by examining its design and outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section reviews relevant literature on vulnerability, socio-professional integration, and the PAIRPPEV program, including its missions, objectives, stakeholders, and beneficiaries.

Non-formal education for the socio-professional integration of vulnerable people

Non-formal education for the socio-professional integration of vulnerable people involves structured, flexible learning programs outside formal schools, aimed at equipping marginalized groups with practical skills for employment and social inclusion. These programs target out-of-school populations, enabling literacy, numeracy, vocational training, and life skills without rigid curricula or prerequisites.

The term "vulnerability" derives from the Latin *vulnerare*, meaning "to wound" or "to be wounded." Kates (1985) defines it simply as susceptibility to harm. [4]. Chambers (1989) describes vulnerability as "exposure to contingencies and stress, coupled with difficulty coping with them" [2]. Globally, populations face heightened vulnerability from socio-economic, political, environmental, and cultural stressors. Pereira (2017) notes that neglected or abused children often remain vulnerable into adulthood, with such individuals facing a roughly 70% higher risk of mental illness and homelessness by their 50s [9].

Vulnerable persons are those who, due to shared characteristics and circumstances, face elevated risks of health problems, psychosocial issues, and trauma (The Quebec Ministry of Health and Social Services, 2015). This vulnerability stems from multiple factors, including socio-economic conditions (e.g., access to resources and services) and individual traits (e.g., age, sex, gender, ethno-cultural origins, pre-existing health conditions, living standards, education, and socio-economic status), which expose people to harm [12]. Shulman et al. (2017) found that populations in precarious living conditions often develop chronic illnesses, mental health disorders, drug addiction, and alcoholism [10]. Mackenzie and Purkey (2019) highlight that socio-economically vulnerable individuals struggle with self-managing chronic conditions and accessing

health/psychosocial services. The World Health Organization (2022) attributes 30-55% of health issues to these factors [13].

Categories of vulnerable people

Numerous studies categorize vulnerable persons as including those with disabilities (mental, physical, intellectual), street children, marginalized groups, war/disaster victims, adolescents, elderly individuals, prisoners, and refugees. McKinney and Swartz (2019) describe street children as lacking shelter and protection, dwelling in unstable settings that expose them to street hazards like violence, substance abuse, and exploitation.

They typically lack formal education, healthcare, or life skills training, stunting personal development and future opportunities [6]. Marginalized populations endure rights deprivation in communities, made vulnerable by systemic, social, economic, and environmental obstacles that restrict access to resources, opportunities, and support. Key drivers include discrimination, economic gaps, underrepresentation, and entrenched inequities.

Socio-professional integration

Daniel (2021) views social integration as individuals or groups gaining social mobility within society. He describes it as a process fostering stable, just, and safe communities through human rights promotion and protection [10]. Memain-Srado (2018) frames social integration within cultural citizenship via three elements:

- Culture “H”: Repository of historical meanings, symbols, and traditions.
- Culture “C”: Creation of new meanings/ symbols through artistic discovery and innovation.
- Culture “S”: Symbolic tools individuals use to shape lifestyles [3].
- Ababou (2009) analyzed socio-professional integration for individuals with intellectual disabilities alongside non-disabled coworkers, revealing both positive and negative outcomes.

Positive effects emerge when coworkers fully grasp and embrace the integration project; conversely, vague project definitions produce adverse results. Thus, successful integration for disabled persons relies on coworkers' comprehension of the initiative [1].

Realistic evaluation theory

Realistic evaluation theory, pioneered by Pawson and Tilley (1997; revised 2006), views the social world as objectively real and employs a theory-based lens for assessment. It holds that intervention effectiveness depends on mechanisms activated within specific contexts, summarized by the equation: $\text{outcome} = \text{mechanism} + \text{context}$ [8].

This approach fits the study perfectly, allowing PAIRPPEV outcome evaluation with contextual nuance. It clarifies mechanisms for vulnerable persons' socio-professional integration/ reintegration, connecting program design to Mfoundi Division impacts.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, blending quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitatively, it applies a descriptive design to evaluate PAIRPPEV's program framework against socio-professional integration outcomes for vulnerable individuals in Cameroon's job market. Fieldwork centered on Yaoundé, the political and administrative capital, within Mfoundi Division.

Targeting all project stakeholders—including Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS) and National Employment Fund (FNE) staff—purposeful sampling recruited 117 participants: project team members, persons with disabilities, street children, and other marginalized groups. Table 1 outlines the study population distribution.

Table I. Study Sample Size

| Category of participants | Population |
|--------------------------|------------|
| Team members | 5 |
| Disabled persons | 15 |
| Street children | 51 |
| Marginal populations | 46 |
| Total | 117 |

Source: Field survey, 2025.

Questionnaire Design and Administration

For the quantitative research, questionnaires served as the primary data collection instrument due to their proven advantages: suitability for the study's goals, ability to yield numerical data, objectivity with minimal bias, and capacity for generalization. The questionnaire employed a 4-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA = 4), Agree (A = 3), Disagree (D = 2), Strongly Disagree (SD = 1). It was administered directly in key locations, including the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS), National Employment Fund (FNE), Poste Centrale, and Warda Roundabout, to reach participants effectively.

Data analysis method

Quantitative techniques processed the data, combining descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) for response patterns with inferential statistics. The Pearson correlation coefficient tested the research hypothesis. Ethical safeguards ensured confidentiality, anonymity, and participant safety, given the vulnerable population.

Study Findings

This section details key results, including descriptive and inferential statistics presented in the tables below (2 and 3).

Table results on PAIRPPEV program conception show strong respondent agreement across key design elements:

- 84.6% confirmed the program has clear, well-known objectives.
- 74.6% agreed its conception addresses vulnerable persons' core needs.
- 86.2% affirmed adequate personnel, budget, and tools for objective achievement.
- 79.5% noted pre-implementation feasibility testing.
- 72.7% supported the existence of a risk management plan by project managers.

Table II. Descriptive Statistics on PAIRPPEV Program Design

| No | Items | N | SA | | A | | D | | SD | | Mean | Std d |
|----|---|-----|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|-----|--------|--------|
| | | | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | | |
| 1 | PAIRPPEV features clearly defined objectives, well-known to all stakeholders. | 117 | 37 | 31.6 | 62 | 53.0 | 15 | 12.8 | 3 | 2.6 | 3.1368 | .72997 |
| 2 | PAIRPPEV program's | 117 | 44 | 37.6 | 56 | 47.9 | 14 | 12 | 3 | 2.6 | 3.2051 | .74900 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|--|-----|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|-----|--------|--------|
| | design accounts for vulnerable persons' primary needs | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | The program includes essential personnel, budget, and tools for effective implementation. | 117 | 54 | 46.2 | 47 | 40.2 | 10 | 8.5 | 6 | 5.1 | 3.2735 | .82654 |
| 4 | Project promoters conducted feasibility studies across technical, financial, operational, and temporal dimensions. | 117 | 47 | 40.2 | 46 | 39.3 | 19 | 16.2 | 5 | 4.3 | 3.1538 | .84706 |
| 5 | Promoters also established a risk management plan to address and mitigate potential threats. | 117 | 32 | 27.4 | 53 | 45.3 | 22 | 18.8 | 10 | 8.5 | 2.9145 | .89609 |
| N valid (listwise) | | 117 | | | | | | | | | | |

These findings indicate broad validation of the program's structural robustness.

Table III. Correlation between PAIRPPEV Design and Socio-Professional Integration

| | | Program Design | Socio-professional integration |
|--|---------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|
| | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .617** |
| | Sig. (bilateral) | | .000 |
| | N | 117 | 117 |
| | Pearson Correlation | .617** | 1 |
| | Sig. (bilateral) | .000 | |
| | N | 117 | 117 |

** Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (bilateral)

The table displays Pearson correlation results linking PAIRPPEV's program conception to socio-professional integration for vulnerable persons. The p-value (.000) falls below the 0.05 alpha threshold typical in social sciences, paired with a positive coefficient of 0.617, indicating a strong correlation where design influences outcomes by 61.7%. These results decisively reject the null hypothesis in favor of the alternative, demonstrating that the conceptual framework of PAIRPPEV exerts a statistically significant impact on project outcomes. Consequently, refining and optimizing the program's design emerges as a strategic lever to elevate the success of socio-professional integration efforts for vulnerable populations.

Qualitative Insights On Design Gaps

This study examined PAIRPPEV's program design influence on socio-professional integration for vulnerable persons in Mfoundi Division, Cameroon. Analysis confirms a significant positive relationship: Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.617 ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$ alpha), rejecting the null hypothesis and affirming the alternative—that program conception substantially drives integration. Quantitative results show PAIRPPEV's design positively impacts integration in Mfoundi Division and Cameroon broadly. Yet, persistent low integration rates after over a decade remain unexplained, prompting a qualitative shift for deeper insight.

Qualitative analysis reveals critical design shortcomings in the MINAS-FNE founding convention, which directly account for the program's stalled advancement. Despite prolonged implementation, the charter's foundational structure merits rigorous scrutiny to identify and address flaws that undermine socio-professional integration for vulnerable populations. Firstly, there are persistent Funding Challenges. Funding remains a core bottleneck. Article 8 explicitly links resources to "MINAS priorities via projects," making execution untenable given MINAS's ongoing budget shortfalls. As MINAS struggles to finance its essential operations, PAIRPPEV inevitably suffers from inadequate support, perpetuating implementation delays. The second key structural

flaw lies in the program's eligibility criteria: PAIRPPEV narrowly targets only those vulnerable individuals pre-registered in FNE database, systematically excluding the vast majority who could benefit from socio-professional integration support. As a result, PAIRPPEV's reach remains limited, perpetuating inequities and reducing its overall impact on socio-professional reintegration at scale.

CONCLUSION

This study evaluates the PAIRPPEV's role in supporting socio-professional integration for Cameroon's vulnerable populations. Despite two decades of implementation, persistently low integration rates prompt an investigation into its design and outcomes. PAIRPPEV, as a non-formal education initiative, aims to equip marginalized groups with practical skills for employment and social inclusion. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research dissects these dynamics to uncover barriers and opportunities. Quantitative analysis confirmed PAIRPPEV's design positively influences integration for vulnerable persons, with Pearson correlation showing a strong link between design elements and results.

Qualitative review, however, uncovered critical flaws: the program targets only vulnerable individuals pre-registered in the National Employment Fund's database, excluding the vast majority; Funding poses a significant obstacle since the program's founding documents tie resources to "MINAS priorities via projects," rendering execution unviable due to MINAS's persistent budget deficits. With MINAS unable to adequately fund its core functions, PAIRPPEV inevitably suffers from insufficient backing.

These design flaws largely account for the program's stalled nationwide progress. Accordingly, the following recommendations emerge:

- Redesign PAIRPPEV for comprehensive coverage of all vulnerable populations, expanding beyond FNE database registrants to boost reach and socio-professional integration success.
- Implement a dedicated funding mechanism solely for PAIRPPEV activities, to ensure sustainable execution.

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