

Involving Local Communities in the Implementation of Climate-Resilient Projects in Cameroon

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3M+

Cameroonians vulnerable
to climate impacts

148

adaptation measures
in the PNACC (2015)

90%

of farmers depend
on rain-fed agriculture

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Cameroon faces increasingly severe climate impacts — including floods in the north, prolonged droughts in Sahelian regions, and disrupted rainy seasons — that directly threaten agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods for over 3 million vulnerable Cameroonians.
- Climate resilience cannot be sustainable without the effective involvement of local communities: these communities are not merely beneficiaries of adaptation projects, but essential actors bearing local knowledge, practices, and solutions rooted in their daily realities.
- This note examines how the integration of civil society and local communities promotes sustainable resilience by ensuring that climate projects account for the socioeconomic and cultural realities of Cameroonians.



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Introduction

Cameroon is currently facing increasingly visible effects of climate change. In several regions — particularly in the north — floods are becoming more frequent, while Sahelian areas experience longer periods of drought. Agricultural land is degrading and rainy seasons are becoming increasingly unpredictable, with significant impacts on agricultural activities (Molua, 2023). These changes directly affect populations who depend on agriculture and natural resources for their livelihoods.

Experience in recent years shows that climate resilience cannot be sustainable without the effective involvement of local communities (Fonguez, 2023). These communities are not merely beneficiaries of adaptation projects but essential actors bearing local knowledge, practices, and solutions rooted in their daily realities. Their participation in the design, implementation, and monitoring of climate-resilient projects is therefore a central question for sustainable adaptation.

Section I: Climate Vulnerability and the Importance of Local Action

Growing Exposure of Communities to Climate Risks

More than 3 million Cameroonians are vulnerable to climate impacts, but the most affected areas are in the Sahelian regions of the north and the forested regions of the south. Climate change is increasing the frequency of floods, droughts, and heat waves — with consequences including declining agricultural yields, loss of income for rural households, and conflicts over access to water and land. These phenomena make communities more vulnerable due to their reliance on rain-fed agriculture, limited access to adaptation technologies, and structural poverty.

The Central Role of Communities in Project Sustainability

Local communities play a key role in the sustainability of climate adaptation projects. They help identify and understand local issues and propose solutions tailored to their specific circumstances (Tchatchou et al., 2013). Projects that fail to involve local communities very often fail to achieve lasting impact. Community involvement improves project relevance, infrastructure maintenance, and the dissemination of innovations.

Section II: Forms of Community Involvement

Participatory Planning and Project Design

Participatory planning involves engaging the population at every stage of the project (Adibone, 2025). It begins with consulting villagers to ensure the proposed solutions are appropriate. Local situations are then analysed with the participation of community members to identify the main climate risks they face, available resources,

and adaptation strategies already in use. Local management committees are established to ensure monitoring and proper implementation — strengthening community ownership and the sustainability of initiatives.

Mobilising Traditional Knowledge and Local Practices

Local populations have a better understanding of traditional agricultural calendars, soil conservation techniques, community forest management, and agroforestry systems. These practices are very often better suited to local realities than certain imported technologies. Communities practice intercropping to mitigate climate risks and use local drought-resistant species. Imported climate systems often fail to account for traditional agricultural cycles and local land tenure systems (Awazi & Tchamba, 2019).

Strengthening Local Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

CSOs serve as the link between culturally responsible practices and climate projects. They sensitise communities on climate risks, mobilise local resources, support the implementation of adaptation actions, and represent community interests before public authorities. An inclusive approach that draws on traditional knowledge leads to the development of context-specific solutions — from organic fertilizers to traditional water harvesting systems common in the Western Highlands.

Section III: Challenges of Community Involvement

Despite its recognized importance, community involvement faces several practical challenges. Limited access to finance for grassroots organisations means that local councils and CSOs often lack the financial resources to meaningfully participate in adaptation project design and implementation. The complexity of international climate finance mechanisms creates barriers to direct access for local actors.

There is also insufficient recognition of traditional knowledge in formal project frameworks: official systems often undervalue or fail to document indigenous ecological knowledge, reducing the effectiveness of interventions. Furthermore, gender disparities persist in community participation — women, who are disproportionately dependent on agriculture and natural resources, are often excluded from decision-making processes despite being most affected by climate change.

The Inclusion Imperative

Climate projects that bypass local communities risk being technically sound but practically irrelevant — failing to achieve lasting impact because they do not reflect the knowledge, priorities, and realities of the people they are designed to serve.

Policy Recommendations

1

Integrate Participatory Planning from the Design Phase

Involve local civil society organisations from the outset of project design to ensure alignment with local knowledge and structures. Establish local management committees with decision-making authority over project implementation.

2

Develop Climate Clubs in Schools and Communities

Create practical training programmes on regenerative agriculture and climate adaptation, led by communities, so that climate awareness becomes embedded in the next generation of farmers and local leaders.

3

Prioritize Gender-Responsive Climate Budgeting

Explicitly allocate climate adaptation funds to women's organisations and cooperatives at national and local levels. Women are generally more involved in small-scale agriculture and bear a disproportionate share of climate impacts.

4

Facilitate Direct Access to Climate Finance for Local Actors

Remove barriers to direct climate finance access for local councils and grassroots organisations through dedicated climate guarantees and more favourable lending terms for community-led adaptation projects.

5

Officially Document and Integrate Indigenous Knowledge

Establish formal systems for documenting and incorporating traditional knowledge on soil conservation, water management, and agroforestry into national adaptation planning to ensure a balance between scientific rigour and cultural relevance.

Conclusion

A successful climate transition is possible in Cameroon if it is led by local communities. CSOs serve as the link between culturally responsible practices that foster local ownership and climate projects rooted in aid, grants, and donor priorities. Inclusive approaches will ensure that environmental strategies and programmes are both scientifically sound and reflective of the knowledge and priorities of local governments — securing environmentally conscious development in Cameroon.

Climate adaptation succeeds when the people most affected are the people most involved. Local communities are not the last link in the adaptation chain — they are the first.

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Henri Kouam is the Founder of CEPI at the Henri Kouam Foundation. He is a contributor to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), was an Economic Expert for NATO, and has consulted for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

About the Cameroon Economic Policy Institute (CEPI)

CEPI is a think tank at the Henri Kouam Foundation improving economic development through fact-based research, policy advocacy, and events. CEPI has successfully led two verifiable policy reforms.

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