

Public-Private Dialogue

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Cameroon / Investment climate and Private Sector Development Cameroon Business Forum

by

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Background and Context

The Cameroon Business Forum (CBF) mechanism aims to support the establishment of a forum for dialogue between the government and private sector to pursue the effective implementation of business reforms in order to improve the country's investment climate, a concern broadly shared by the government, the private sector represented by Private Sector Platform and the donors.

A coordinator for the Forum was hired in 2008 and a Memorandum of Understanding signed on January 2009 with the Government of Cameroon (GoC) and two private sector organizations that the CBF became operational.

More specifically, the CBF aimed at:

- Replacing the Comité Interministériel Elargi au Secteur Privé (CIESP) with CBF as the formal PPD platform in Cameroon;
- Formulating and implementing at least 10 reforms in several areas conducive to improving investment climate in Cameroon.

The CBF mandate encompasses 3 aspects:

- Create an adequate business environment / investment climate;
- Create the foundation for ongoing, structured dialogue between the public and private sectors;
- Increase the influence of the private sector over the country's economy.

In practice the bulk of the dialogue and of the reforms undertaken focus on the Doing Business indicators, which address a subset of the necessary business environment reforms.

Youth and Inclusion Dimension

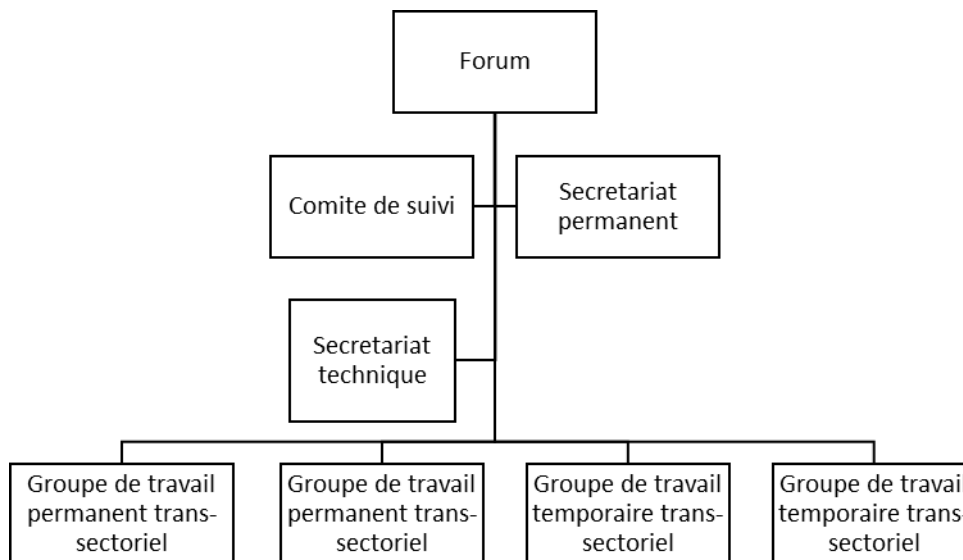
Regarding competitive markets and jobs inclusive of youth and women's, the commitment of the CBF can be summarized through tree program

- Business entry for making starting new business easier by streamlining procedures (e-registration) and less costly by optional requirement of public notaries for creating LLC as well as reduction of minimum capital from USD1,673 to USD167.
- Implementation of Incubators for encouraging self-employment
- Elaboration of strategy plan for youth employment

Partnership, Structure and Processes

Structure and participation

- The figure below illustrates the CBF's structure.



- Comparing the CBF structure with other PPDs, three features are noticeable:
- The existence of a Comité de Suivi that meets regularly to track progresses and follow up with stakeholders to 'get things done'.

- The Comité Technique is the main CBF operational entity. It prioritizes issues to be addressed, decides on the creation and the composition of working groups, proposes reforms, etc. The working groups are purely technical structures that work on finding solutions on the issues they are mandated to address – often the working groups are temporary structures.
- The PPD governing responsibilities are not explicitly attributed to any of the CBF structures.
- On the private sector side, business associations only entitled to be full CBF members while individual companies and private sector experts will be invited to take part to the working groups on adhoc basis.
- Capture of the dialogue;
- Deficit in PS representation and hence in CBF legitimacy.

Results so far

- An Evaluation Committee chaired by the Secretary General of the Prime Minister Office has been put in place by GoC for the close monitoring of the CBF activities. This is a testimony of ownership of the CBF;
- Several meetings of working groups (include GoC and private sector representatives) have been organized to discuss issues and priorities on the agenda;
- Cameroon has implemented several Investment Climate reforms during these last 8 years covering many main areas: Business startup, Trade logistics, paying taxes, Registry Property, construction permits and private sector development (SM'es BaKI, Incubators, Invest incentives).
- Since this progress has been less than expected, the CBF is providing assistance to GoC to get them focused on the implementation of the reforms. This will ensure that reforms made are really implemented on the ground and are picked up by the next Doing Business report;

Actually, the CBF has implemented a total of 140 reforms to make Cameroon's business environment more competitive for investors. Highlights of those reforms include the digitization of tax payment, setting up mediation chambers to resolve commercial disputes, the revision of the land law, which dated back to 1974, or the set-up of the Land registry. Cameroon's online business registration system, MyBusiness.cm, received a global Award from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Global Entrepreneurship Network of the US State Department during the during the Global Economic Forum in July, 2016, in Nairobi, Kenya.

Expected Results

- 1) Translate into concrete improvements on the ground in 2017 reforms implemented in regulatory terms. This requires from GoC to take necessary measures to (i) render operational the single window for access to property, (ii) continue to simplify business startup processes, tax payments, trade across borders by streamlining required documents and procedures;
- 2) Accelerate the adoption of additional regulations (decree, law) needed to continue to improve the investment climate. This includes the adoption of the following regulations: (i) Law setting up the new commercial chambers; (ii) Elaboration of construction code; (iii) Completing process of the electronic trade and (iv) Review the land regime; v) Facilitation of VAT reimbursements.

Challenges

Levy's assessment in May 2011 outlined a number of activities for the period 2011-2014 consisting of:

- Delivering results (DB reforms, creation of additional working groups);
- Increasing private sector participation to the PPD process;
- Planning for and preparing the PPD sustainability (planning, staffing, financial sustainability);
- Successfully hand over the CBF's secretariat from IFC to GoC;
- Ancillary functions (developing and implementing a communications plan; M&E).

It is the **absolute priority to continue to deliver on reforms during the discussions on sustainability.**

Biography of the Author

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- Permanent Secretary of the Cameroon Business forum and Investment Climate Program Coordinator
- Former Secretary General of the National Federation of SME's Associations
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