

REPORT

TRAINING WORKSHOP ON THE MANAGEMENT AND USE OF THE DIGITAL PLATFORM FOR MONITORING PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

From 14 to 16 June 2022

Yaoundé

I. INTRODUCTION

1 BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

The project "***Strengthening Budgetary Governance for the Sustainable Provision of Basic Services While Respecting the Preservation of the Environment***" responds to the objective of the Cameroon-European Union strategic cooperation plan to support Cameroonian civil society organisations in their efforts to contribute to an inclusive and sustainable growth in Cameroon. In the context of the implementation of the SDGs, the main objective of the project is to contribute to the strengthening of budgetary governance for an improvement in the effectiveness and efficiency of public policies (in the areas of financing the economy, public procurement and mining industries) as well as the access of the population to quality information (accurate, understandable, exhaustive and complete) in the context of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Moving towards emergence 2035, the essential question is where does the money come from? We question the Budget on these two axes resources and usage, does the Public Investment Budget (BIP) translated into Public Procurement really benefit the citizens? Hence the need for transparency in this sector by following the different stages of contracting in our communes. For this reason, a digital platform, available on the internet, for monitoring public contracts in Cameroon has been designed and developed.

This information management tool relating to the execution of the public investment budget (BIP) allows citizens to better appropriate and get involved in the management of the city. Moreover, based on this principle, it is easier for associations, NGOs and citizens to visualise public action in terms of public procurement. In a context of accelerated implementation of decentralisation, the measure constitutes an opportunity for decentralised territorial collectivities.

Thus, the Consortium Africa Development Interchange Network (ADIN), AfroLeadership, African Regional Centre for Endogenous and Community Development (CRADEC), Dynamique Mondiale des Jeunes (DMJ) and Transparency International-Cameroon (TI-Cameroon) organised from 14 to 16 June 2022 in Yaoundé a workshop on "training on the management of a virtual platform for monitoring public procurement in Cameroon" which was attended by mayors and representatives of mayors of 6 communes covering the Centre (Yaoundé VI) , South (Ngoulemakong), East (Nguelemendouka, Bétaré Oya & Ngoura) and Far North (Yagoua) regions of the country.

2 OBJECTIVES OF THE TRAINING

The training took into account the use of the tool, writing and accessibility in order to allow the administration of the platform from an editorial point of view. The main objective was to strengthen the participants' capacity to use the digital platform for monitoring public contracts independently.

Specifically, the aim was to:

- Facilitate understanding of the Open Contracting Partnership (OCP) and the Open Contracting Data Standards (OCDS);
- To understand the different technologies used for the development of the digital platform;
- Engage municipal stakeholders to become more involved in the monitoring of public contracts.

3 EXPECTED RESULT

The Consortium, the project implementation team and the municipal actors are empowered to administer and use the digital platform on public procurement monitoring.

II. PROCEEDINGS OF THE WORKSHOP

The work was carried out in three stages:

- The opening ceremony ;
- The technical phase;
- The closing ceremony.

1. OPENING OF THE WORKSHOP

Mr MBALLA MBALLA welcomed all the representatives of the communes -- of Yaoundé VI, Ngoulemakong, Ngoura, Betare Oya, Nguelemendouka, and Yagoua. He then recalled that the training **workshop on the management of the use of the digital platform on the monitoring of public procurement** follows a series of inter-regional workshops and communal consultations, with the objective of better operationalizing the Monitoring, Supervision and Accountability Framework within the communes, These are presented as the basic unit for the implementation of the project on **"Strengthening Budgetary Governance for the Sustainable Provision of Basic Services with Respect for the Environment"**, This project is carried out by the Consortium Africa Development Interchange Network (ADIN), Afroleadership, the African Regional Centre for Endogenous and Community Development (CRADEC), Dynamique Mondiale des Jeunes (DMJ) and Transparency International - Cameroon (TI-Cameroon), and is financed by the Delegation of the European Union in Cameroon, within the framework of the Cameroon-European Union Cooperation. The workshop will then focus on public contracts, i.e. whether public contracts meet the needs of the population (roads, drinking water, infrastructure, etc.); improving the quality of information exchange through the online platform implemented to monitor public contracts.

Mr TSOUNKEU Martin added that the 6 pilot communes gathered today for the occasion are the result of inter-regional workshops and communal consultations carried out beforehand. The ambition is to extend beyond the reflections engaged on the communal development plans to respond to the difficulties of exchange and transparency of information and the mobilisation of resources for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) helped by the monitoring tool of the public order which will be presented today in its technical as well as in its strategic aspect so that the municipal magistrates are edified and in capacity to implement the Framework of Monitoring, Supervision and Accountability for the SDGs.

The expectations expressed by the participants include:

- Link up with the new digital platform for monitoring public contracts and see how it is implemented on the ground at the communal level;
- Build capacity in public procurement monitoring techniques;
- To be able to review the public procurement system so that it is more transparent and champions the most deserving in the calls for tender;
- To have access to more readable and traceable information throughout the procurement process;
- Acquire practical knowledge to implement on the ground.

2. TECHNICAL PHASE OF THE WORK

Ms HAPPI Jocelyne, Developer and Consultant's collaborator for the design of the platform, started by giving some definitions (TI-C, Internet, how to access it and the various reasons why we use it). She went on to inform that the platform is composed of a front-end visible to its users and a back-end operated by its administrators.

From the presentation of the context that motivated the creation of the digital platform for monitoring public procurement made by Mr. Bertrand WAMBA, we note that Cameroon has joined the **Open Contracting Partnership (OCP)** which federates more than 150 members around the world, and whose main objective is to promote standards and best practices in terms of disclosure and participation in public procurement, with the aim of advancing open contracting worldwide. This is the Partnership for Open Contracting. The term transparency we are talking about here is to be understood as having the same level of information available to all. This workshop is therefore an opportunity for the municipal magistrates present to implement Open Contracting through a monitoring, supervision and accountability framework for the protection of public wealth in order to achieve the SDGs in a concrete manner. The various challenges faced by the communes should not be a hindrance to progress in the operationalization of the roadmap established during the communal consultations. The Open Contracting Partnership (OCP) is defined as a non-profit body that advocates for a global standard for better and more open public procurement. It therefore aims for openness and transparency in public procurement with well-established principles and partnerships and the Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS) is the standard promoted by the OCP for structuring and publishing open data covering all stages of the procurement process.

The digital platform was set up with a methodology that consisted of designing, mapping, building and publishing for different use cases such as getting value for money for public actors or monitoring the effectiveness of services provided. It is a system open to information that has filters to relay only fully valid information that will pass through built-in clearance levels before publication. The notion of back-end comes back to explain that it is not just anyone who informs the platform upstream but precise administrators who will update the data to appear on the front-end for any user.

This was followed by the effective presentation of the platform named Cameroon Open Contracting Data available online by Mrs. Séraphine NGUEPNNAG through the link "<https://cameroon-ocd.org>" with the unfolding of its different functionalities. All the participants are thus called upon to consult on their own on their devices (phone, PC, tablet). After the participants have browsed the different functionalities of the platform, a Q&A session is opened.

From the question/answer/suggestion session that followed, we note:

- How can I access information that only concerns a specific municipality? The platform will cover all pilot municipalities and beyond;
- Is the information available on the platform reliable? Yes, it is collected from official sources (institutions in charge of public procurement such as MINMAP, ARMP, Communes, etc.);
- The platform is a citizen tool accessible to all;
- Better involvement of MINMAP in the development process and viability of the platform;
- Integration of all the communes (Pilots) and all the other partner communes in the project;
- Ensure that the platform's scope is extended to the sectors;
- The platform can be used to attract investments in the communes;
- The platform will be updated regularly to meet the needs of users.

The second day of work begins with a presentation of the summary of the exchanges of the first day, the work continues with the review and examination of the data collection form which must be filled in under the different headings which are: General information, goods and services ordered (the deliverables), Documents, Stakeholders, Assignments, Contracts, Execution, Transactions and photos/videos. Mayors are assured that once the data has been entered on the platform, the continuity of the information provided is guaranteed and that, as far as transactions are concerned, the stages of the operations will be integrated into the system.

We then move on to the practical use of the digital platform. Participants share their email addresses and phone numbers in the WhatsApp group created (**cameroon-ocd platform**) to proceed with the creation of their accounts as administrators of the back-end of the system. Once the accounts are created, the participants are invited to click on the link "<https://cameroon-ocd.org/manager>" sent to the group to enter the administration console of the platform to practice, take ownership of the system and make changes. This exercise led to an expression of satisfaction from the participants regarding the expectations expressed by each of them concerning the digital platform.

On the third day of the training, the navigation for ownership of the platform continued. In parallel to this exercise, the Consortium introduced the reflection for strategic engagement of Mayors in the opening of data for transparency in the public procurement process. This articulation led the Mayors to a conclave with the aim of understanding the stakes and perspectives of such a positioning.

As for the prospects, they can be summarised as a "Follow the Money" campaign in the four (4) pilot communes. Two activities will materialise the campaign in the implementation of the project. These are the evaluation of some projects in each pilot commune. These evaluations will be carried out within the framework of the implementation of local common platforms for work and collaboration around the Monitoring, Supervision and Accountability Framework initiated in the Communes during communal consultations on the one hand and in the mining Communes during workshops to popularise the Mining Code on the other. Concerning the strategic positioning of the Mayors, they examined and adopted a Declaration of Commitment "To the promotion of transparent, effective and efficient public procurement".

From the ensuing discussions, perspectives and recommendations were adopted:

- The mayors were reassured that the platform is already operational and will be updated on the basis of the reformulations and reconfigurations adopted;
- On the achievements of this activity, the "Follow the Money" campaign and the production of related reports will follow;
- On the ICT-digital capacity-building plan, support for the equipment is requested, because as a sample-pioneer in the project, if they encourage it, they should be able to train their peers;
- For the sustainability of the project and the tool, additional costs must be borne by the various stakeholders.
- An agreement between the Consortium and the town halls will be drawn up to correct the administrative void noted in the process of identifying the pilot municipalities;
- This convention will serve as a basis for the operationalization of the tool in the field with the aim of seeing the 6 communes in partnership with the Consortium lead the 354 other communes in the digitalisation and opening up of public procurement data in Cameroon;
- The Consortium undertakes to mobilise resources from various partners to support the communes and to open discussions to find ways of financing themselves;

- The consortium encourages the Communes to open discussions within the Communal Councils in order to deliberate on a budget line dedicated to this strategy. This guarantees the institutional, technical and budgetary sustainability of this action.

3. CLOSURE OF THE WORKSHOP

At the end of the work, the official reading of the declaration signed by the Communes was carried out by the Mayor of Nguelemendouka. The representative of the Mayor of Yaoundé 6 gave her assessment of the activity, praising the good performance of the participants and the organisation. The Mayor of Ngoulemakong, who is also the Vice President of the United Towns and Cities of Cameroon (CVUC), thanked all the stakeholders in the activity and reiterated the commitment of the Towns and their Mayors to the implementation of the project and more specifically to the promotion of transparency in public procurement. The presentation of certificates of participation to all closed the workshop.