

## Cameroon own path towards municipal solid waste management

Jean-Pierre Ymelé Director - [HYSACAM](#)

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Cameroon's municipal solid waste management (MSWM) policy is based on a public-private partnership which ensures regular collection and processing service for domestic waste in the major cities. The model has proved successful: on a continent where many capitals struggle to provide a daily waste collection service, it represents an interesting solution even though questions remain regarding the sustainability of its financing model.

In 1969, Douala became the first city in Cameroon to outsource the management of its municipal solid waste to a private operator, after having realised that the municipal solid waste management system was failing. The city of Yaoundé followed suit ten years later. In 1987, the government's decentralisation drive transferred responsibility for waste management, not to the Urban Communities<sup>1</sup> of Douala and Yaoundé, which cover the administration of the whole city, but to the newly created district councils<sup>2</sup>, which cover smaller administrative units. The legislators believed that this would support the concept of a neighbourhood service, but not a single district council managed to provide the requisite service, despite being funded to do so: the very limited scale of each district, poor coordination, payment of arrears by the councils, and a lack of private-sector expertise condemned the experiment to failure. At this time, the metropolitan areas of Yaoundé and Douala were regarded as two of Africa's dirtiest major cities.

For nearly a decade, the Cameroonian government merely tinkered with the problem. In 1994 though, in partnership with the World Bank, it created a special domestic waste management programme called Emergency Social Program<sup>3</sup> to clean up the metropolitan areas of Douala and Yaoundé, which at the time were dotted with open landfills. This programme - which also sought to offset the impacts of the economic crisis and currency devaluation by promoting labour-intensive initiatives - was a failure. Centrally managed by the Finance Ministry, which was poorly equipped for the role, it was unable to supervise or monitor the waste management system closely enough. In addition, the service delivery was entrusted to NGOs and organisations that proved ill-equipped for the task. This programme's failure once again confirmed the fact that rapid urban growth - which the authorities had not anticipated - was no longer compatible with an unprofessional waste collection and processing system, determined by external constraints.

In 1998, therefore, new contracts were signed between the Urban Communities of Yaoundé and Douala, and Hysacam, which had been operating in the sector since the time of the first private-public partnerships.

### **Key features of municipal solid waste management policy**

Based on these different experiences and failures, Cameroon's has developed its own municipal solid waste management policy. It is based on three major principles.

The first is that municipal solid waste management must be an integral element of governmental

organisation: the system needs to be set up and managed at the largest municipal scale, under the authority of a single institution – in this case the relevant Urban Community. This view differs from the one of other African countries which have opted for decentralisation to the neighbourhood-level or for privatising the entire system by requiring operators to collect payment for their service directly from the households using it. The latter system, where the user pays – also known as ‘pay as you dump’ – has proved highly unsuitable for waste collection services: enforcement options relating to users are far more limited than in the water or electricity sectors: a household which has not had its waste collected will always find some other way of getting rid of it.

The second principle of Cameroon’s municipal solid waste management policy is that waste management is a specialist business calling for an industrial approach. In order to meet quantified targets and observe budgetary constraints, it is necessary to move beyond an exclusively public-sector management regime, which is overly subject to political and social influences. The local communities need to retain the role of regulator and supervisor – traditionally its area of competence – while the private sector contributes with its technical expertise and management efficiency. Performance contracts are signed between the two parties to clearly define their respective duties and responsibilities (*Box 1*).

### **Performance contracts in Cameroon**

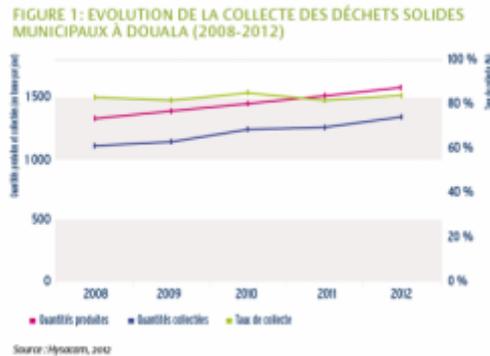
The Urban Communities and Hysacam sign performance contracts which specify very precisely the content of the service to be delivered by the latter party. The Urban Community specifies exact targets regarding collection and cleaning schedules for each area. The collection tonnage is monitored by the municipality on a daily basis – and any failure to meet the specified targets incurs penalties. The administration also supervises the availability of equipment, schedule compliance and the frequency of collection and cleaning services. Individual Hysacam teams are responsible for meeting their performance targets, and any failure to do so is easily identified. Collecting household waste in cities with several million residents calls for high-quality resources, notably trained staff, a fleet of specialist vehicles, etc. These resources require a high level of investment: service contracts of sufficient length (five years) are therefore necessary to enable the operator to recoup these costs.

This is also about moving beyond alternative waste management methods – such as collection by donkey carts or the pay-as-you-dump model. These methods, supposedly better suited to the towns of sub-Saharan Africa (Parrot et al, 2009), have clearly shown their limitations, especially in cities with several million inhabitants. The third principle is that waste management should be allocated dedicated funding, transferred by the state in a system of controlled decentralisation, because of the importance of the issues involved (Follea et al., 2001).

### **Recognised effectiveness of Hysacam**

Hysacam is Cameroon’s leading private municipal solid waste management operator, holding management contracts with 14 towns and cities in the country. In December 2009, a meeting of African mayors in Marrakech (Morocco) recognised the company’s effectiveness by awarding it the first Africités prize for waste management in Africa. One of the reasons for Hysacam’s success is its ability to adapt to changing requirements. It has recruited trained personnel and deployed modern, well-maintained equipment – key requirements for managing waste in towns and cities with as many as several million residents – when many outside observers considered such an organization oversized for a country like Cameroon. As a result, it is able to achieve collection rates of 80-90%. To reach harder-to-access neighbourhoods, Hysacam has developed pre-collection agreements with community based organisations that gather the waste from the inaccessible areas and transfer it to the company’s collection bins. This kind of arrangement can only work if the private operator keeps to its commitments, and if the collection points are clearly defined (Ps-Eau & PDM, 2003).

Hysacam is also aware that waste management is a public service mission entailing very specific requirements and a high level of social sensitivity. This makes it very important to ensure continuity of service even if the client falls into payment arrears. Hysacam has adapted to this requirement, offsetting the potential difficulties by building strong relationships with local banks. This business model based on a permanent and constructive dialogue between the public and the private sectors has helped to reassure public authorities that the company is reliable; today they are convinced of the benefit of using private-sector services. Hysacam's success has helped to enhance the sector's value - and the return of the waste industry multinationals to Africa is currently being witnessed<sup>4</sup>. Their comeback has been rather halting, however the multinationals still find it difficult to adapt to the characteristic features of the African situation. Excessively high costs and low levels of confidence in African markets inhibit their investment.



### The challenging equation of waste management financing

The taxation relating to municipal solid waste management in Cameroon is based on a system of direct local taxes dedicated to financing local services: street lighting, water supplies, removal of household waste. The central state centralises the collection of taxes from workers and businesses and redistributes them to municipal authorities. The fundamental problem with this tax is the narrow base from which it is drawn, limited as it is to the formal and public sectors, which represent less than 10% of the population (INS, 2011). In the main cities, Douala and Yaoundé, this tax finances less than one tenth of the waste collection and processing activities<sup>5</sup> - the remainder of the financing is covered by central state subsidies.

Rather than implementing measures to improve and increase taxation, which would have weighed too heavily in social terms, the Cameroonian government opted for a system of allocating dedicated funding to cities for the processing of domestic waste. Municipalities are required to allocate these resources exclusively to this expenditure item. The central state allocates 85% of the finance necessary for the management of waste in Cameroon's main cities from its own budget, thus showing the importance it gives to keeping cities clean.

The central state therefore compensates for the low level of direct taxation at the local level, without making any changes to the tax regime. In itself, this state contribution cannot represent a long-term solution; it will be necessary to find a more sustainable financing model. One of the issues to overcome is that the users have become accustomed to a high-quality domestic waste collection service - without being aware of the level of subsidy provided by the central state in order to finance it. The idea of indexing the tax for domestic waste removal to electricity bills does not offer an effective solution: not only would it create the impression of higher energy costs - which could have a knock-on inflationary effect on the cost of basic products - but it would fail to solve the problem of the narrow tax base.<sup>6</sup> One solution worth exploring could be a tax on all imported products, in accordance with their potential for generating waste, following the European model of extended producer and consumer taxation. Waste from imported products, accounts for 35% of all waste produced in Cameroon.

## **Towards a change in the status of waste**

The Cameroonian government is gradually emerging from a hygienist vision of municipal solid waste management and is adopting a more environmentalist, sustainable approach. Although no legislation to this effect is currently in place, the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development has incorporated the concept of sustainable development in its waste management strategy document. This official strategy is clearly structured around three priorities. The first is to prevent and reduce the production and harmfulness of waste by developing clean and more resource-efficient technologies. The second priority is to ensure that more waste is recovered and recycled, and the third is to dispose of non-valuable waste in a sustainable way. Implementing this kind of policy, however, runs into the obstacle of the sector's funding problems. With the country's waste management's current remuneration levels - less than €6 per ton, compared with €40 to €120 in Europe (Ademe, 2006) - it is difficult to find an ecological solution to the processing of non-biodegradable waste. At these remuneration levels it is difficult to comply with all the local environmental standards - let alone international standards such as the International Finance Corporation (IFC)'s environmental and social performance standards. This policy also runs into the practical difficulties of recovering and recycling waste in the current environment in Cameroon where the recycling component of the waste is low. There is, however, room for improvement as 100% of the collected waste is sent to landfill. Solutions are possible, especially in the field of recycling (*Box 2*).

### **Waste recovery in Cameroon**

Currently, all municipal solid waste collected in Cameroon is sent to landfill. The only existing recycling industry relates to products such as iron and bottles, which are recovered by waste pickers before the waste is collected. Metals are sold to industry - mainly in China and India. Establishing widespread recycling is problematic due to the composition of the waste, which has a very low recyclable component - except for the biodegradable material (60% of the total volume), which can be used to produce compost. Yet here the market is dominated by competition from chemical fertilisers: only taxation and limits on their usage, combined with an increasing awareness of their damaging effect on the soil, could pave the way for growth in the compost sector. Industrial recovery of other materials is unlikely to be cost-effective - although the current trend in raw materials costs is making sorting and separating increasingly economically attractive.

Hysacam is helping to drive this process forward, with initiatives that include projects for capturing and processing the biogas generated by decomposing domestic waste at its waste facilities; for example, the company has established Central Africa's first biogas processing plant at the waste facility in Nkolfoulou, a suburb of Yaoundé using the Kyoto Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). This example shows yet again the value of involving the private sector to improve waste management and identify efficient, sustainable solutions for the sector.

Cameroon's strategy for municipal solid waste management went against the trend of the recommendations made by institutional donors at the time it was put in place. It was based on strong political leadership from public authorities, accompanied by the provision of appropriate resources by the delegation of service provision to a local private operator and a strong cooperation between the public and the private sectors. Although there are still many challenges to overcome - stability of financing, waste recovery, etc. - this model has nonetheless facilitated the emergence of an efficient, sustainable collection system which has proved capable of adapting to the strong growth of African cities.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> "Communautés Urbaines" in French

<sup>2</sup> “Communes d’arrondissement” in French

<sup>3</sup> “Programme Social d’urgence” (P.S.U.) in French

<sup>4</sup> Veolia in Dakar, Pizzorno in Mauritania, Nicollin in Algeria and Morocco.

<sup>5</sup> The removal of household waste represents almost 20% of the municipal budgets of Douala and Yaoundé - which total nearly CFA 42 billion (Å64 million) and CFA 35 billion (Å53,5 million) respectively.

<sup>6</sup> In the city of Douala (3 million inhabitants representing 800,000 households), for example, the electricity supplier lists fewer than 200,000 customers. This means all the electricity company’s customers would have to pay an average of more than CFA 50,000 per year (Å75) to cover the costs of waste collection.

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