



**EXPANDING ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY IN CAMEROON AND AFRICA THROUGH
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FINANCING AND A JUST ENERGY TRANSITION**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Project Energy for Life Cameroon Consortium (PEFL) is a nonpartisan, global development consortium based in New York, USA and Oku, Cameroon. PEFL's mission is to end energy poverty by expanding access to sustainable development in rural communities in Cameroon and across the African continent. PEFL's vision is to help Cameroon and the African continent reach the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Experts at PEFL bring empirical research and evidence-based analysis to Cameroon's and the African region's most pressing concerns.

In the coming years, the African continent will experience both rapid growth and intense challenges. As African leaders prepare to address issues of youth unemployment, energy constraints, and growing national debt, they will seek new evidence and policy solutions to drive economic development and expand opportunity for the region's workers, families, and communities. It is well documented that households, businesses, and public centers need electricity help communities survive and thrive, yet 75% of people in the world without electricity live in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Cameroon, 40% of the population does not have access to electricity which increases to a significant 80% for those living in rural areas.

Despite these challenges, the narrative that Cameroon's, and Africa's, economic story is about "weak growth" is false. Instead, its story is about growth that is in need of generating good quality jobs underscored by strong infrastructure. Access to electricity allows better conditions for cooking and heating. Healthcare facilities and other services will run more effectively. Nighttime lighting encourages reading and increases the ability of children and adults to study, learn, and have more hours for economic productivity and business operations.

PEFL therefore proposes a two-year project to address these interconnected issues. PEFL will work with consortium members in its home country and across the continent to inform a variety of stakeholders including African leaders, regional leaders, youth leaders, and regional counterparts about new models and policies for inclusive and sustainable development in Africa.

PEFL has a strong track record of convening and catalyzing engagement among key stakeholders at the global, regional, and local levels. The project team, many of whom are African as is much of PEFL, will leverage its convening power to reach important and key actors in this space for dissemination of findings. PEFL's Distinguished Advisors (including White House Champions of Change Hussainatu Blake and Hassanatu Blake, [Supreme Ruler] Fon Ngum IV, and World Bank Advisor Benjamin Darche) will provide overall strategic guidance to PEFL. The project team will be led by Executive Director Elvis Ndansi, an inaugural Obama Foundation Scholar, Washington Mandela Fellow, who has deep-rooted connections to the region as a regional public figure.

Comprising of nonprofit organizations, businesses, and individual leaders, PEFL is reaching a pivotal moment in the organization's efforts to make a lasting impact on the communities served. Experts at PEFL bring empirical research and evidence-based analysis to Cameroon's and the African region's most pressing concerns, and development colleagues from across the continent and in the U.S. look to PEFL for creative solutions to today's challenges because they trust they will find solutions grounded in data and lived experience as well as attentive to the practical realities of today's global sustainable development environment.

FUNDING REQUEST

Background

In the coming years, the African continent will experience both rapid growth and intense challenges. As African leaders prepare to address issues of youth unemployment, energy constraints, and growing national debt, they will seek new evidence and policy solutions to drive economic development and expand opportunity for the region's workers, families, and communities.

Nowhere is the world's youth ballooning population and job creation challenge more acute than in Africa. Its unemployment situation is at once one of the world's greatest challenges, one of its greatest economic opportunities, and one of the most consequential global megatrends. Seventy percent of Africa's population is under 30 and continues to grow rapidly at around 2.5 percent per year. The UN projects that, at the turn of the century, Africa will be home to 40 percent of the world's population.

At the same time, Africa is the most vulnerable region to energy-deficiency. It is well documented that households, businesses, and public centers need electricity to help communities survive and thrive, yet 75% of people in the world without electricity live in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Cameroon, 40% of the population does not have access to electricity which increases to a significant 80% for those living in rural areas. Families need to walk more than a mile to charge their cell phones that serves as the main gateway for information, services, and communications.

Data are lacking in the number of rural clinics and schools with electricity or the number of villages with access to electric pumping facilities. The distribution of electricity in Cameroon is limited yet the growth of new subscribers is slow. Given the problems that the urban-based grid systems already experience, it is unlikely that most of the rural population and institutions, under current policies, will attain electricity access in the next 20-40 years.

Despite these challenges, the narrative that Cameroon's, and Africa's, economic story is about "weak growth" is false. Instead, its story is about growth that is in need of generating good quality jobs underscored by needing strong infrastructure. Access to electricity allows better conditions for cooking and heating. Healthcare facilities and other services will run more effectively. Nighttime lighting encourages reading and increases the ability of children and adults to study, learn, and have more hours for economic productivity and business operations.

If Africa does not invest in a just energy transition and create enough good quality jobs for its young population, then the region's youth could become a global liability. Africa would experience mass unemployment that could lead to widespread social and political instability that Cameroon is already facing with the Anglophone Crisis. Increased migration and growing insecurity will result in global consequences (Centre on Religion and Geopolitics Global Extremism Monitor). The COVID-19 crisis, as both a health and an economic shock, has exacerbated these issues, highlighting African countries' vulnerabilities due to high levels of debt, a lack of formal sector employment, and low levels of domestic resource mobilization, among other challenges.

The Project Energy for Life Consortium (PEFL) therefore proposes a two-year project to address these interconnected issues.

Project Description

PEFL respectfully requests \$300,000 in flexible support that will help it work with consortium members in country and across the continent to inform a variety of stakeholders including African leaders, regional leaders, youth leaders, and regional counterparts about new models and policies for inclusive and sustainable development in Cameroon and Africa. Specifically, during the grant period PEFL will work towards the following primary outcomes:

1. African leaders and stakeholders in Cameroon have innovative approaches and tangible strategies to address jobless growth and youth unemployment, as well as improved strategies to pursue regional trade and integration in clean energy as a means for enhanced job creation across the continent.
2. African leaders, research institutes, and youth groups in Cameroon will have more favorable policy outcomes in sustainable development dialogues due to stronger cross-country learning and regional exchanges across Africa.
3. African leaders and stakeholders in Cameroon have needed data and recommendations to inform policies on improving the energy sector, including through effective domestic resource mobilization and access to sustainable financing.

Africa's needs are enormous and have only been compounded by COVID-19. Indeed, if PEFL had more resources, a great deal more could be accomplished. As such, these outcomes and the activities outlined below reflect only a sub-set of the work PEFL will pursue over the next two years with a focus on Cameroon. PEFL respectfully requests flexibility to scale to other African countries over the course of the grant period.

Key Grant Activities

Outcome #1: African leaders and stakeholders in Cameroon have innovative approaches and tangible strategies to address jobless growth and youth unemployment, as well as improved strategies to pursue regional trade and integration in clean energy as a means for enhanced job creation across the continent.

PEFL has undertaken research (jointly with the University of Notre Dame Pulte Institute for Global Development) on the prospects of Africa's structural transformation in the context of premature deindustrialization. The research revealed a very promising and unexplored development path for African economies, including evidence to suggest that Cameroon might be undergoing a more profound structural economic transformation than most experts believed. It is occurring not through traditional industries where many economists have focused their research, but in tradable services and agro-industries that resemble traditional industries. These industries include horticulture, agribusiness, tourism, and some information and communication technology (ICT)-based services. As these 'industries without smokestacks' (IWOSS) have grown, they have generated new patterns of structural change. In addition to being tradable, these industries without smokestacks have higher productivity than agriculture; they benefit from technological change, economies of scale, and agglomeration; and, very importantly, they can absorb large numbers of

moderately skilled workers. They also have the additional advantage of being environmentally sustainable and less exposed to automation, which, notwithstanding automation's many benefits, presents challenges for countries where the overriding priority is to create large-scale formal sector jobs.

With generous support from partners, PEFL held two workshops with the goal of advancing research on the potential for IWOSS to provide large-scale employment in Cameroon and commissioned ten case studies focused on how critical Cameroon can pursue IWOSS strategies. A case-study of IWOSS Oku, Cameroon was published in December 2024, and an edited volume that synthesizes the case-studies to inform national strategies and effective policies to address the job creation and youth unemployment challenge in will be released in early 2025. With support from this grant, PEFL plans to carry-out an additional case study of IWOSS Bamenda, Cameroon to inform the country's national transformation agenda. Additionally, PEFL will further examine the results of firm studies conducted under the case studies and present in-depth results from those.

Outcome #2: African leaders, research institutes, and youth groups in Cameroon will have more favorable policy outcomes in sustainable development dialogues due to stronger cross-country learning and regional exchanges across Africa.

Cameroon's think tanks and research institutes have not studied in sufficient detail the nexus between energy poverty and youth challenges on the continent. There have been few cross interactions or partnerships between think tanks and youth organizations in the energy space. PEFL's new "Elevating youth voices on clean energy" project aims to break down the silos between think tanks and youth groups. Initially, the project will focus on the following five objectives:

1. Identify existing opportunities and gaps in Africa's youth-led climate action.
2. Strengthen the capacity of youth organizations across the continent through access to the latest evidence, research, and policy options on the just energy transition in Africa, generated through collaborative research work with African think tanks.
3. Provide think tanks access to the local knowledge and activism platforms of Cameroon's youth groups in the clean energy space.
4. Enable Cameroon's youth to effectively engage with the highest level of decision makers through partnerships with think tanks and related programming.
5. Strengthen cross-country learning or regional exchanges across Africa between networks of think tanks and youth groups leading to stronger positions and more favorable policy outcomes in international climate dialogues, and continental youth-led programs for a just energy transition.

Outcome #3: African leaders and stakeholders in Cameroon have needed data and recommendations to inform policies on improving the energy sector, including through effective domestic resource mobilization and access to sustainable financing.

Effective domestic resource mobilization: Another important consideration for Africa's continued economic growth will be each country's ability to mobilize more domestic resources to sustainably finance their economic agendas. Rising government debt levels and global interest

rates, subdued commodity prices, and current uncertainties around development assistance suggest that a more difficult external financing environment lies ahead and underscore the urgency for Africa to look inward for its development financing needs. Fortunately, several African countries have taken important steps to address this development priority, including attempting to harness natural resource revenues, as well as stem illicit capital flows. Continued success of these efforts will be pivotal to growth in the region. Sustainable development financing thus remains a bedrock of PEFL's strategy. Accordingly, PEFL will continue research to take stock of African countries' domestic resources and produce recommendations for governments and the global community to improve resource mobilization. Among other activities, PEFL will raise visibility around domestic resource mobilization in Cameroon and Africa broadly, including by convening policymakers, the public, and other stakeholders.

Sustainable financing for development and sovereign debt: Only fifteen years after the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative, African countries have experienced a sharp rise in debt levels fueled by both domestic and external debt. While debt levels remain lower than during the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) era, the pace of the increase has been rapid, and has come with a rapid rise in debt servicing costs. The composition of debt has also changed, with an increase in the share of commercial debt and the share of debt owed to some bilateral lenders. The COVID-19 crisis has increased the urgency for global policies addressing high debt levels and the need for debt relief; in response, the G20 has instituted debt standstill policies and the IMF and World Bank have begun to roll out sweeping relief packages. However, the debt standstill does not go far enough in its scope, and it does not address debt owned by private creditors or by some bilateral lenders. PEFL plans to continue its research and policy outreach on Africa's burgeoning debt crisis and to explore strategies for financing development agendas, raising visibility and galvanizing action through publications and engagement with high-level local, regional, and global policymakers and other stakeholders.

While this proposal outlines the full scope of these priority projects over a two-year period, the scope of activities will be scaled in accordance to available resources and with the understanding that as additional support is raised, funds may be used flexibly within PEFL.

Dissemination Plan

Partners include the IMF, UN Youth Office, UN Foundation, Sustainable Development Solutions Network, United Nations Association of the USA, Washington Mandela Fellows, Obama Foundation Scholars, Columbia World Project, Wall Street Green Summit, Strategic Doing Institute, and Lichtenstein Institute for Strategic Development. The project team will leverage its convening power to reach important and key actors in this space, including national- and international-level leaders and policymakers.

In addition to disseminating the project's findings through channels such as publications (e.g., policy briefs, summaries, papers), commentaries and analyses (e.g., blog posts, Op-Eds, Podcasts), public and private convenings (e.g., agenda setting discussions), the publication of outcome-specific research papers and short-form pieces, outcomes 1, 2, and 3 are fully integrated into signature PEFL partner outlets and events to disseminate findings and help catalyze change, including:

- **CurateND:** The Institutional Repository for the University of Notre Dame provides a strong digital infrastructure for presenting PEFL’s research and associated data, scholarly papers, presentations, and other works so they can be shared and discovered through an interconnected digital community that expands to the University of Notre Dame’s wide-ranged network. High-level panel events are also held in collaboration with PEFL’s partner, the Notre Dame Pulte Institute for Global Development. CurateND presents PEFL with a critical opportunity to help frame seminal research to watch in the year ahead and initiate greater discussion on policy change in connection with Notre Dame’s presence in the continent.
- **Global Health Pursuit:** Global Health Pursuit is a global top 2% performing podcast that seeks to answer tough questions about the world from a beginner's mindset. Its objective is to ask real questions about real-world issues without overcomplicating communicating solutions with jargon and buzzwords. The field of global health is vast, and the challenges can feel overwhelming, but learning about it shouldn’t be. Global Health Pursuit aims to showcase how inspiring leaders are combating global poverty, bringing a just energy transition to remote villages, expanding healthcare access, and much more, demonstrating how the issues that PEFL tackles are interconnected to communities far and wide.
- **Regular public and private events:** PEFL regularly hosts events with Cameroonian and other African leaders, high-level policymakers, private sector and civil society leaders, and other thought leaders, as well as briefings and engagement with key stakeholders. PEFL has been a major voice both on the continent and in Washington when it comes to policies in Cameroon on leadership, job creation, development financing, and structural transformation. PEFL has hosted several prominent Cameroonian leaders and ministers for discussions on sustainable development in the country. PEFL also convenes a regular forum during the UN General Assembly and attracts senior decision-makers and their staff. These events present an opportunity to enrich debates on Africa with informed perspectives. Even while COVID-19 made in-person events infeasible for staff and participants, PEFL has hosted remote events and workshops to stay engaged with stakeholders.

As each country in Africa has its own policies, priorities, and comparative advantages, as well as history, PEFL will seek to recommend strategies for growth that are both broad-based and country-specific (starting in Cameroon), as well as bring broader lessons to the global community focused on Africa. PEFL is also actively engaged with international, regional, and country-level stakeholders for its research and outreach and dissemination efforts.

Project Leadership

The project team will be led by Elvis Ndansi, Executive Director of PEFL. Prior to this role, Elvis became the President & Founder of Unite for Health Foundation, a healthcare NGO in Cameroon registered as a 501(c)(3) in New York. He was one of twelve Obama Foundation Scholars in the 2018 inaugural program at Columbia University in New York City. Elvis’ career in nursing and public health was inspired by the work of his mother, a dedicated and tireless nurse in a rural

community in Cameroon. When he was a 24-year-old nurse working in a remote village, he had to deal with the death of a sick baby, a death that could have been avoided. The mother had no choice but to walk for many hours to get the infant to the nearest health facility. It changed Elvis' life forever. He quit his job and in 2007 he started Unite for Health in a single room in a student neighborhood in Yaounde, with a box of medications and a few instruments. Elvis has grown Unite for Health's operations with other micro-clinics, and many outreach programs for underserved communities and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), with a focus on maternal health. In 2016, Elvis was awarded a Young African Leader Mandela Washington Fellowship, a U.S. Department of State exchange program. A registered nurse in New York, Elvis has a BS in Nursing from the University of Buea in Cameroon, an MS in Nursing Education and a MPH with a concentration in Infectious Disease. Elvis is one of the few leaders doing nonprofit work in Africa who comes from the region.

The products will be peer-reviewed by high-level African scholars, including Professor Obiora Okafor (Johns Hopkins University), Professor Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (Cape Town, South Africa), Dr. Jackline Oluoch-Aridi (Nairobi, Kenya), Dr. Célestin Monga (Harvard Kennedy School) and Dr. Julius Kewir Tanka (Cameroon). PEFL's Distinguished Advisors (including White House Champions of Change Hussainatu Blake and Hassanatu Blake, [Supreme Ruler] Fon Ngum IV, and World Bank Advisor Benjamin Darche) will continue to provide overall strategic guidance to PEFL.

About Project Energy for Life

The Project Energy for Life Cameroon (PEFL) Consortium is a nonpartisan, global development consortium based in New York, USA and Oku, Cameroon. PEFL's mission is to end energy poverty by expanding access to sustainable development in rural communities in Cameroon and across the African continent. PEFL's vision is to help Cameroon and Africa reach the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Comprising of nonprofit organizations, businesses, and individual leaders, the consortium is reaching a pivotal moment in the organization's efforts to make a lasting impact on the communities served. Experts at PEFL bring empirical research and evidence-based analysis to Cameroon's and the African region's most pressing concerns. Development colleagues from across the continent and in the U.S. also look to PEFL for creative solutions to today's challenges because they trust they will find solutions grounded in data and lived experience as well as attentive to the practical realities of today's global sustainable development environment.