

CAMEROON PROJECT PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT LANDSCAPE

Interview with Dr Samuel SALLA, PMP®¹
President of PMI chapter Cameroon



Interviewed by Martin MADIBA EBONGUE

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Introduction to the interviewee

Samuel Salla is an accomplished professional, uniquely adept in both Project and Financial Management, complemented by over 12 years as an experienced trainer. He champions the critical integration of these disciplines as fundamental drivers for sustainable development, particularly within challenging contexts like Cameroon.

His practical expertise shines across several complex projects, notably a \$37 million USAID-funded initiative. Within this particular program, he ensured robust project operations management and crucially strengthened the governance mechanisms of over 25 local organizations. This remarkable feat directly ensured the uninterrupted provision of vital services to over 35,000 orphans and vulnerable children, showcasing his ability to solve complex systemic issues through rigorous project and financial oversight.

Beyond execution, Samuel has personally coached, trained, and mentored over 3,000 students and young professionals, delivering impactful training in finance, audit, and project management. As President of the PMI Cameroon Chapter and a PMI University Outreach Ambassador, he actively shares expertise, emphasizing how robust financial governance

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and disciplined project execution are crucial for overcoming development hurdles in Cameroon.

In January 2024, Samuel assumed leadership as PMI Cameroon Chapter President, guiding a group of seven Vice Presidents and serving thousands of project enthusiasts. He's instrumental in driving impactful initiatives at both national and community levels, leveraging effective project management to foster development across Cameroon. Through these efforts, he directly contributes to empowering women (SDG 5), providing high-quality education in project management (SDG 4), and building strong, collaborative partnerships for sustainable development (SDG 17).

Interview

Q1: Can you share with us the story of Project Portfolio Management in Cameroon in 5 steps?

Samuel: The concept of Project Portfolio Management was not born in Cameroon but was imported by multinational corporations and international development organizations like the World Bank and UN agencies. Operating with global mandates, they had to align local projects with their worldwide strategies. They introduced basic PPM principles—like formal project selection and strategic alignment—to manage their large-scale initiatives in sectors such as oil, infrastructure, and public health. This initial phase was fragmented, with PPM seen as a niche, externally imposed practice rather than a local business discipline.

As Cameroon's private sector began to grow in the 2000s, particularly in telecommunications, banking, and construction, there was a quiet, grassroots recognition of the need for better project governance. Companies started to lose money on misaligned projects and inefficient resource use. This led to a gradual, informal adoption of PPM concepts, often driven by the experience of project managers who had worked for international firms. Professional bodies, such as the PMI Cameroon Chapter, played a pivotal role in this phase by organizing workshops and advocating for formal project management practices, laying the groundwork for a more structured approach.

This period marked a significant shift from informal practices to structured frameworks. Local companies began to actively seek out professionals with certifications like PMP and Prince2, and the focus moved from simply completing projects to ensuring they delivered strategic value. This was the era of standardization, where organizations built formal project management offices (PMOs) and adopted standardized processes for project selection, prioritization, and tracking. This shift was fueled by a desire to reduce project failures and enhance organizational transparency.

Today, PPM is no longer just a corporate tool; it is a key enabler for national development. The government and public sector are increasingly recognizing its importance in achieving

the ambitious goals outlined in the National Development Strategy 2030 (SND30). PPM is seen as a way to ensure that major public projects in sectors like infrastructure, energy, and digital transformation are not only executed efficiently but also contribute directly to national priorities, maximizing return on public investment.

The final, ongoing step is the technological leap. Companies are moving away from manual, spreadsheet-based systems and adopting dedicated project and portfolio management software, often incorporating elements of artificial intelligence. These tools enable real-time data analysis, predictive modeling, and automated reporting, allowing leaders to make more informed, data-driven decisions about their project portfolios. This digital transformation is set to democratize PPM, making it accessible to a wider range of organizations, including SMEs.

Q2: How do you describe the today's Project Portfolio Management landscape in Cameroon?

Samuel: The current PPM landscape in Cameroon is a dynamic and multifaceted ecosystem, marked by both progress and significant disparity. While the concept is gaining traction, its maturity level varies greatly depending on the sector and the size of the organization.

There is a widespread, though not universal, recognition of the need for structured project management and portfolio-level thinking. Leaders are increasingly aware that simply completing projects is not enough; they must be the *right* projects that deliver strategic value. However, this awareness is most pronounced in large, established industries.

The most mature sectors for PPM are those that are highly regulated, competitive, or capital-intensive. The financial services sector (banking, microfinance), telecommunications, and major construction firms have a well-developed approach to PPM, often with dedicated PMOs and increased number of certified professionals. In contrast, sectors like agriculture, small-scale manufacturing, and the public service are still in the early stages of adopting formal PPM practices.

You'll find a mix of methodologies in the market. While some organizations are fully committed to standardized frameworks, many SMEs still rely on a more ad-hoc, informal approach. The challenge lies in tailoring a scalable PPM solution that is not overly bureaucratic for smaller organizations.

The proliferation of affordable digital tools is a game-changer. Cloud-based project management software (like Microsoft Project and Primavera) and mobile applications are making PPM more accessible. This is allowing organizations to move away from manual spreadsheets and towards more efficient, data-driven decision-making, even with limited resources.

Q3: What are the perspectives of the Project Management science and profession in Cameroon?

Samuel: The future of project management in Cameroon is exceptionally bright, poised for significant growth and professionalization. The profession is set to evolve from a technical skill set to a strategic discipline that is central to the country's development.

However, these perspectives are tempered by specific challenges, notably in governance, which can limit the capacity to successfully execute high-potential projects.

- **Soaring Demand for Certified Professionals:** As Cameroon moves forward with major infrastructure projects and private sector expansion, the demand for certified and skilled project managers will skyrocket. Organizations will increasingly require professionals who can not only execute projects but also demonstrate their ability to align them with organizational and national goals. This will make certifications like PMP, CAPM, and PgMP highly sought after.
- **Education:** We are seeing a mixed integration of project management into academic curricula. Universities and professional schools are creating dedicated programs, and the establishment of PMI Student Clubs is fostering the next generation of project leaders. This will create a steady pipeline of talent, ensuring the profession's long-term sustainability.
- **Strategic Role in National Development:** Project management is no longer a footnote but a critical function for achieving national goals. The science of project management will be seen as a key driver for executing public and private initiatives efficiently, transparently, and with greater impact, directly contributing to the goals of the National Development Strategy 2030 (SND30).
- **Governance and Execution Challenges:** Despite the immense potential, the successful execution of projects is often hindered by governance issues. These can include a lack of institutional continuity, where changes in leadership lead to shifts in project priorities, or a lack of accountability, where key performance indicators are not consistently tracked and enforced. Additionally, insufficient transparency in procurement processes can undermine a project's financial viability and stakeholder trust. Addressing these governance gaps is a key challenge, and professional project managers have a vital role to play in advocating for and implementing the standards of transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct that are essential for project success.
- **Innovation and Specialization:** The profession will become more specialized. We can expect a rise in niches like Agile Project Management for tech startups, Benefits

Realization Management for public sector projects, and Risk Management in sectors facing complex challenges. This specialization will drive innovation and tailor the practice of project management to the specific needs of different industries.

Q4: Can we know the Project Management Activities calendar for 2025-2026?

Samuel: Our activities are organized around three pillars:

- Engagement with the government,
- Collaboration with the private sector and local organizations,
- Outreach to universities and students.

Activities with the Government

The PMI Cameroon Chapter is actively engaged with the government to elevate project management as a critical discipline for national development. A core focus is providing training for civil servants, a need identified and requested by Cameroonian officials to enhance public sector project delivery. Many practitioners and certified professionals now come from the public sector and enjoy the social impact programs implemented by the Chapter to stay connected with the beneficiaries. This trend is expected to increase significantly in the coming years.

Additionally, the chapter is leading the work to create a National Order of Project Managers in Cameroon. The creation of this Order is designed to **harmonize practices by** creating a single, high-quality standard, **enhance credibility by** granting project managers with official recognition and establishing a clear career path, and **improving accountability:** by supporting the implementation of governance tools like code of ethics and professional conduct, providing a mechanism for accountability and ensuring that projects are managed with integrity.

The chapter also plans to collaborate on information events to showcase government actions and discuss methods for improving project management in the public sector. These efforts align with the theme of the upcoming PMI Cameroon Annual Conference, which will focus on the impact of development projects on the economy.

Activities with the Private Sector & Local Organizations

PMI Cameroon is dedicated to upskilling staff and members of various companies, NGOs, and associations. In 2025, the chapter will intensify its work by supporting a greater number of organizations and reducing inequalities, in alignment with SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). The chapter has already collaborated with over a dozen associations targeting women and youth, providing free project management initiation through webinars, coaching, and mentoring. This support also includes

participation in partners events that help to promote entrepreneurship, projects management, professional careers in various sectors and awareness to the economic and social development of the country.

Activities in Universities & with Students

The chapter's plan includes a significant increase in its University Outreach Program. The primary goal is to support universities in developing a strong project management awareness among students.

A key initiative is the creation of a permanent structure called PMI Student Clubs, which are designed to drive project management initiatives on campus. These clubs are led by a small team of students who build essential management skills by drafting, planning, and executing activities just as the PMI Chapter does. This hands-on experience is fundamental to preparing students with the practical knowledge and skills required to become successful professionals.

In 2025, PMI Cameroon has already visited more than 10 schools and universities in Yaoundé, Douala, and even in Kigali, Rwanda, to promote this program and foster the next generation of project leaders.

Best regards

About the interviewer



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Martin Madiba Ebongue, MscPM, PMP® is a dedicated and passionate Senior Project, Programme and Portfolio Management Professional with a demonstrated track record across Africa for 20+ valuable years of experience in the fields of Aviation, Government and Non-Government, Banking, Agribusiness, High tech, Energy and Construction.

He is holder of a Master's degree in Project Management (Pan African Institute of Development-Central Africa); a Post Graduate Certificate in Project Management (University of Wales-United Kingdom); a Project Management Professional (PMP®) Certification (Project Management Institute-USA); Quality Systems Specialist ISO9001V2015 and Lead Auditor 19011 trained by Bureau Veritas.

In the Agribusiness and development field, he holds University Diploma in Science and a Graduate Certificate in Agriculture-Economics (National School of Agronomy and agricultural science Dschang-Cameroon).

In Aviation, he is also a Senior Airline Safety Officer trained by the Institut Français de Sécurité Aérienne-Paris, a Certified Professional in Aviation Safety/Security from National Advanced School of Civil Aviation-Paris and holds a Diploma in Airline Strategy Management (IATA) Institute of Training and Development–Switzerland.

He's had a multifold career pattern as Guest Lecturer for master's degree classes in Project Management and Strategy for Business Schools, Corporate Trainer for Small, medium size firms and multinationals, Senior Business & Project Management Consultant, and several Senior Advisory roles particularly in West Africa. He served as Program Coordinator and Project Manager, Director for Strategy and Projects for several organisations in different sectors.

Since 2019 Madiba has been hired by the National Airline Project: Cameroon Airlines Corporation, as Company Secretary to the Board, cumulatively as Chief Commercial Officer. In this current role, he is involved in corporate governance, program and portfolio management, high level negotiation with government and strategic stakeholders including bilaterals, building alliances, product development, airline Network modeling, distribution and sales strategy. He is currently successfully implementing an end-to-end commercial Project Management Office (PMO) with outstanding results.

In 2010, MADIBA was among the pioneer volunteers in the creation of PMI Cameroon Chapter. Over the years, he has coached 200+ candidates gathered in study groups across Africa preparing for the PMI-PMP Certification. He has authored several articles from his project engineering experience and research that have been published in national and international journals with worldwide read reviews notably "PM Today" edited by the Project Management Institute –USA. Also, he has been a prominent speaker in regional events in Douala-2012; Lagos-2013; Lome-2015; Abidjan-2016; Douala-2019 and PMI Africa Conferences in Johannesburg; Mauritius-2021.

Since March 2024, Madiba has served as an International Correspondent for the PM World Journal and Library, covering Cameroon and other countries of the Central African sub-region.

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