

Local Public Administration and the Challenges of Socio-economic Development of Local Communities in Cameroon: The Case of Buea and Douala Municipalities

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Abstract

The 18th of January 1996 is the turning point in the history of Cameroon, as it marks the establishment of a new constitution and the constitutionalisation of decentralisation stated under Section 55(1) of the constitution. These collectivities constitute the nature of local public administration in Cameroon, which has been granted administrative and financial autonomy and competences via independent elected counsellors who manage them on behalf of the local people under the protection of the senate, which represents the local communities at the level of the state. The piece of work is titled "Local Public Administration and the Challenges of Socio-economic Development of Local Government Areas in Cameroon: The Case of Buea and Douala Municipalities. The research is out to give a clear understanding of the evolution of local public administration in Cameroon and what are the reasons for ineffective socio-economic development by local public administration in local communities in Buea and Douala. This project will thus include the gathering and analysis of data. Results revealed that local public administration is still mired in a state of complication when it comes to the delivery of essential services, notwithstanding the decentralisation policy's materialisation. Consequently, the impact of decentralisation on local development was investigated through an evaluation of local government performance in the municipalities of Buea and Douala. The researcher proposed that, in order to ensure the efficiency of local public administration in Cameroon in the area of local community socio-economic development, the central government make a functional and sincere political commitment to execute all stages of the decentralisation plans.

Keywords: Authorities, councils, development, public administration, regions

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of state management trends over the world and time has prompted many nations and states to tilt from the authoritarian or monarchical form to more liberal and democratic ones which have progressively yielded to participative development schemes. In this regard, the devolution of power varies from state to state or from one country to another, depending usually on their history.

The historical evolution of Cameroon which appears to be very complex, owing to its annexation, partition by the allied powers in the post first half of the world war era, its reunification and unification, has exposed the country to various

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forms of state management systems. As such, the system of governance under German rule appeared to be a strongly centralised system, just as it was the case under French rule with the policy of assimilation or direct rule. The part of the territory which came under British rule experienced a more liberal form of governance and management under the policy of indirect rule. Thus, upon its partition, the various portions of the Cameroonian territory were exposed to various forms of governance which have forever shaped the future of the country [1].

Upon reunification in 1961 [2], both portions of the country were exposed to a very decisive phase of their history. This required the selection of a form of governance that would suit all Cameroonians while ensuring the smooth development of the country. In this light, they both adopted a federal system of government. After close to a decade of its implementation, the policymakers at the time concluded that this form of management was burdensome and inadequate for the running of the system and would table a draft constitution for a popular vote in the 1972 referendum aimed at transforming the country into a unitary state.

This draft constitution will therefore be adopted and implemented up to the early 1990s when its limits can no longer be contained; this will lead the country to a period of political and social crisis, which will all culminate in the revision of the 1972 Constitution. It was in 1996, that this new constitution saw the light, with an interesting package of reforms contained therein. The most important reform that will come with this constitution will be the establishment of a decentralised unitary state in Section 1(2) [3]. Thus, unlike the previous constitution, which simply made provision for a unitary state, this one went further to specify the system of management under the unitary state whereby local development will be carried out with the full participation of the local population.

However, it is only in 2004 that the implementation law will be passed to lay down the frameworks under which decentralisation shall be exercised in Cameroon [4]. In this light, Law No. 2004/17 of the 22nd July 2004 on the decentralisation policy, No. 2004/18 of the 22nd of July 2004 to lay down rules applicable to councils [5], N 2004/19 to lay down rules applicable to regions [6] and later on Law No. 2009/11 to lay down the fiscal regime of regional and local authorities [7] and Law No. 2009/019 of the 15th of December 2009 to lay down local fiscal regime will be passed so as to ensure the effectiveness of decentralisation.

Between 2010 and 2020, the country was once again shaken by some important socio-political crises. Since 2016, there is no doubt that the state of Cameroon has been witnessing an unprecedented secessionist conflict in the two English regions of the north-west and south-west which mutated from a socio-professional crisis to a socio-political crisis. In a bid to curb this situation, several measures have been taken and are still in process. This crisis, as is well known, has resulted to diverse consequences on persons and property. Within the state's willingness to reach profound solutions without forgetting external concerns as to the prevailing situation in Cameroon, the President of the Republic on 10/09/2019 in his address to the nation as to the crisis ravaging the English regions of Cameroon, called for a major national dialogue which was to bring major stakeholders together in order to ponder on profound solutions as regard to this crisis. It is within the auspices of this consultation convened by the President of the Republic that amongst other recommendations made, the question of the form of state was addressed as decentralisation was redefined to adequately respond to the plea of the two regions in question.

These will then lead to the passing of the decentralisation code in December 2019 which was established with Law No. 2019/024 of 24th December 2019 bill to institute the general code of regional and local authorities [8], a document which shall henceforth be the compass of all public actions in decentralisation matters.

The new law on the general code of regional and local authorities differentiates itself from the old law from the point of view of its organisation and structure. It is organised in 6 different books divided

into parts and chapters. It contains 501 sections contrary to the 2004 laws on decentralisation which were structured in 3 different laws; the code on regional and local authorities has tried to come out with compact or single instrument governing all issues relating to decentralisation. One innovative measure implemented by the general code for regional and municipal authorities is the institutionalisation of special status based on their unique linguistic characteristics and historical heritage. This special status clause also ensures that the common law-based educational and legal systems of Anglophone countries are respected.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Pen and Pad (2021), a statement problem describes the research problem and identifies potential causes and solutions.

Over some years now, Cameroon has experienced a very slow rate of development, especially in the rural areas, and this is looked upon as a result of the centralization of power, inefficient legislation, or the non-application of state policies to help the local population participate in the socio-economic development at the local level. For these reasons, legal instruments and institutional frameworks have been put in place by the state of Cameroon to transfer administrative and developmental competence to the local councils so as to revamp development at the grass root level. However, there is still a problem because it appears that there is multiplicity of laws, confusion of power, and a lack of political will in the philosophy of the law to decentralize power to the local councils and the issue raised here is. Thus, the research problem will be: what are the reasons for ineffective socio-economic development by local public administration in local communities in Buea and Douala.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Main Research Question

1. Why has the implementation of local public administration and socio-economic development remained narrative in Cameroon?

Subsidiary Questions

2. What is the institutional framework of local public administration to socio-economic development of local communities in Cameroon?
3. What are the impacts of local public administration in relation to socio-economic development in Buea and Douala local communities?
4. What are socio-economic development challenges faced in Buea and Douala local communities in Cameroon?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Main Research Objective

1. To identify the factors and reasons against the effective implementation of local public administration and socio-economic development in Buea and Douala

Specific Research Objectives

2. To identify the institutions of local public administration competence to carry out socio-economic development in the municipalities of Buea and Douala
3. To examine the impacts of local public administration on realisation of socio-economic development in the municipalities of Buea and Douala
4. To examine the challenges faced by local public administration in socio-economic development in the municipalities of Buea and Douala

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Primary Hypothesis

This research assumes that the ineffectiveness of socio-economic development by local public administration, despite the recommendations and innovations, means that local municipalities in Buea and Douala still face some challenges.

Secondary Hypothesis

Despite the identification of different local public administration institutions and structures, socio-economic development is still a challenge because of the narrative nature of local public administration in Cameroon.

DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This research takes into consideration scientific, spatial, and temporary delimitations. Scientifically, this study refers to why this topic was chosen and its contribution to science. This research focuses on the appraisal of the effective competence of local public administration and their role in socio-economic development in the municipalities of Buea and Douala. Therefore, it is a purely scientific analysis with reference to findings, observations, and reforms, which can be made to the existing legislature on local administration in Cameroon.

Spatially, it goes to the geographical space of the study and thus it focuses on the appraisal of the effective implementation of local public administration and the role of socio-economic development in Buea of the south west region and Douala of the Littoral region. As to temporal delimitation it refers to the study period which runs from 2019–2022 for which 2019 was the takeoff year for the study and this research is expected to end in 2022. This duration permits the researcher to understand the pattern of local public administration and its role in socio-economic development in Buea and Douala local communities.

RESEARCH THEORY

A good hypothesis for this study might be new public management. Yet, this theory is a corpus of theories that analyses current developments in public administration and includes a set of administrative practises, a consulting craze, and a consulting fad. According to a lot of authors, new public administration is more of a theory than a passing trend that has to be studied [9]. This theory is appropriate for the research topic because it deals with the characteristics of public administration, for which local public administration and its institutions and structures for socio-economic development are part and parcel of the elements of administration.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research will take into consideration three research methods: the theoretical method, which consists of the consultation of relevant documents on decentralisation, paper reports from both governmental and non-governmental organisations, textbooks, articles from journals and internet sources. The empirical method consists of observations of decentralised activities at the local councils and a review of legal instruments. Structural functionalism is a school of thought in which each of the institutions, relationships, roles, and norms of society, serves a purpose, and is indispensable as a whole. The given research methods are all useful since the different elements of each method fall within the context of this research topic. This research consists of the use of data collection and the techniques of data analysis.

THE INTEREST OF STUDY

The interest of this research lies in the findings and recommendations that it offers to academics, policymakers, students, and researchers. The findings of this research will facilitate the understanding of local public administration and its role in the socio-economic development of local communities in Buea and Douala.

According to the scientific interest, it will help researchers to understand the evolution of local public administration and its role in socio-economic development of local communities in the targeted geographical space in Cameroon.

It will assist policymakers to improve on the enactment of legislations necessary to guarantee the effective realisation of socio-economic development of local communities by local public

administration. Socio-culturally, it will bring to the understanding of local public service in Cameroon and the competences of local public service personnel in the realisation of activities for socio-economic development of local communities in Cameroon. This study will also provide students researching similar topics with useful information for their research.

LITERATURE

Despite the limited literature related to the study of local public administration in Cameroon, it remains an important issue not only for the state of Cameroon but for the entire African continent and the world at large. This research will help in crafting an effective response to the establishment of this form of administration in Cameroon. In this, we have summarised and analysed works that address the origin and growth of local public administration in Cameroon. Most of the literature that exists as it concerns local public administration is mostly articles, government reports, journals, write-ups by scholars, and a few books. This literature review will cover the positions of different scholars on how to deal with and present the concept of local public administration in Cameroon. These books are appreciated and later criticized.

In Cameroon, the standards for the implementation of legal rules on decentralization are vital to the livelihood and development of local communities. However, it is shown that the implementation of the decentralization policy in Cameroon is still a debatable issue; the local population has been exposed to untold suffering since local councils in Cameroon are yet to have administrative and developmental competence which will permit them to carry out socio-economic development. For example, local councils cannot manage their budgets independently, which has created numerous complications for rural development.

One apparent way to overcome this problem is to move to strict respect of the different legal instruments put in place for effective transfer of power and competence to the local councils such that the local population can by direct or indirect manner participate in the socio-economic development of their local communities.

Freudenthal E et al., [10] in examining national-level REDD planning related to the forest carbon partnership facility (FCPF) initiative in Cameroon before proceeding to reviewing sub-national REDD-related projects highlighted that Cameroon lack effective measures to guarantee the participation of indigenous people and local communities in socio-economic development of local communities. He proceeded to show how local councils should act and how best they can ensure the socio-economic development of the local communities where a developmental project is undergoing and how best to attain such developmental goal without infringing on the rights of the people in the local communities. This work was important to the present research as it lays down emphasis on the participation of the local population in projects carried out at the grass roots and the importance of such participation. However, the work differs from the present research in that, it did not examine the role of local councils in the socio-economic development of local communities in Cameroon.

Mbarga E (1972) described how decentralization was established under the “indirect rule in his article entitled “La Décentralisation Territoriale au Cameroun” [11]. He opined in this regard that “mixed rural councils” had “a specific area of activity” well limited by law and that “native authorities”, forerunners of local administration had a mission with a wider scope aimed at satisfying the general interest and ensuring the wellbeing of the local population. The author helped us to understand the importance of setting up local councils as they will help in the development of the local communities and by doing that satisfying the needs of the local population which will bring general satisfaction. The present research differs in that, it examines the role of local councils in the socio-economic development of local communities in Cameroon.

Dieudonne A [12] attempts an approach to environmental and social impact assessment, and how to deduce the negative social impacts of a project over an environment by developmental actors, which

should include councils taking into cognizance both social, economic, cultural, and environmental development of such projects. The work has been applauded for describing in the importance of and necessity for the social and economic development of communities where a developmental project is being carried out as would be amplified in our present work relating it to the social and economic development of local communities with the aid of local councils without jeopardizing other rights. The present research differs in that, it examines the role of local councils in the socio-economic development of local communities in Cameroon.

Cheka C (2007) [13], in his article titled ‘The state of the process of decentralization in Cameroon’, examines how decentralization depends on the legal environment and the dynamism of stakeholders, especially local authorities and the state, in the development corporation with partners, and civil society. He further evaluated the shortcomings of the decentralization process in Cameroon while arguing that the objective for embarking on decentralization in each context varies with its promoters and citing that in Cameroon, decentralization constitutes the legal, institutional, and financial means through which regional and local authorities operate to foster local development with the active involvement of the population. He further explains how the devolution of powers to local entities will enhance local development and contribute to the fight against poverty, which can only be achieved through the coordination and organization of the interventions of the stakeholders.

This work helped us as it reiterated on the need of decentralization and the participation of both stakeholders and the local population to revamp socio-economic development as a means to fight against poverty. However, the present research is different in that, it focusses on the role of local councils in the socio-economic development of local communities in Cameroon [14].

Educational network for west and central Africa with case studies of Dr. Laouli M et al. (2012), Transition research on decentralization in west and central Africa: Learning from local and international lessons—education, water and health—who opined on the fact that since the collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, and the subsequent ending of the cold war, African countries seem to have rediscovered democracy and rejected the single party system. They further explain that this democratization goes beyond the multiparty system, takes on a new perspective of governance based on a profound reform of the administration and gives local actors, including the civil society, more power in the management of public affairs. They added that, the advent of decentralization, to name this new governance, even though announced for decades, became a reality only after the populations revolted, as was the case in Mali with the events of 26th March 1991, or the series of sovereign national conferences where they also indicated that only Cameroon and Senegal did not wait for this civil unrest to begin the process of sharing power with local elected officials. This work was very important to our research as it analyses not only the administrative experiences of decentralization but also sector policies for basic social services, in particular water, education, and health. However, our work differs in that, it explains the role of local councils in the socio-economic development of local communities in Cameroon [15].

Renate R et al. (2010), in their article entitled ‘Impact of decentralization: The French experience in a comparative perspective’, explained on a shift in competences in levels of government which fundamentally transform public policy making in France, Germany, and England. They further elaborated on the fact that the effects of the different reforms put in place have remained largely understudied. These analysis traces national decentralization strategies and compares their impacts on public service performance in person-related service. This work was very important to our research as it analyses not only the administrative experiences of decentralization for England, France, or Germany but also emphasizes on the need for synergies at the local levels by parties involved in the decentralization and socioeconomic development. However, our work differs in that, it explains the role of local councils in the socio-economic development of local communities in Cameroon [16].

BA Prakash (2011) in his book entitled “local finance, fiscal decentralization and decentralized planning: A Kerala experience”, opined on a number of lessons on the transfer of financial powers, mobilization of sources of revenue, inter-governmental transfer of funds, and the outcome of fiscal decentralization in Kerala being unsatisfactory due to partial and inefficient implementation decentralised competences. Therefore, it shows that the transfer of a large number of functional expenditures at an early stage of fiscal decentralization without assigning adequate administrative and financial powers has resulted in poor execution of all the competences. The study points out the need to move from partial to full fiscal decentralization which in the context of our dissertation helps us to understand that the failure to allocate fiscal power to local collectivities has been one of the main causes of poor results from decentralization policies. However, our work differs in that, it explains the role of local councils in the socio-economic development of local communities in Cameroon [17].

According to the local government bulletin titled ‘Local government and decentralisation in Cameroon’ by Dr Soren David [18], the author presents three main challenging aspects facing local administration in Cameroon, amongst which are, the location of most of these councils pose problems because of inaccessibility; the insubstantial investment spending by local government is in line with what is happening at the national level of the government, and the failed allocation means that is financial means to decentralised collectivities and local authorities are insufficient but this research has made available financial autonomy and the transfer of this financial autonomy to these collectivities.

According to Guy Yakana, Mounon Chouaibou, and Lucie Yakana in their article titled ‘Decentralised territorial collectivities and the implementation of public policies, the case of Cameroon [19], the authors acknowledged the fact that, for there to be effective implementation of public policies, the central administration needs to transfer if not all but certain competences to the local government, thereby identifying the significant importance of local and regional authorities in the execution of public policies. They also mentioned the need for these authorities to enjoy some degree of autonomy, for which the authors presented that these authorities do not enjoy genuine administrative and financial autonomy. The authors presented some different public policies that can be carried out by the local public administration, that is, the place of local and regional authorities in the implementation of policies but failed to present the significant importance of some institutions such as the National School for Local Administration (NASLA) charged with the training of some authorities of this local administration. FEICOM (Fond Special d’Equipement et d’Invention Intercommunal) which has as mission to provide mutual assistance to councils or finance council investment projects. Thus, this research will be of significant importance as it does not only examine these organs but goes as far as to present the impact that local administration will have on the implementation of public policies in the socio-economic development of local communities in Cameroon: The case of Buea and Douala local municipalities.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK: THE STAKES THAT GUARANTEE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT BY LOCAL COUNCILS

The Cameroon Constitution of 1972 established norms and objectives for decentralization. The revision of the Constitution in 1996 created a unitary decentralized state [20], and granted decentralizing functional responsibilities for education, health, social and cultural activities [21]. The maintenance of national decentralization program, however in 2004, the legal framework was changed again to introduce the principles of subsidiarity, progressiveness, and complementarity [22]. However, these concepts were not defined; nor made operational in the Cameroonian context until 2019 with the establishment of the general code on regions and council and in fact, they were overridden by the concurrent competencies of the central power as it was then and even now as would be seen in our discussion here. This legal framework recognizes deconcentration as a step towards devolution [23], and envisaged, there would be a transfer of resources parallel with competencies [24]. Section 55 (2) of the constitution states that regional and local authorities shall have administrative and financial autonomy and shall be freely administered by elected councils [25].

The Constitution states in a very general manner that the competences devolved to local governments shall be to promote the economic development, and social, health, educational, cultural and sports capacities. This was reiterated in the 1996 revision as well as the 2004 Law [26], which defines the assignment of responsibilities between the state and local governments to meet the criteria of (1) subsidiarity, (2) progressiveness, and (3) complementarity, ostensibly following developments in the EU [27].

It is also worth noting that Law 2004/017, art. 20, refers to “devolved powers,” hence the reality of the centralized unitary state ceding responsibilities is recognized. In Cameroon, according to Law No. 2004/017 of 22 July 2004 on decentralization guidelines, decentralization is viewed as the transfer of power from the central government to representatives and downwardly accountable actors, such as elected local governments, and No. 2009/011 of 10 July 2009 relating to the Financial Regime of Regional and Local Authorities (RLA). Regional and local authorities are corporate bodies governed by public law and are endowed with a legal personality as well as administrative and financial autonomy with respect to the management of regional and local interests. To this regard, the 2004 laws and specifically in its Articles 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22 provide for the empowerment of local councils with function such as social care, health care, promoting economic development, culture, and sport development with the aim of promoting local development and good governance which as well aims at achieving sustainable development in every community and generally in Cameroon. With the advent of the Anglophone crisis, came into existence Law No. 2019/024 of 24th December 2019 instituting the general code on regional and local authorities believed to be timely in solving the crisis partly blamed on the decentralization process in Cameroon.

DEVELOPMENTAL INDICATORS AT THE DISPOSAL OF LOCAL COUNCILS TO ATTAIN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The given indicators shall be examined as the mechanisms necessary for socio-economic development at the disposal of local councils and include the following.

The Principle of Autonomy and Free Administration

Enshrined in Section 55 (2) of the Cameroon Constitution, it makes allusion to the fact that regional and local authorities shall be freely administered by elected councils.

The principle of autonomy is also enshrined in Law No. 2019/024 of 24th December 2019 instituting the general code on regional and local authorities. Administrative autonomy of local authorities is envisaged in Sections 9 and 10 while financial autonomy is envisaged in Section 11.

In reviewing and synopsis, the functioning and performance of the local authorities to include local councils as institutions which have been given the mandate to spearhead rural development, freedom of administration, and autonomy of finance was consecrated to illustrate its importance in socio-economic development. There is the relationship between freedom and development, the ways in which freedom is both intrinsic and extrinsic to development, that is, a basic constituent of development in itself and an enabling key to other aspects such as stability and security, a concept the Cameroon Legislator was quick to perceive [28]. He suggests a focus on what he calls capabilities, that is, substantive human freedom, encompassing processes and opportunities, and for recognition of the heterogeneity of distinct components of freedom.

He further bickers that development consists of the removal of various types of “unfreedoms” (like political freedom) that leaves people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency.

The Devolution of Power to Local Councils: A Vital Stipulate for Socio-economic Development

The devolution of power to local governments seems to me as one model of socio-economic development adopted by the government of Cameroon.

In Section 17 (1) of Law No. 2019/024 of 24th December 2019 instituting the general code on regional and local authorities, it stipulates that: “The state shall devolve to local authorities the powers necessary for their economic, social, health, education, cultural, and sports development.”

And (2) (further stipulate that they shall exclusively exercise the powers devolve by the state.

The major argument in the hypothetical framework is that devolution of powers enhances participation and plays a fundamental role in rural socio-economic development. Devolving powers to local authorities provides them the opportunities to self-actualize in society and at the same time institutionalize their objectives which they so much value into development efforts without running to the central government for service provision at all time when the need arises.

There is a legal requirement that financial resources transferred to local governments must match the decentralized competences, and this corresponds to international best practice. However, there is no precision about the nature of the transferred resources in Law 2004/017, and it is not specified whether these should be taxes or transfers [29] before the 2019 law on regions and council. There are also some legal qualifications that confuse the picture.

Law 2004/017, Article 24, states that “The financial burden of the decentralized competencies must be evaluated before their transfer.”

Since evaluating this burden is quite subjective, the agency (line ministries) actually in charge of the evaluation would play an important role.

Law 2004/017, Article 23 introduces a general transfer, which corresponds to the partial financing of decentralization. However, art. 7 of decree 2009/248 states that it should be an “appropriate” transfer. Neither of the formulations has to correspond precisely to the transferred functions, and could leave the local governments to make up for the difference out of their own (non-existent) resources.

Law 2004/017, Article 23, also stipulates that “The general transfer should be decided annually with the central budget”.

This means that it will likely be adjusted to the financial circumstances of the central government, as has been seen recently (see below).

But then, in 2019, the Cameroonian Legislator did admirable work when it attached to the devolution of power the concepts of human and material resources. These human and material resources are the backbone of social and economic development at the level of community development by local authorities [30]. The law further makes it mandatory that such devolution of powers be consistent with the principles of subsidiarity and complementarity.

Fortunately, this law further makes it possible for the state to devolve such powers as stipulated in Section 17 (1) and to affect the transfer of the resources and means necessary to exercise such powers [31]. The theory of devolution of power is a facet of empowerment essential to attaining socio-economic development. Nonetheless, let us draw attention to the slim disparity in the treatment of this concept to clear up any ambiguity. Empowerment is treated as a core concept in the theory of power devolution, and the focus is on political empowerment which is purported by Pyne [32] to be a situation where people are free, and have the strong political motivation to make positive changes. It is a condition where the local authorities are given the opportunity to benefit from equal privileges and to make unbiased choices on their own. Although development is an element of empowerment, I also hold that empowerment is the attraction of development with regard to the fact that it gives people the freedom to express their choices of decision-making. Empowerment is therefore used here to embrace the autonomy of the local council.

Barnes considers power to be one of those things which makes its existence apparent to us through its effects, and hence, it has always been found much easier to describe its consequences than to identify its nature and its basis [33].

The Democratic Principle of Election

As a democratic concept, election are seen as necessary for development as it give the people the opportunity to sit as councilors and vote for the person they believe is right to deliver the goal and ensure the socio-economic development of their locality [34]. The concept of democracy is a local political cosmology which emphasizes the values of justice, civility, and open communication between rulers and subjects [35].

According to Schumpeter, political decisions are realized for ‘common good’ by making the people decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out their will [36]. Enshrined in Article 55 (2) of the Cameroon Constitution, it makes allusion that “Regional and local authorities shall be freely administered by elected councils” [37].

And also incorporated in Law No. 2019/024 of 24th December 2019 instituting the general code on regional and local authorities, Article 6(1) provides that: “Local authorities shall be administered freely by elected organs, by rules laid down by the law”. Article 6(2) further stipulates that: “The deliberative and executive organs of local authorities shall derive their powers through universal suffrages”. Article 7 of the same law [38] however vitiates the mechanism of election as an exceptional measure. Sir Arthur Lewis perceives this model as undemocratic as it is characterized by exclusiveness. This is common in societies where the executive is too conservative. Article 7 provides that; “Local authorities may exceptionally be administered by unelected organs in particular pursuant to the provisions relating to the establishment of a special delegation” [39].

The Lien Between Democracy and Socio-economic Development

Defining democracy as an “ongoing search for an institutional resolution of the problem of power that lies at the core of politics”, Shapiro in his theory attempts to establish a link between democracy and development [40]. In his view, democracy should be based on a rational collective action and not majority rule because this will force the minority to become tyranny. Hitting hard on the role of deliberations in the promotion and achievement of the common good, he established the lien or nexus in a wider dimension to ascertain how democratic performance will produce developmental output. On democratic performance, Elgstöm pays more attention to certain political events and institutions and the nature of elections [41].

Shanmugaratnam [42], while investigating Sen’s [43] capability approach to development presents a contrary view to the authoritarian regime, by establishing a link between democracy and development. Another scholar explores the extent to which democracy or any dimension of it, such as freedom, is beneficial to development [44], and the philosophy seem to have the same philosophical roots as those propounded by Sen, where freedom helps people to participate in decision-making at different levels and permit them to express their economic and other needs. Not only does democracy lead to progress, the latter also generate high probability of democratic government. In this view, it is ascertained that development promotes democracy when the emphasis on economic development has to be broadened to encompass measures of human development [45]. Thus, it is of quintessence to hold that while social and economic development are necessities in every local community, democracy is a condition sine qua non.

Funds as a Development Indicator

For the council to operate, it requires funds. So, how does the council raise funds for its functioning? There are many ways that the local council is empowered to raise funds to carry out its activities. The council depends mainly on local taxes that are collected from the market through market tolls. Other

sources include revenue from hawker licenses, lease of the town hall, and other council property such as the trucks, payment from the use of the stadium during football matches, and other activities such as trade fairs. They also raise funds from civil status records such as birth certificates and marriage certificates, advertisement fees, and billboards in the municipality. You have to pay a quarter to the council. The law also demands that the council make money from building permits. For a structure to be put up, the council has to be consulted through an application, whereby the council will send council technicians to inspect the area to ascertain the suitability of the structure and then levy a small fee.

The council is also subsidized by FEICOM (the special council support fund). FEICOM is a government institution with a mission to assist councils and realize council projects like roads, water, and electricity. This support can be financial or material. This institution gets its funding from money generated by councils. This is an indication that councils raise enough funds to be self-sufficient.

It is also the responsibility of the council to create national and international contacts through which they can solicit aid. It could be from development agencies, associations, or even governments. This aid is granted in most cases on the condition that a project is in the pipeline.

These projects will act as a yardstick for assessing the performance of the council. The identification of projects is a process that involves the local people and the local council.

The Participatory Requirement

The participatory mechanism is one of the most useful mechanisms to ensure socio-economic development at the level of the local community. Law No. 2019/024 of 24th December 2019 instituting the general code on regional and local authorities gives impetus to this mechanism. According to Article 40 (1), it states that ‘Any natural or legal person may propose to the council or regional executive any measure aimed at fostering development and or improving the functioning of the local authority concern’.

Article 40 (2) further provides that ‘Any inhabitant or a tax payer of a local authority may, at his expense request the disclosure, or obtain a complete or partial copy of the report of deliberative organs, the budget, drafts, and annual performance report, develop plans, accounts or orders under the conditions lay down by the regulations.

From the foregoing, this mechanism has come in place to make the local inhabitants to have a say in the administration of the local affairs of the council and to give fruitful contributions deem to be relevant in the socio-economic development of that locality in question.

Sub-section (3) of the given Section 40 even makes it mandatory for the copies of the documents mentioned in Sub-section 2 to be published for consultation and so open to the public.

This principle of participation makes it possible for local communities to investigate into the proper administration of their affairs. At the same time, it is a kind of self-check at the lower level, giving locals the opportunity to check the acts of the local administrators to see if they are in line with their intended objectives.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL COUNCILS IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

There are several reasons why local governments are vital to the process of economic development, beginning with their traditional roles. Local councils must provide a secure and stable environment in which enterprises can flourish. They are responsible for physical infrastructures, such as roads, water supply, waste management, and information and communication technologies, all of which are necessary prerequisites to economic activity. Local councils also address the needs of their citizens for

public health, education, housing, local transportation services, cultural and recreational facilities, child care, and other public goods and services that are essential to the nurturing of a healthy, skilled, and reliable workforce.

In addition to these traditional roles, local councils around the world are providing leadership in the economic development of their jurisdictions. As the public institutions closest to the people, with an immediate grasp of the assets, deficits, and issues of their communities, local councils are the most appropriate agents to convene all of the local economy's stakeholders: the chamber of commerce, the representatives of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), trade and labour unions, primary producers, education and training institutions, agents of the departments and structures of other levels of government, non-governmental organizations, and international development partners active in the community, as well as the representatives of those who are unemployed, marginalized because of their youth, gender, disability, or ethnic origin, or who are struggling to survive in the informal economy. Local councils are the best-placed initiators, catalysts, and drivers of processes that engage these stakeholders in visioning the future, designing strategies, and implementing economic development initiatives. Of course, local economic development is only one part of the total effort needed to create the conditions in which people can enhance their capacities to live the life they choose. National development plans and policies are required for large infrastructural projects like energy grids, highways, railroads, and communication networks. It is in recognition of this that so many countries of the world have undertaken programs of decentralization, devolving to the local scale responsibility for economic development in their jurisdictions.

In many cases, however, this process of decentralization is incomplete, as it has not included clear, legislated mandates with defined roles for the various tiers of government, nor has it provided adequate human and financial resources to local councils to meet their responsibilities. The consequences for many local councils have been extremely overextended resources and barriers to their effectiveness as agents of development. To achieve effective decentralization of responsibility for local economic development, upper-tier governments must establish legal frameworks that provide local councils with clear mandates in the field of local economic development and ensure that local authorities and their staff have the training and financial resources to carry out their roles.

THE LEGAL STIPULATIONS

In Cameroon, local councils have a key role to play in the socio-economic development of their local communities because of their comprehensive responsibilities and functions as ascribed by the laws [46]. They are the political and administrative structures most closely related to local development. In order to address the question of what role they perform, it is indispensable first of all to understand how the laws of the land relate to social and economic functions.

Stipulations of Law No. 2004/17 of July 2004 on Decentralization in Relation to the Economic and Social Functions of Local Councils

In Cameroon, three bills voted by the house of parliament in June 2004 were promulgated into law on July 22, 2004 [47]. Local authorities were and are empowered under Section 2(1) of Law No. 2004/17 of July 2004 on the orientation of decentralization. It states that "Decentralization shall consist of devolution by the state of special powers and appropriate resources to regional and local authorities" [48]. The legal and regulatory instruments governing local governments expressly confer a developmental role on local authorities. Section 4(1) Law No. 2004/17 of 22 July 2004 on the orientation of decentralization stipulates (inter alia) that the "mission" of councils" of local authorities "shall be to promote economic, social, health, educational, cultural and sports development in their respective areas of jurisdiction" [49]. Their powers in this regard include ascertaining the views of the community, promoting interest and involvement in local government affairs, and promoting, organizing or assisting in research, surveys, and studies regarding the local community. These powers ensure that local authorities can develop initiatives with the full participation of the public they represent.

Stipulations of Law No. 2019/024 of 24 December 2019 on the General Code on Regions and Councils

Following the 2019 law on regions and council, the council's overall objective is to ensure local development and improve the living environment and conditions of the inhabitants [50]. To perform this task, the council may in addition to its own resources, request assistance from the state, its population, civil society organization, local authorities or international partners, upon deliberation by the council board [51]. With this stipulate, local councils can thus attain their social and economic development function as stipulated by the law.

Let's examine the following.

Local Government Policy on Social Economy

The terms "social economy", "solidarity economy" and "third sector" refer to enterprises that use business methods to address social, economic, cultural, and health needs in a community or region. A social enterprise may take any one of a variety of forms, such as a producer cooperative, a credit union, or a non-profit corporation, but common features include democratic governance and an orientation to serving community needs rather than private capital accumulation. Typical enterprises include childcare, elder care, waste recycling, cooperative housing, cultural production, food production and distribution, and financial services.

These provide local employment as well as goods and services of direct use to the community. Local councils in many countries include social economy enterprises in their planning processes and support them with start-up funding, technical assistance, skill training, and preferential treatment in procurement contracts.

Economic Actions of Local Council

Being a state function from a prima facie point of view, the following are economic action that has been devolved to the council:

- Promotion of council agriculture, pastoral, artisanal, and fish farming activities;
- Development and management of council touristic sites;
- Construction, equipping, management and maintaining of markets, motor parks, and slaughter houses;
- Organization of local trade fares;
- Support to income generating and job creating micro-project;
- Exploitation of mineral substances that cannot be given out as concessions [52].

Means to Attain Social and Economic Actions in Buea and Douala Municipalities

Local councils have their own assets, staff, public and private property separate of those of the state and other public entities. They may execute projects in partnership with the state, public establishments, public or semi-public enterprises, private enterprises, civil society organizations, and foreign partners [53] for which the municipalities of Buea and Douala are inclusive.

From the given analysis, local councils therefore have their own budget and resources and as such, they can freely draw up and vote their own budget, receive resources from the state and other public or private sector entities, receive all or part of the proceed from the exploitation of natural resources within their territory, generate the resources necessary to promote economic, social, health, educational, cultural, and sport development within its jurisdiction, and all resources mention herein are freely managed by the local council [54].

Resources as a Means to Attain Social and Economic Development

Local councils have the competence to levy taxes and charges which include direct council taxes, cattle tax, and licenses. The most important mechanism for revenue-sharing is the additional council

taxes levy on national taxation, of which 70% goes to the councils. All councils have similar responsibilities and powers for service delivery with the exception of sub-divisional councils, which have a modified set of competencies.

Thus, to be independent and free to carry out social and economic functions, the state has devolved resources and means necessary for effective exercise of such functions to councils [55]. These resources are in the form of human and material resources.

The Role of Local Governments in Agriculture

Prospects for sustainable livelihoods in agriculture have been declining in recent decades. Low-input, sustainable smallholder agriculture, a traditional source of livelihood around the world, is being squeezed by large-scale industrial agriculture, frequently supported by heavy state subsidies. Plantation agriculture, notably for biofuels and for exports of fruit, vegetables, and even cut flowers, is displacing food production for local consumption. International organizations like the World Bank and the World Trade Organization claim that industrial agriculture and trade liberalization have lifted hundreds of millions of people from poverty, increased food production, and reduced its cost to consumers. Companies like Monsanto and BASF argue that their research and products have contributed significantly to increased productivity in an age of rapid population growth with limited quantities of soil and water.

Social Actions of Local Council

There are three domains of social actions given to councils in accordance with the 2019 law on regional and local authorities. Amongst them are:

- The participation in the upkeep and management of social advancement and reintegration centers;
- The creation, maintainance, and management of public commentaries;
- The organization and coordination of relief operations for the needy.

Building the Capacities of Local Actors

Local councils also recognize the critical importance of training their own elected officials, staff, and stakeholder groups in approaches to LED, in the governance of economic development, and in policy development. In some cases, there is a valuable role in this training function for technical assistance offered by international development partners. Working with a strong appreciation of local knowledge and skills, and with respect for local values and goals, international development partners are well-positioned to provide workshops and study tours for the key LED actors in a community, or region study tours are especially beneficial if timed early in the process of strategic planning or in the design of a new initiative.

Elected officials, staff, and stakeholder groups can learn from similar efforts in other places, seeing first hand the actual approaches used and hearing from their counterparts the lessons they have learned. Small-scale short-term demonstration projects are another useful learning tool. Not only do they provide a practical display of a new method or product, they also generate a sense of momentum in the LED process. Some local councils have established knowledge management (KM) systems that capture the learning from their own experiences and also provide access to knowledge from outside their community.

Sources of Council Revenue for Socio-economic Development via Partner Institutions

Statutory sources of revenue available to councils in Cameroon include revenue from CEFAM now NASLA and FEICOM which are both key actors in the process of decentralization in Cameroon. FEICOM is mandated with the competence of collecting and redistributing additional tax and provide grants and soft loans to councils. The National Community Driven Program (NCDP) financially supports the local councils in their development initiatives. Other sources of revenue include royalties for the use of natural resources such as forest and mining exploitation.

The Financial Implication of Transfer of Power to Carry out Social and Economic Actions

A common decentralization fund is created to partially finance council and expenditures corresponding to the exercise of power prior to its devolution.

Each year, the finance law determines a fraction from the state budget to be allocated to the support councils in the process of decentralisation, and such a fraction may not be less than 15%. However, any new expenditure to be borne by the local council subsequent to its amendment by the state, by regulations of rules of exercise of transfer powers must be offset by an equivalent allocation to the common decentralization fund or by tax revenue in accordance with terms and conditions. Moreover, if there is a shortage of funds in the local council that may jeopardize the smooth execution of public service activities, the state may intervene through the allocation of special funds to the local authority concerned. Financial expenditure arising from the devolution of power shall entail an allocation by the state of resources equivalent to that expenditure [56].

Findings on the Implications of Local Public Administration on the Performance of Regional and Local Authorities

Despite the materialization of the decentralization policies, citizens are still trapped in a state of dilemma—whether or not to articulate that the performance of their municipal councils has improved with the implementation of these decentralization policies. The implication of decentralization on local development was examined through the assessment of the performance of local authorities in Buea and Douala in the provision of fundamental services, that is to say, in areas these municipalities considered as priority areas for major expenditure heads in their action plans for capital investment (quality electricity supply, quality portable drinking water and sanitary services, the construction and rehabilitation of feeder roads and classrooms).

Evidence demonstrated that a greater percentage of the population perceive their councils to be making greater strides in the provision of portable drinking water and sanitary services to the community as 18% rated their municipal council to be very effective in the given services with 38% of the opinion that their efforts could be seen to be rather high than low, giving a 47.1% of positive rating as against 46.2% negative consideration of the efforts of their municipal authorities. However, although 59.2% of the population both thought negatively of the efforts of their councils either in the area of rehabilitation and roads construction, a greater percentage (38.2%) of them perceive positively that their municipal council makes considerable efforts in the construction of roads and classrooms, contrary to the responses of 29% of the population who are of opinion that their municipal council is making efforts in its electrification projects. This lapse in electrification projects could be attributed to the huge costs associated with such projects whereas there are inadequacies in own-source revenues as 40% of their budgets are allocated for capital investment.

However, from the mean proportion of the overall performance rating of the municipal councils under study, it can be seen that a simple majority of citizens (31%) perceive the performance of their councils to be rather low than high while 27% considers their efforts to be rather high than low, with 24% perceiving them to be very low and 11% perceiving them to be very high. From the responses of the citizens on their views on the performance of their municipal authorities in the wake of the operationalization of the decentralization policies, it was indicative that the correlation between the implementation of the decentralization policies in Buea and Douala local council areas and the improvement in the performance of councils could be rated to be below average. This gives credence to the fact that momentous improvements in the performance of municipal councils so far cannot by and large be attributed to the ongoing decentralization process.

Furthermore, President Biya's Communal Liberalism's (1986:113) articulation of decentralization is emphatic on the ideals of governance processes as it advocates the restoration of autonomy to the individual so as to protect him/her from any capricious and arbitrary authority. How the citizens have

been able to realize these noble visions have been a matter of conjecture that needs verification at the local level as we however depict here that the implementation of the decentralization policy has not significantly contributed in improving participatory local governance processes. The impact of the current decentralization process on local governance in Buea and Douala local councils was examined here with focus on the level of local actors' capacity in development and participation, responsiveness, transparency, and accountability of local authorities. Primary evidence from data revealed that local authorities do not make it as a point of duty to engage citizens in their activities, explaining why a negligible percentage of the sampled population of citizens have ever participated in any council session, budget session, village development meeting, or made any suggestion to the municipal council concerning the development of their area. This problem is greatly compounded by the fact that there is a great paucity of information on the affairs of local authorities especially in terms of their budgets and plans for the community.

Evidences revealed inadequacies in the capacity of local actors that are stakeholders in the decentralization process at the local level in overcoming 'local dictatorship' at the municipal level in ensuring that the role and impact of citizens go beyond just voting at the municipal elections but participating in local developmental activities in partnership with their municipal councils in fostering participatory local governance and community driven development (CDD). It is in this light that seventy percent of the sampled citizens have never participated in any council session, budget session, village development meeting, or made any suggestion to the municipal council concerning the development of their area.

From the given assessment of the local governance process, it is evident that there are lapses and inadequacies in the co-option of citizens and other local stakeholders in the decentralization process even at the national level as decentralized projects are depicted to be designed in Yaoundé without the collaboration and participation of local authorities. As concerned, the concept of special status given to the north west and south west regions, just 20% understand this concept with respect to its local population and some local staffs in regional and local administrations, whereas the rest of the local population do not even know what special status mean not to talk of its functioning.

OBSTACLES FACED BY LOCAL COUNCILS IN THE EXERCISE OF THEIR FUNCTIONS WITHIN THE DOMAIN OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Given are some challenges encountered by the local councils.

Chronic Budgetary Deficit and Capital Depreciation

The primary and most critical dilemma plaguing local council is chronic budgetary deficit and depreciation that dictates major capital expenditure. Although addressed in the law that transfer of power shall be followed with the means to exercise such power, the question of capital depreciation to include capital weighs down or teardown capital does not appear in the law. So far this problem has not been fully addressed in the decentralization legislation. Many local councils were and are still unacquainted as to how much freedom of choice they have over handling of financial resources for capital depreciation or how to use the available but limited resources to accomplish the much needed social and economic services on a sustainable base. Although local councils are supposed to generate their revenue from local sources, they still depend on grants from the central government. Reason being that the revenue generated is not sufficient to support their mission of service delivery. Thus to improve revenue collection, councils apply some strategies to make sure that they collect more to cover the gap that rose due to rationalization of local government taxes. With the review of bylaws, computerization of revenue management strengthen revenue collection system by so doing strengthen its own sources of revenues which is the major focus on widening revenue base. Thus, it is a strong punishment for council staff and politicians found guilty of mismanagement and outsourcing collection of some taxes from private agents.

In effect, smaller local councils will unquestionably encounter difficulties in satisfying their innovative array of statutory actions as spelt out in the 2019 law on general code on regions and council, as highlighted under social and economic actions plus health, education, and environmental protection without a substantive and equivalent boost in their funding, albeit the new legislation stipulates that where services have been transferred, any relevant infrastructure and other resources should also be transferred. Insufficiency in budgetary allocations was and still is a serious problem in the provision of socio-economic development and the carrying out of rehabilitation that can lead to sustainable development.

In Cameroon, the whole machinery of reconciling anticipated socio-economic development with the fundamental practice for allocating and controlling local council funds for capital investment (to include capital depreciation) and the effecting operation is often demanding and not consistent.

Nonpayment of Local Council Tax, Dues, and Fines by Local Community Inhabitants within the Municipalities of Buea and Douala

The issue of not paying because others do not pay and no action taken against them by local authority, also emerged as one of the hindrance affecting local councils. Such council taxes are relevant for future developmental plans and when not forthcoming, it raises budgetary issues. Non-compliance by the taxpayers is another serious problem impacting negatively upon the council who have to device on what has been collected through council taxes, park fees, and fines rentals. Unwillingness of local community inhabitants to pay dues makes council revenue sourcing a difficult undertaking ensuing in very low collection efficiency levels. On the other hand, local community inhabitants find the probability of being caught for not paying a council due too low.

Untrue Returns from Tax, Levies, Council Tickets, and Park Fees from Councils Collecting Agents in Buea and Douala

A major challenge plaguing the revenue collection process of local council is correlated to the assessment of the revenue potential of every taxable activity and ascertaining what amount can be generated from a particular tax base. For instance, how much can be pre-established as the forecast amount that will be recovered as taxi council tax in the course of the year without even knowing the actual number of taxis in the community and worsened with the imminence presence of clandestine transport. Even the day-to-day market council ticket paid by traders cannot be ascertained and a forecast is known before its collection. With this leak, revenue or funds that would have been used by the local council to carry out its project will end up in private pockets of individuals while the population continues in lack.

The Continuous Centralized Tendencies of the State in the Affairs of Local Communities

With the 2019 general code on regional and local authorities, one would have believed that the government intends to display a will to see the full implementation of decentralization. But this vision is a sham when the law makes it mandatory for the state representative to have free access in the affairs of the local council as if he runs the affairs. For instance, the law provides that the council board is the deliberative organ of the council and deliberates the affairs of the council through deliberations and expresses its resolution by way of opinion when required by law and regulations or at the request of the representative of the state. More so, the law provides that the council board meets quarterly when convened by the mayor, lasts for seven days in its ordinary session, and handles matters falling only within its jurisdiction. The law even went further to state that where the mayor fails to convene the board meeting after 72 hours of warning, the representative of the state may do so [57]. Does this imply that he will also deliberate at the meeting? More so, the law further stipulates that where the mayor fails to convene an extraordinary session per subsections 1, 2, and 3 of Section 172, the representative of the state may convene such a meeting and sign the convening notices [58]. If this law had pure intentions, then such responsibility would have reverted to the deputy mayor or the board chairman. Further, where any obstacle renders communication between the headquarters and part of the council difficult, a special

deputy mayor is to be created by a reasoned council board resolution and submitted to the state representative for approval, and the special deputy mayor is elected amongst councilors within the council area. This implies that, if the state representative does not approve, there is nothing the council board can do. The implication here is that this provision gives the state representative the right to fill this vacancy as per the wish of the state or his personal ambition. He can keep on rejecting until his choice is made. So therefore, the choice of the state representative is the point of focus.

CHALLENGES IN THE CAMEROON DECENTRALIZATION PROCESS: IMPACT ON THE EFFECTIVE SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN THE BUEA AND DOUALA COUNCIL AREAS

Glaringly, there has been a noticeable trend in favour of decentralization in nations characterized by centralistic organizational patterns, although to various degrees and with different ascents. In view of the fact that decentralization is a process that can advance rather than retreat depending on the obstacles that the process may likely run into as it evolves, it is worthwhile to explore the roadblocks inherent in such policy implementation processes in the context of Cameroon, as exemplified more recently in its 'Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP)-2010–2020', which acknowledges the weaknesses and unsuccessful nature of its decentralization process especially in contributing to achieve the goals of its April 2003 'Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) (GESP, 2009:96)'.

Lack of Political Will

Bringing to light the 'devil in the details' in Cameroon's decentralization process, stumbling blocks in the process could be traced to the colonial period resulting from the state's diverse colonial heritage coupled with the bias and exploitative rationale by the colonialists in establishing local government structures. It is in this light that Etougou and Oyono, scrutinizing the paradox of decentralization revealed the authoritarian reconstruction of the state since the 1990s with the active usage of divisional officers and senior divisional officers [59, 60]. The omnipresence of these officials emphasizes the limits and instrumentality of decentralization with their excessive role leading to the 'irresponsibility' and denigration of the local population.

The first United Cities and Local Government's (UCLG) report in 2008 on the state of decentralization and local governance in Africa identifies among a plethora of challenges the fact that the implementation of decentralization policies in Africa has been rarely planned and adequately monitored especially in Central Africa and West Africa as they in most part rather rest in the policy pronouncements and speeches made by head of states. A challenge and controversy is typified here that, despite the growth in multiparty elections with leaders chosen by universal suffrage, some categories of officials like regional governors in Cameroon, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt are still being appointed. This grossly however distorts genuine decentralization processes and the autonomy of subnational authorities. The rare effective transfer of powers and the capacity deficits of local authorities to mobilize 'own revenues' pose as crucial challenges especially in Ivory Coast and Cameroon where the municipal income of local administrators are controlled by the central government with local government (LG) finance representing less than one per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) and five per cent of its subnational expenditure [60].

It has also been argued that Cameroon's decentralization process does not realistically consider the changing nature of the society, and scholarship has depicted a pessimistic futuristic view about the aftermath implementation of the decentralization policy marked by the lack of representativeness in administrative agencies and compounded by its bureaucratic crisis of 'file chase' procedure inherent in the civil service [61]. Negative implications for public organizations, state personnel system, universities, and the public service are envisaged here if the implementation of administrative decentralization in Cameroon does not continually take into consideration the 'temporary' nature of the society which is continually changing.

LIMITED FINANCIAL AUTONOMY TO FOSTER TRANSFER COMPETENCES

The 1996 Constitution does not give financial autonomy to the regions. Financial decisions are taken by the central government and imposed on regions. The main instrument governing financial issues of decentralization in Cameroon is Law No. 2009/0011/11 of 10th July 2009 relating on the financial regimes of regions and local authority. According to Section 2, it states that local government authority have financial autonomy for the management of regions and local interest.

However on the contrary, the regions are not consulted in the joint process and are dependent on the budget join up by the central government. In addition, all custom duties as well as major taxes are collected by the central government then shared to regions and councils. The sources of revenue for local government are limited and as a result, sometime there are huge gaps between projected budget and what is finally realized [62].

INEFFECTIVE PREPARATION AND MONITORING OF POWERS TRANSFERRED TO DECENTRALISE TERRITORIAL COLLECTIVITIES

Supervisory bodies for the effective implementation for the transfer of competences includes among others four national decentralization board, interministerial committee on local services as well as the national commission for the promotion of bilingualism and multiculturalism. These institutions have fundamental role to play in the following up and monitoring of decentralized framework in Cameroon.

USE OF OUTDATED INFORMATION ON POPULATION SIZE TO TRANSFER RESOURCES

Resources are located to accompany the transfer of competences to Cameroon following the principle of equalization. This principle is to ensure harmonious development among local and regional authorities and as such, takes into consideration the population size of each DTC (Decentralise Territorial Collectivities). The use of population sizes for the transfer of resources in the Cameroonian context poses a number of significant challenges.

Looking at the study carried out by the World Bank on the path to fiscal decentralization in Cameroon, mayors express discontent as it was not clear which estimate of the population was to be used. Whether the information from 1987 or a more recent estimate shows a large migrating movement. From the administrative account, it is observed that the population figures cited by the individual municipalities are more than those mentioned in the official data. Thus, this is a major source of dissatisfaction with the transfer system which is based on the outdated information of population size.

WEAK INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY OF DECENTRALISED TERRITORIAL COLLECTIVITIES

Decentralized territorial collectivities still suffer from weak institutional capacity. Decision-making processes are disordered, the mechanisms for accountability between officials and elected representatives are inadequate, and there is a shortage of officials with the necessary technical, managerial, and financial skills. This is due to a lack of financial resources to attract and retain competent staff. Building institutional capacity at the local level also requires consistent support from the central government, which has not been sufficient promoting the creation of NASLA.

OVERLOBING COMPETENCES BETWEEN COUNCILS, CITY COUNCILS, AND REGIONS

Competences disfavor councils, city councils, and regions. Moreso, the degree of the conflict can be practically identified in the overlobbing and incoherent power sharing between the city council and the subdivisional councils in cosmopolitan areas. The city council is seen as carrying out the main job, while the subdivisional councils basically do the finishing.

THE UNDEFINED ROLE OF THE STATE

The lack of a clearly defined concept of the role of the state is a key issue that hinders the implementation of the decentralization process and has strong consequences for the transfer of powers

and resources to the decentralized territorial collectivities. One of the reasons why decentralized territorial collectivities have been left with minimal tax packages is that there are no concessions on the role of the state. As a result, it is difficult to define the level at which the government should overtake taxes. That is why the government has found it a dilemma to transfer functions to lower levels of government without increasing significant transfers of resources, which ultimately may link to the delivery of many services, but in a highly inadequate way.

GENERAL CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Here, we shall give a vivid synopsis of this work and then provide recommendations.

Generally, it has been observed that a sound law and sufficient local revenue are significant prerequisites for ensuring the social and economic development of local communities by local councils. Therefore, the role of councils in the socio-economic development of local communities is tied to the law and resources. In the introductory part of this work, we endeavor to show the historical evolution of decentralization in Cameroon in order to understand how it is perceived today. We then went forward to analyze those indicators that are necessary for councils to perform their socio-economic role within the local community, and then we looked at the organigram of local councils in the accomplishment of their socio-economic role. From this point, we then analyzed their social and economic functions before embarking on the difficulties these councils face in the execution of their socio-economic functions. We are made to understand that these obstacles are eminent and problematic for councils and local communities.

It has however been seen here that pressures like structural adjustment programs and civil unrests in the 1990s to curb the historical curtailment of the autonomy of local communities prompted the re-introduction of decentralization in the 1996 Constitution as an administrative governance technique, which however took the state fourteen years to practically implement this policy. Irrespective of this eventual implementation, the pace of this policy process is still very slow and will reach an 'anti-climax' in the 2011 financial year as critical constraints stymie the practical implementation of the policy centered around the lack of genuine political will and commitment by the government. This is compounded by the great influence of its restrictive Francophone "Jacobin" administrative state construct with its recentralization tendencies which show some level of central government conspiracy in that in its drive to decentralize, it grants powers to local authorities on one hand and takes a considerable share again on the other. It is against this backdrop that one can conveniently say that Cameroon's decentralization regime is composed of large doses of deconcentration mixed with a patina of devolution, as it can be seen through the lens of a zero-sum power game rather than through that of a positive-sum power game in which all actors gain over time.

Recommendations

From the foregoing analysis of the study and the problems highlighted, the following major recommendations can be taken into consideration.

Automation of Revenue Sources

In order to improve effectiveness and minimize human error and corruption opportunities that have led to the siphoning of council tax and other levies, a simple computerized revenue management system would be feasible. The local councils should be able to device an automated system that provides an exact forecast of taxable activities, the persons liable, type of levies, and those liable and an exact amount of market traders, and the day-to-day expected returns from market sales. The system must consider an automated administration function of registration, assessment, collection, and accounting for the revenue collected. It is thus recommended that local councils computerize their revenues in order to minimize corruption in revenue collection and accounting.

Establishing an Adequate Revenue Collection

Local revenues should be adequate to meet the cost of the services and the purpose they are intended to finance. They should also be optimistic, meaning that the overall revenues should change roughly in

proportion to the economic base. The tax base should grow automatically when prices rise, the population grows, or the economy expands to meet expanding demands for service delivery. Revenue collections need to be stable and predictable to facilitate planning and budgeting, while at the same time, collection and administration costs need to be minimized. Local revenue autonomy and flexibility need to be reinforced, and tax instruments need to be politically acceptable.

Instituting an Independent Accountable Body for Assessing Council Revenue before Outsourcing

To meet their objectives, the councils' outsourcing systems need to establish criteria that ensure that collecting agents accomplish a reasonable return to the local council. Hence, it is important for each council to conduct a rigorous assessment of the revenue potential before outsourcing takes place or is expanded, and to update the assessment regularly. One option for consideration is to move the responsibility for revenue assessment out of council administration by establishing an independent body responsible for such assessments.

The Need for a Political Will

It is therefore highly recommended that there be a functional and genuine political commitment on the part of the central government to implement all the facets of the decentralization policies manifested and made practical with the establishment of a timetable for devolution, the allocation of a fixed quota of the state budget to local authorities, and the financing of the decentralization process, coupled with the curbing of the excessive oversight role of appointed administrative officials who impinge on the autonomy of elected local authorities.

Fiscal decentralization is important for an efficient process because, without financial resources, it will be difficult or impossible for the DTCs to carry out their duties. Fiscal decentralization refers to the decree in which certain central executives give little competence to DTCs with regard to financial autonomy to raise revenue or resources for the execution of development initiatives; delaying fiscal decentralization renders political administrative decentralization ineffective. It is therefore important to assign resources to accompany the competence and tax that had been transferred.

The financing module of operation provided under the decentralization framework in Cameroon is not working. Book 5 of the 2019 December code focuses on the financial regime on regional and local authorities, distorted way which the revenue is distributed, and widely differing nature of revenue between municipal and city council has resulted in serious inequalities and has led to serious in some part of the country.

The consequences of this is that municipal councils with very limited resources are faced with difficulties in carrying out their fundamentals especially on the responsibilities under Section 28 of the financial regime law to issue certain compulsory payment.

It is therefore important to take into consideration three major elements in enhancing a fiscal decentralization design for Cameroon.

- The assignment of responsibilities to lower levels of government to raise revenue.
- The assignment of responsibilities for expenditures; in other words, the assignment of responsibility to pay out money services.
- Intergovernmental transfers with focus on how various levels of government equalize imbalance and share revenue.

The central government must continue to play a key role in ensuring that resources are properly used and corruption prevented at the local level. This should not just be a concern for money transfer from the center.

The central government has an overriding concern to ensure proper use of all public money at whatever level the money is collected. Regarding curbing corruption in the management of resources

by local governments, the central government has a series of instruments that can be used to oversee the management of resources by local governments.

Challenging corruption in local government does not rely solely on the upward accountability of the central government. It also requires building local accountability; local elections need to be matched by increased opportunities for direct citizen participation. Since those who have participated in the discussion about the use of funds are more likely to do so.

It also requires increased access to information about the use of resources. Beyond that, it also requires the emergence of a civil society capable of engaging effectively in the local government, not just on behalf of the elites' interests, but also on behalf of the poor.

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