

An Evaluation on the Influence of Municipal Authorities on the Socio-Economic Development of the North West Region of Cameroon

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Abstract: Despite the recognition of community development structures in the 2019 bill on regional and local authorities of Cameroon and strengthened in the 2023 ministerial order, as crucial players to drive the decentralization process, there remains a gap in understanding and appropriating the impact of their roles in advancing socio-economic conditions within the context of decentralization in the North West Region of Cameroon. This paper therefore investigated the impact of municipal authorities, on socio-economic development in the North West Region of Cameroon, within the context of decentralization. Primary data was collected from 277 municipal authorities in total from all the divisions of the North West region of Cameroon. Descriptively, data was analysed using frequencies and percentages and inferential analysis, including correlation analysis and ordinary least squares regression with aid of the SPSS software. The findings from ordinary least squares regression results revealed that municipal authorities positively and significantly affect the socioeconomic development of the North West region of Cameroon. The study recommends intensifying training for stakeholders on their roles and promoting better collaboration among them, would help move decentralization from a theoretical goal to a practical reality in the North West Region of Cameroon.

Key words: Community development, decentralization, municipal authorities, and socio-economic development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Decentralization is a necessary tool to accelerate the pace and spread the benefits of growth, integrate diverse regions in heterogeneous countries and use scarce resources more efficiently to promote socio-economic development in poverty-stricken areas (Rondinelli, 1981). Its goal to foster decentralised development planning and management, has become a recurring theme in the plans and policies of international assistant agencies and developing nations in recent years. With the shifting emphasis in development strategies toward promoting more socially equitable economic growth and meeting the basic needs of the regions, wide-spread participation in decisions-making is considered essential to the development process in decentralization purview.

In the context of Cameroon and the North West Region in essence, community-based participation in development and socio-economic advancement of the population have been enshrined in Law no. 2019 /024 of 24 December, 2019 to institute the general code of Regional and Local Authorities as pivotal entities for local development and represent crucial elements for local development. This is resonated in the Order No 00000147/A/MINDDEVEL OF 19 July 2023 on the establishment, organization and functioning of neighbourhood or village committees as part of citizen participation in council action. The region has pursued decentralization as a means of promoting community-specific development initiatives and addressing socio-economic challenges. Though very challenging, as the results of these programs are often been disappointing, leading some scholars to call for more in-depth exploration of whether community participation can improve prospect for development (Gonzalez, 2014). This study seeks to explore the impact of community development structures and the advancement of socio-economic conditions within the context of decentralization in the North West Region.

The decentralization code provides greater devolution of power to the local councils and the sectorial ministry in charge, which is the Ministry of Decentralization and Local Development, called MINDDEVEL. They have the responsibility of creating, monitoring, and evaluating the government's decentralization policy of promoting local development. The structure of MINDDEVEL is headed by a Minister, followed by a Secretary General with several Directors. For the focus of my study, emphasis is laid on the Director in charge of Decentralization. At the regional level, there are the Regional Assemblies and the Regional Delegations. In the Divisions the equal exist Divisional Delegations and some City councils. Finally, Local Councils are lodged in the Sub-Divisions. This structure fits very well with the situation of the North-West Region.

The North West Region of Cameroon has been the focus of significant attention in recent years due to its socio-economic and political dynamics, particularly in the context of decentralization. This region has experienced challenges related to community development and socio-economic advancement, exacerbated by the ongoing decentralization process. The Community Development Organizations (CDOs) have been recognized in the 2019 Code on Regional and Local Authorities as pivotal entities for local development. However, there exists a gap in understanding the precise relationship between CDOs and the decentralization process, as well as their impact on local development. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the dynamics between CDOs and decentralization in the North West Region of Cameroon, with a focus on their role in local development (Code on Regional and Local Authorities, 2019). Community participation is vital for the enhancement of socio-economic development, and is pertinent for this analysis as it reveals a variety of meanings and purposes since scholars in social sciences define and interpret them in different ways.

1.1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the recognition of Municipal Authorities as Community Development Structures (CDSs) in the 2019 bill on Regional and Local Authorities and strengthened in the 2023 ministerial order, as crucial players to drive the decentralization process, there remains a gap in understanding and appropriating the effectiveness and impact of their roles in advancing socio-economic conditions within the context of decentralization in the North West Region of Cameroon. The level of involvement and participation of Municipal Authorities as king pin in driving the decentralization process to foster socio-economic growth remains to be assessed and measured. Absence of data on Municipal Authorities as a driving force in the decentralization process will inhibit knowledge on the extent to which CDSs have contributed to or not in meaningful socio-economic advancements, and in addressing the challenges they faced previously where they had little or no space for their voices to be heard in shaping their own development, and exposing potential areas for improvement. This research will provide valuable insights for inclusive and effective planning, promoting peace and social cohesion and designing/ formulation policy for implementation towards advancing the socio-economic development in the region by building synergy between the local and regional authorities that will contribute to attain the goal of SND30, agenda 2030/63 and the SDGs.

1.2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of municipal authorities on the socio-economic development in the context of decentralization of the Northwest region of Cameroon.

Analyse the effect of traditional authorities on socio-economic development

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the effect of municipal authorities on socio-economic development of the Northwest region of Cameroon?

1.4. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

There is no significant effect of municipal authorities on socio-economic development of the Northwest region of Cameroon.

1.5. SCOPE OF STUDY

The geographic scope of the study will focus on the Northwest region of Cameroon, specifically examining the various municipal authorities. The time scope will cover the period following the enactment of the 2019 bill on Regional and Local Authorities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Municipal Authorities

The Municipal council is the territorial body in charge of the municipal territory or municipality; it enjoys political, fiscal and administrative autonomy within the limits agreed by the constitution and the decentralization laws of each country.

Municipal councils are not part of the executive government but are autonomous authorities, elected directly by the people with a mandate to promote the development of their territory. They have extensive powers to set up their own local projects and standards, provided they do not contravene national legislation. The functions of municipal governments include the following:

- I.** Provision of state-run home services and basic unmet needs as regards health, education, environmental cleanliness, drinking water in homes, recreation and sport.
- II.** Organization and planning of the economic, social and environmental development of their territory and construction of facilities required for municipal progress.
- III.** Control of the appropriate management of renewable natural resources and the environment.
- IV.** Promotion of community participation and the social and cultural improvement of their inhabitants.

In Cameroon, communities have long aspired to control their own resources and shape their own future. The citizens had to be introduced to the administration of public life, just like in every other African nation south of the Sahara. Colonization introduced the idea of a territory governed by a municipal council. During the colonial era, Cameroon underwent its first decentralization experiences (Felicite, 2023).

In 1930, the British colonizer established the "native authorities" primarily along ethnic lines in an effort to involve the traditional chiefs in the management of the region's resources. First, the Fons of Bangwa and Bali, Nkom, Bum, and Bansa in the Bamenda division (Fontem) in the Mamfe division were established as indigenous leaders with the support of councils and tribunals. Four chiefs were then acknowledged in the Victoria-Buéa districts as well. As the duties increased, the "native authorities" institution made strides, they started to adopt a more collaborative structure, and there were an increasing number of local assemblies and councils in place of the traditional chiefs. Thus, there were 18 "native authorities" in the present North-East Bamenda division in 1938. There were twenty-three "native authorities" in this region in 1944. All of the "local authorities" in 1950 were councils made up of both elected officials and traditional chiefs. Following reunification, the "local councils" evolved into "local governments" (Peguy, 2012). To put it another way, the chairperson of the council was chosen by the Interior Minister for a one-year term, and the vice-president was chosen by the council. The members of these local assemblies were, for the most part, chosen by the traditional chiefs, who were designated by the Interior Minister. There were twenty-three "native authorities" in this region (Levine, 1984).

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According to the general code of regional and local authorities of Cameroon, the council will serve as the fundamental local government, with its main goal being to promote local development and enhance the living conditions and surroundings of its residents. The council shall be created by decree of the President of the Republic, which shall state its name, territorial jurisdiction, and headquarters. The law has devolved about 59 powers to councils in the areas of economic development, health and social development, education, sports, and cultural development.

3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Socio-economic development is a composite word, constituting of both social and economic development. For a better understanding of the concept of socio-economic development, it is therefore necessary to start by understanding what development means. Development in pure economic sense is however understood to mean economic development.

In general, a state of improvement is referred to as development. However, its definition varies depending on the social, political, biological, scientific, technological, linguistic, and literary contexts. Development in the socioeconomic sense refers to the enhancement of people's quality of life via better employment, incomes, education, and skill development. It is the process of social and economic change driven by environmental and cultural variables (Kapur, 2018). The process through which a nation's real national and per capita income rises over an extended period of time is known as economic development.

According to the definition of economic development, the term "process" refers to modifications in the structure of the demand for goods and the supply of basic components. A long-term process entails a steady rise in actual output for a minimum of 25 years. According to Akpan et al. (2011), Schumpeter (1934), Nurske (1966), Kindleberger (2003) as cited by Jhingan (2011), economic development is defined as a sustained increase in output plus modifications to the institutional arrangements used to produce and distribute this output.

Economic development implies changes in the composition of output and the distribution of inputs by all sectors of the economy, going beyond growth (a simple rise in an economy's gross output) (Jhingan, 2011). According to Friedman in Jhingan (2011), development is an inventive process that results in the structural transformation of social systems, whereas growth can be defined as the expansion of the economic system in one or more dimensions.

According to Todaro and Smith (2011), development in traditional economics is the ability of a once-stable economy to maintain a yearly growth in GNP of roughly 5% to 7%. According to this perspective, the majority of development strategies prioritize industrialization over the primary economic issues that directly and broadly impact the populace, such as poverty, discrimination, unemployment, and income distribution. Prior to the 1970s, economic development was indicated by sharp rises in the total per capita GNP growth.

The 1950s and 1960s saw many developing nations meet their goals for economic growth, but most people's quality of life remained low. The rise in a nation's per capita GNP was therefore viewed by many economists as an inadequate and unsuitable indicator of development. Economic development has recently been seen as a means of lowering income inequality, unemployment, poverty, and discrimination. According to the World Bank's 1991 World Development Report (quoted in Jhingan (2011), Todaro and Smith (2011), and Akpan et al. (2011)), economic development is equivalent to improvements in the quality of life as measured by a number of indicators, including increased incomes, improved education, more opportunities for quality work, high standards of nutrition and health, increased individual freedom, and a richer cultural life.

Social development is a process that leads to the alteration of social institutions in a way that increases society's ability to achieve its goals. It suggests a qualitative shift in how society constructs itself and conducts its operations, including more of the population's progressive views and actions, the use of more sophisticated technology, or the adoption of more efficient procedures. This shows how closely environments, lifestyles, and technology are related with each other (Kapur, 2018). Social development thus has been a concept with multiple meanings, encompassing at least three connotations developed extensively in the literature pertaining to the social sphere. At its most basic level, social development simply suggests improvement in the conditions and quality of life of the population.

Therefore, the process of social and economic development within a society is known as socio-economic development. A number of indicators are used to measure it, including GDP, life expectancy, literacy, and employment levels. We can define social and economic development independently to gain a better understanding of socio-economic development (Kapur, 2018).

According to sociological literature, "economic and social development" is the term used to describe how a population's standard of living is raised by elements like wealth distribution, social differentiation, and industrial transformations (Filgueira and Filgueira, 2001). Greater levels of wealth, technological advancement, and public policies permit people to live better, to consume more, to feed themselves better, and to get a better life.

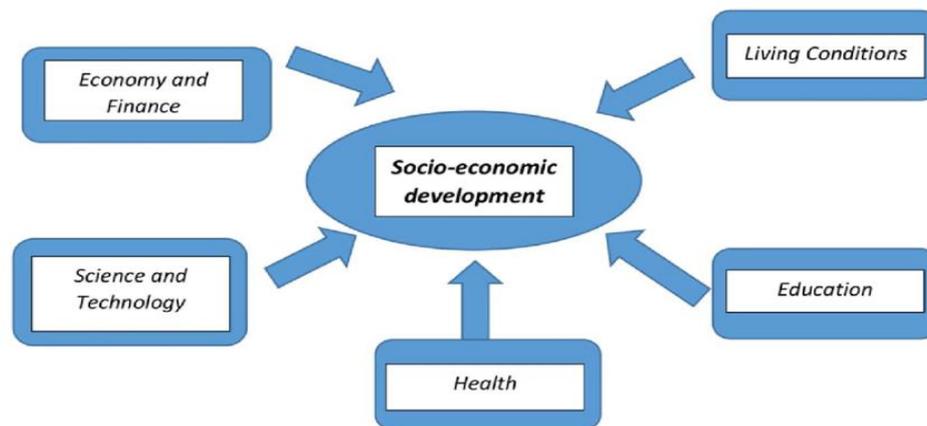


Figure 2.1. *Socio-economic development and its dimensions*

Source: *Author (2025)*

4. DECENTRALIZATION

The term “decentralization” has received varied interpretations from scholars, making it difficult to have a universally accepted definition. Sometimes, the same word is used to connote different things. Nevertheless, there is the general belief that when power and resources are transferred away from the national government, it is decentralization and not the reverse (Schneider, 2003).

Decentralization is generally understood to mean circumstances under which responsibilities and authority is transferred from the higher to the lower levels of the government. The intention is to create accountable relationships among service providers, citizens and subnational governments and between the local and central government. This ensures that both centralized and decentralized units are accountable (Ozmen, 2014).

Crook & Manor (1998), Agrawal & Ribot (1999) view decentralization as the central government transfer of power to lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy. According to this definition, decentralization takes two forms; administrative decentralization and political, or democratic decentralization. Also known as deconcentration, administrative decentralization is power transfer to lower-level central government authorities, or other local authorities who will be accountable upwardly to the central government (Ribot, 2002). Democratic decentralization is the transfer of authority to representative and downwardly accountable actors, such as elected local governments (Yuliani, 2004). Political decentralization involves transfer to local governments of the state administration, judicial autonomy and legislative authority (Ozmen, 2014). Ozmen (2014) adds a third dimension or form of decentralization; financial or fiscal decentralization, involving the transfer of constitutional and statutory powers of taxation, budget and expenditure rights to the local authorities or decentralized units. Schneider (2003) defines decentralization in terms of its dimensions of administrative, political and fiscal decentralization, emphasizing that the system can be considered decentralized only if the central government plays a minimal role in some or all of the dimensions. Hence, a smaller proportion of financial resources should remain with the central system and the sub-units or decentralized units should have greater administrative autonomy and more political functions.

The word decentralization varies according to authors and conceptions. In the present study decentralization is;

- *Section 5(1)* of the general code of Regional and Local Authorities define decentralization as the devolution by the State of special powers and appropriate resources to local authorities. Section 5(2) stipulates that Decentralization shall constitute the basic driving force for the promotion of development, democracy and good governance at the local level.
- *Joseph Owona*, defines decentralization as a method of organization of the administrative arm of government in which the state creates decentralized public entities and grants them jurisdiction and resources while preserving the supervisory and monitoring power. It is a means of developing democracy and specifically local democracy, closer to citizens. Decentralization comes with an institutionalization of administrative and financial control.
- *Benoit M* defines decentralization as the transfer of public prerogatives from higher to lower levels of governance. The author also says decentralization is a tool that fosters local development, governance and democracy.
- *Hussein* says administratively, decentralization is an important process that allows decongestion of the central government and reduces the workload to manageable proportions. The breaking-up of the workload promotes greater efficiency, coordination and effectiveness in public service delivery. Since decision-making powers are transferred from the Centre to local institutions decentralization provides an opportunity for local involvement in decision-making and harnessing local knowledge, resources and expertise in the development process.

Decentralization is a step to promoting democracy. It is the transfer of responsibilities, in the management of local affairs, from the central government to the local government. The purpose is to bring administration closer to the people, and this has proven to be the better way to improve the living standards of the population. Local communities stand out to be the principal pools of local development. They are political laboratories that are inevitable in the fight against poverty and the implantation of democracy. There are four different kinds of decentralization;

- I. Deconcentration: designates an administrative process of decentralization of resources whereby the local services remain under the control of the central government. Eriksen et al refer to this as administrative decentralization. The transfer of authority is from the central government to local “branches” of central government. In this context the participation of the local population is only a tool in the accomplishment of projects. Hence, it is a form of centralization in disguise.
- II. Devolution: This on the contrary is the delegation or surrender of powers of the central government to local authorities or institutions which are based on local political representation. It could also be referred to as political decentralization and this means that the institutions to which this power is devolved must be governed by locally elected persons.

Citing the deficiencies in centralized models of governance, Eriksen et al posit that decentralization was seen as an alternative model of governance and is therefore referred to as part of the solution and an answer to the need for more involvement and participation of local communities in development processes. It is also a remedy to the problems of power abuse, mismanagement and bureaucracy. Participation in decision-making and implementation and information of the local population seem to be some of the objectives devolution. Devolution permits at least in theory, more participation, transparency and accountability in the management of public affairs.

Decentralization stands out among the priorities of the African traditional agenda because it empowers local institutions thereby enhancing and modernizing democratic societies and states in Africa. By enforcing accountability, it lays the ground for monitoring and hence potential sanctions, both positive and negative. And accountability automatically becomes a responsibility in the normative sense of the word. But who these decentralized units have responsibility to is a challenge we need to find out?

Political decentralization or devolution is the more real form of decentralization and the whole idea of this work is based on devolution of power. Though some disadvantages are linked to this such as inequality between districts and local authorities, I will also challenge any argument that states that this does not happen in centralized systems because the inequality between regions, cities and rural areas today especially in African states was created during state led development. When the local people are given the formal power to decide how problems should be dealt with they get more involved. The

question that arouses my interest here is; Was democratic decentralization a government mechanism to strive to establish its strong administrative presence at the local level, or was it meant to serve as an instrument for local interests' vis-a-vis the central government?

Advocates of decentralization in developing countries argue that it brings government closer to the people and hence, be more responsive and more likely to develop policies and outputs which meet the needs of the ordinary people. Responsiveness has to do with the degree of empowerment and ownership felt by those affected by them, and this is determined by the effectiveness of institutional and public accountability mechanisms. However, the degree and type of decentralization existing in a system will determine this outcome, that is, the outcome is dependent on regime type.

Considering that the majority if not all of the people in developing countries are excluded from politics (because power is concentrated in the hands of a few), any scheme which offers greater political participation by ordinary citizens at the grass-roots seems likely to increase their voice and hence, the relevance and effectiveness of government's developmental output. Such is the case with decentralization. But an important question to be asked here is: was this a scheme meant to benefit the people or was this scheme perpetuated by state undercover interests?

5. STAKEHOLDER THEORY

A stakeholder approach to strategy emerged in the mid-1980. One focal point in this movement was the publication of **R. Edward Freeman's** *Strategic Management A Stakeholder Approach in 1984*. The impetus behind stakeholder management was to try and build a framework that was responsive to the concerns of managers who were being buffeted by unprecedented levels of environmental turbulence and change.

Traditional strategy frameworks were neither helping managers develop new strategic directions nor were they helping them understand how to create new opportunities in the midst of so much change. As Freeman observed current theories are inconsistent with both the quantity and kinds of change that are occurring in the business environment of the 1980's...A new conceptual framework is needed (Freeman, 2010) stakeholder approach was a response to this challenge.

An obvious play on the word "stockholder", the approach sought to broaden the concept of strategic management beyond its traditional economic roots, by defining stakeholders as "any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of an organization's objectives". The purpose of stakeholder management was to devise methods to manage the myriad groups and relationships that resulted in a strategic fashion. While the stakeholder framework had roots in a number of academic fields, its heart lay in the clinical studies of management practitioners that were carried out over ten years through the Busch Center, the Wharton Applied Research Center, and the Managerial and Behavioral Science Center, all at The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania by a host of researchers. Stakeholder theory is a critical framework for understanding community participation in public investment projects. It emphasizes that organizations (in this case, the Northwest Regional Assembly) must consider the interests of all stakeholders impacted by their decisions. In the context of your research topic, stakeholder theory provides a lens through which to examine the dynamics of community involvement in public investment projects.

6. METHODOLOGY

6.1. Research Design

This study utilized a mixed-methods research design. This approach allows for the integration of qualitative and quantitative data to provide a broader perspective on the subject matter. Aramo-Immonen (2013) holds that mixed methods provides researchers a rigorous method of responding to research questions. The mixed-methods approach ensures a comprehensive exploration of the topic in order to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter. By combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, this research design also enables the researcher to do triangulation.

6.2. Population of the Study

The population of this study constitute 277 municipal authorities currently operating in the North West Region of Cameroon.

7. METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Two methods were used to analyze the data collected. These are the descriptive and inferential statistics methods. For the descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, bar-charts and pie charts were used to describe the results registered from the field.

The inferential statistical tool used in analyzing the data is the ordinary least squares. This method is applied to predict the value of a variable based on the value of two or more other variables. Generally, the simple regression equation of Y on X₁, is given by;

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{1i} + u_i, \quad i = 1, \dots, n$$

where Y is the dependent variable, X₁, is the independent variable, u is the stochastic disturbance term, i is the *ith* observation and β_0, β_1 are coefficients to be estimated.

8. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

This section of the research targeted at addressing the perception of the respondents about the influence of municipal authorities on economic development in the context of decentralization. Fifteen (15) Likert scale type items with five response options ranging from not at all (NAA) to very high extend (VHE) were designed to capture the influence of community development associations on economic development in the context of decentralisation. The results of the data analysis are presented on Table 4.12 using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations.

Table 1.12. Municipal Authorities and Economic Socio-economic Development

SN		NAA	VLE	LE	HE	VHE	NAA/VL E/LE	HE/VHE	Mean	SD
1	Municipal authorities are aware of different stakeholders in the community to be involved in the decentralization process	27	55	61	92	42	143 (52%)	134 (48%)	3.24	1.214
2	Municipal authorities promote peace, and foster social cohesion	20	44	59	118	36	123 (44%)	154 (56%)	3.38	1.119
3	Municipal authorities are important actors of development in your community	9	78	68	91	31	155 (56%)	122 (44%)	3.21	1.072
4	They are familiar with the local community than any other government entities	17	50	92	87	31	159 (57%)	118 (43%)	3.23	1.066
5	They work in close contact with other local councils and deconcentrated (technical) services	11	85	91	78	12	187 (68%)	90 (32%)	2.98	0.961
6	Municipal authorities earmark, design and implement projects in your community from community members	5	77	77	98	20	159 (57%)	118 (43%)	3.18	0.981
7	Municipal authorities ensure that government projects are adapted to local realities and conditions	14	77	114	50	22	205 (74%)	72 (26%)	2.96	0.99
8	Municipal authorities support socio-economic projects carried out by the community	25	84	74	79	15	183 (66%)	94 (34%)	2.91	1.078
9	Municipal authorities are accountable to the local people who elected them	29	100	87	44	17	216 (78%)	61 (22%)	2.71	1.051
10	Government-sponsored projects in your community are executed by the local council	17	76	109	56	19	202 (73%)	75 (27%)	2.94	0.998
11	Municipal authorities work in collaboration with community development associations and traditional authorities	16	77	116	50	18	209 (75%)	68 (25%)	2.92	0.973

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12	Municipal authorities invite leaders of community association in council sessions to examine community projects	28	128	64	40	17	220 (79%)	57 (21%)	2.6	1.05
13	Municipal authorities provide access to council's information on projects to community members	36	86	93	48	14	215 (78%)	62 (22%)	2.7	1.059
14	Community leaders/members request to participate in council sessions	32	74	106	51	14	212 (77%)	65 (23%)	2.79	1.036
15	Traditional authorities participate in council sessions	27	113	85	38	14	225 (81%)	52 (19%)	2.64	1.004
	Average	21	80	86	68	21	188 (68%)	89 (32%)	2.96	1.03

Where NAA = Not At All, VLE =Very Low Extent, LE = Low Extent, HE = High Extent, VHE = Very High Extent, NAA/VLE/LE =Collapsed frequencies and percentages of Not At All, Very Low Extent and Low Extent, HE/VHE = Collapsed frequencies and percentages of High Extent and Very High Extent, SD = Standard Deviation

In evaluating the level of knowledge and awareness of municipal authorities in the context of their rights and responsibilities and whether they are aware of the different stakeholders in the community to be involved in the decentralization process, 143 (52%) of the respondents say either municipal authorities are not aware of the different stakeholders in the community to be involved in the decentralization process or they are aware to a low or very low extent. On the contrary 134 (48%) of the respondents were for the opinion that municipal authorities are aware of the different stakeholders in the community to be involved in the decentralization process and equality aware of their rights and responsibilities regarding decentralization. This investigation to this research item had a mean score of 3.24 and a standard deviation of 1.214.

In finding out if municipal authorities promote peace and foster social cohesion in the community, it was seen that 123 (44%) of the respondents were for the fact that municipal authorities do not promote peace nor foster social cohesion in their municipality. Even if they do, it is at a very low extent. Paradoxically, 154 (56%) of the respondents were for the fact that municipal authorities promote peace and social cohesion to a very high extent in their communities. This was with an overall mean of 3.38 and a standard deviation of 1.119. In investigating whether municipal authorities are important actors of development in the different localities in the North West Region of Cameroon, 155 (56%) of the respondents were for the fact that either municipal authorities are not important actors of development or they are to a low extent. This was opposed by 122 (44%) of the respondents whose opinion was that municipal authorities are important actors of development their municipalities. This survey had a mean score of 3.21 and a standard deviation of 1.072.

In evaluating the familiarity of the municipal authorities with their local communities, 159 (57%) of the respondents were for the fact that municipal authorities are less familiar with the local community than any other government entity. If they do, it is to a low or very low extent. On the contrary, 118 (43%) of the respondents thought that municipal authorities are familiar with the local community than any other government entities in their municipalities. This research item had an overall mean of 3.23 and a standard deviation of 1.066.

The next research item for this section was to investigate whether municipal authorities work in close contact with other local councils and decentralized services. Regarding this research item, 187 (68%) of the respondents were for the fact that municipal authorities do not work in close contact with other local councils and devolved services, or they do, but to a very low extent. On the other hand, 90 (32%) of the respondents were for the fact that municipal authorities work in close contact with other local councils and devolved services in their municipalities, with an overall mean of 2.98 and a standard deviation of 0.961.

In addition, investigating whether municipal authorities earmark, design and implement projects in different communities in the North West Region of Cameroon, 159 (57%) of the respondents were for the fact that municipal authorities do not earmark, design or implement projects in their communities

and even if they do, it is at a very low or low extent. On the contrary, 118 (43%) of the respondents thought that municipal authorities in their areas of jurisdiction earmark, design, and implement projects in their communities. This evaluation had a mean of 3.18 and a standard deviation of 0.981.

The next research item for this section was to investigate whether municipal authorities ensure that government sponsored projects are adapted to local realities and conditions. In this regard, 205 (74%) of the respondents were for the opinion that they ensure this to a very little extent or do not ensure that government sponsored projects are adapted to local the realities and conditions. On the contrary, 72 (26%) of the respondents were for the opinion that municipal authorities ensure that government projects are adapted to local realities and conditions to very high extent. This research questionnaire item had an overall mean of 2.96 and a standard deviation of 0.99.

The next item was aimed at investigating whether municipal authorities support socio-economic projects carried out by the community. In this context, 183 (66%) of the respondents were for the fact that municipal authorities support socio-economic projects carried out by their communities to a very low extent or do not do this. Paradoxically, the opinion of 94 (34%) respondents was that to a very high or high extent, municipal authorities support socio-economic projects carried out by the community. This investigation had a mean of 2.91 and a standard deviation of 1.078.

The next question was to investigate whether the municipal authorities are accountable to the local population who elected them. Concerning this research item, 216 (78%) of the respondents were for the fact that municipal authorities are not accountable to the local people who elected them and even if they are accountable, it is to a little or very little extent. On the contrary, 61 (22%) of the respondents were for the opinion that municipal authorities are accountable to the local people who elected them. This item had an overall mean of 2.71 and a standard deviation of 1.051.

The next question was to investigate whether government sponsored projects in different localities of the North West Region are executed by the local councils. The opinion of 202 (73%) respondents was that government sponsored projects in their localities are not executed by the local council whereas others had the opinion that local councils execute government projects to a little extent. This view was contradicted by 75 (27%) of the respondents who opined that government sponsored projects in their rural areas as executed by their local councils. This item had a mean of 2.98 and a standard deviation of 0.998. The next item was to evaluate the level of collaboration that exists between municipal authorities, community development associations and traditional authorities. Of the total respondents in this section, 68 (25%) of the respondents were for the fact that there is high or very high collaboration between municipal authorities, community development associations and the traditional authorities. On the contrary, 209 (75%) respondents were for the opinion that there is little or no collaboration between municipal authorities, CDAs and traditional authorities in their localities. This investigation had a mean of 2.92 and a standard deviation of 0.972.

The next item was to investigate whether municipal authorities invite leaders of community development associations in council sessions to examine community projects. Regarding this investigation, 57 (21%) respondents were for the opinion that municipal authorities invite leaders of community development associations in council sessions to examine community projects. The opinion of 220 (79%) respondents was that municipal authorities do not invite leaders of community development associations in council sessions to examine community projects and even if they do it is to a low of very low extend. This questionnaire item had a mean of 2.6 and a standard deviation of 1.05.

In addition, the next question was to investigate if municipal authorities provide access to council's information and projects to community members. This evaluation showed that 62 (22%) respondents were for the opinion that municipal authorities provide access to council's information on projects to community members. This was opposed by 215 (78%) respondents who were for the opinion that the extent to which municipal authorities provide access to council's information on projects to community members is very low or do not exist. This investigation had a mean of 2.7 and a standard deviation of 1.059.

The next question was aimed at investigating what are community leaders and members request to participate in cancer sessions and I invited to take part in these sessions. This investigation shows that 212 (77%) respondents were for the fact that community members and leaders do not request to

participate in council sessions. Even if others do, the level at which they make this request is very low. In contrast, 65 (23%) of the respondents said community leaders and members usually request to participate in councils' session and they do this at a high level.

The last item for this section was to evaluate whether traditional authorities participate in council's sessions. The data collected revealed that 225 (81%) of the respondents were for the opinion that traditional authorities do not participate in council sessions. Some participate but the level of participation is very low. This analogy was contradicted by 52 (19%) of the respondents whose view was that traditional authorities participate in council's sessions. The level of participation had an overall mean of 2.64 and a standard deviation of 1.004.

In summary, 21 (8%) respondents had the opinion that municipal authorities do not adhere to the questions raised in this section, 80 (28%) respondents pointed out that municipal authorities adhere to the various questions raised for this investigation to a very low extent. Similarly, 86 (31%) respondents had the view that municipal authorities adhere to a low extent to the various concerns in this section. Equally 68 (25%) respondents were for the fact that municipal authorities adhere to a high extent and 21 (8%) respondents for the opinion that municipal authorities adhere to a very high extent to the concerns raised in this section of the study. In summary, of 188 (68%) respondents were for the fact that municipal authorities either do not adhere at all, adhere to a very low extent or to a low extent to the various items raised to investigate this research variable. This was opposed by 89 (32%) of the respondent who had the view that municipal authorities conform and execute to a high or very high to the various question raised to investigate this research variable. This investigation of the various questions had an overall mean of 2.9 and a standard deviation of 1.043.

The municipal authorities equally carried out some projects in partnership with their community development associations and the traditional authorities. This was surveyed using a multi response question in which respondents choose more than one option as the case could be. It was observed that a total of 1,309 projects were carried out in partnership with these three stakeholders and spearheaded by the municipal authorities.

Table 2.13. *Projects carried out by the municipal Authorities in collaboration with the CDAs and traditional and municipal authorities*

Projects	Frequency	Percentage
Construction, equipping, managements and maintenance of markets, motor parks and slaughterhouses	217	16.6
Roads	159	12.1
Nursery and primary School rehabilitation/construction	154	11.8
Electricity supply/project to bring electricity to the community	122	9.3
Setting up, managing, and equipping educational facilities of nursery and primary level	81	6.2
Cultural projects (museum, community hall, libraries)	80	6.1
Organization of local trade fairs	77	5.9
Support to income-generating and job-creating micro-projects	74	5.7
Organization of sporting activities	66	5.0
Promotion of agriculture, pastoral, artisanal and fish farming	61	4.7
Support to cultural associations	58	4.4
Organization of festivals	57	4.4
Well, boreholes, pipe borne	47	3.6
Exploitation of mineral substances that cannot be given out as concession	27	2.1
Development and management of tourist sites	26	2.0
Setting up, equipping, managing and maintaining council health facilities or centres	3	0.2
Total	1309	100

Of these projects, the construction, equipping, managing and maintenance of markets motorbikes and slaughterhouses stood out at 217 (16.6%) as the outstanding project carried out by the state holders as championed by the municipal authorities. The maintenance of community roads was the second in this order what a partnership rate of 12.1%. The construction and rehabilitation of nursery and primary schools was done at 11.8%. Equally the supply of electricity to the communities as spearheaded by the

municipal authorities start at 9.3%. The setting up, managing and equipping off educational facilities of the nursery and primary schools was executed at a partnership rate of 6.2%. Cultural projects such as museums, community halls and libraries told at 6.1%. Similarly, the municipal authorities partook in the organization of look at trade fairs at 5.9%. Also, support to income generating activities and micro projects in order to create jobs was done at 5.7%. In like manner, municipal authorities supported sporting activities at 5.0% and the promotion of agriculture, pastoral, artisanal and fish farming at 4.7%. Municipal authorities were also involved in supporting cultural activities in their communities at 4.4%. The equally organized festivals which stood at 4.4%. Additionally, municipal authorities partner in the digging of wells, boreholes and pipe borne water at 3.6%. The exploitation of mineral substances that cannot be given at as concession was done at 2.1% and the development and management of touristic sites at 2%. Lastly, the setting up, equipping and maintenance of community health facilities was done at 0.2%.

Table 4.14. shows how the local council is a representative of the local population in the different communities.

Table 3.14. How is the municipal authorities a representative of the local people in your area?

	Frequency	Percent
Largely influenced by the state (state policies)	85	30.7
The council is represented by a popular choice of the people	45	16.2
Work according to the needs and desires of the people	147	53.1
Total	277	100.0

Of the 277 responses regarding this question, 85 30.7% of the respondents say the municipal authorities are largely influence by state policies. Equally, 45 16.2% of the respondents say the municipal authorities is a represented by a popular choice of the people. In addition, 147 53.1% of the respondents say the council work in accordance to the needs and desires of the people.

9. PERCEPTION OF RESPONDENTS ON SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

This section of the research was intended to examine the perception of the respondents on socio-economic development in the context of decentralization in the North West Region of Cameroon. Twelve (12) Likert scale type items with five response options ranging from not at all (NAA) to very high extend (VHE) were designed to capture the influence of community development associations on economic development in the context of decentralisation. The results of the data analysis are presented on Table 4.18 using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations.

Table 4.18. Economic Development in the context of decentralization

SN		NAA	VLE	LE	HE	VHE	NAA/VLE/LE	HE/VHE	Mean	SD
1	The community is aware of their rights and responsibilities within the context of decentralization	71	386	139	108	66	596 (77%)	174 (23%)	2.63	1.102
2	Community participates in council activities and project execution	73	270	221	171	35	564 (73%)	206 (27%)	2.77	1.041
3	There has been an improvement in access to education, and quality health services	76	270	201	186	37	547 (71%)	223 (29%)	2.79	1.066
4	Generally, my community is witnessing increasingly levels of employment	100	302	250	110	8	652 (85%)	118 (15%)	2.58	2.105
5	There is increased participation of people in all aspects of the community life	86	274	276	109	25	636 (83%)	134 (17%)	2.63	0.968
6	There is a high sense of solidarity amongst my community members	102	228	202	195	43	532 (69%)	238 (31%)	2.8	1.125
7	Equal opportunities are offered to members of my community	134	305	238	72	21	677 (88%)	93 (12%)	2.4	0.97
8	Residents of my community have access to quality drinkable water	58	288	181	221	22	527 (68%)	243 (32%)	2.82	1.022

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9	There is adequate access to road network, markets and infrastructural development in my community	94	245	323	98	10	662 (86%)	108 (14%)	2.5 9	0.905
10	Community members say local public investment reflect their needs	109	351	211	55	44	671 (87%)	99 (13%)	2.4 5	1.009
11	Community members say there is an increased level of execution of the local public investment budget	146	327	199	64	34	672 (87%)	98 (13%)	2.3 7	1.022
12	Community members say they participate in mobilizing resources for councils development projects	115	331	194	121	9	640 (83%)	130 (17%)	2.4 5	0.965
	Average	97	298	220	126	30	615 (80%)	155 (20%)	2.6 1	1.108

Where **NAA** = Not At All, **VLE** = Very Low Extent, **LE** = Low Extent, **HE** = High Extent, **VHE** = Very High Extent, **NAA/VLE/LE** = Collapsed frequencies and percentages of Not At All, Very Low Extent and Low Extent, **HE/VHE** = Collapsed frequencies and percentages of High Extent and Very High Extent, **SD** = Standard Deviation

10. REGRESSION RESULTS BASED ON ORDINARY LEAST SQUARES

Table 5.23. Ordinary Least Squares results with municipal authority as independent variable

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	.540	.134		4.020	.000
	Municipal Authorities	.723	.044		16.379	.000
	Adjusted R-squared	.492				
	F-statistic Prob (F-statistic)	268.2 0.000				

Dependent variable: socioeconomic development

*** $p < .01$

From Table 4.23, the coefficient of municipal authorities is positive, which is consistent with the a priori expectation. This implies increased activities of local and municipal authorities will result to an increase in socioeconomic development of the North West region and vice versa. The quantitative findings reveal that socioeconomic development will increase by 0.723 units when municipal authorities carry out an additional local economic development activity. This result is highly significant at 1% level, considering the p-value of 0.01 at 1% significance level. Based on this, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that municipal authority has a significant effect on the socioeconomic development of the North West region of Cameroon and should therefore be considered for policy recommendation.

The value of adjusted R-squared is 0.49, implying that about 49% of the variations in the socioeconomic development of the region is explained by the presence and activities carried out by community development associations. The value of the F statistic is 162 and its p-value is 0.000, meaning that the overall regression result is significant at 1% level and can be trusted for policy recommendation.

11. CONCLUSION

Municipal authorities have carried out several projects in common including the rehabilitation of nursery and primary schools, roads maintenance, supporting sporting activities amongst others. It was observed that the level of collaboration has been poor. Municipal authorities have earmarked many of the projects but the involvement and partnership with traditional authorities and community development associations have been very poor. Equally these stakeholders have not involved most of the community members in carrying out most developmental projects. Traditional authorities on the other hand have been the least of the three stakeholders to earmark projects. Their participation in community development have been minimal and they don't involve community members in the few projects they execute.

In a similar manner, municipal authorities been a representative of the local population and work according to the popular choice of the people. Despite this, these stakeholders to some extent have been

influenced by state policies and they turn to work based on orders from the state neglecting the people they are called to represent. Some of the authorities who have been displaced and no longer live in their areas of jurisdiction have little or no information about the current state of affairs in their localities and sometimes work on false assumptions.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

- I.** Mayors should uphold provisions of the code to invite village development presidents to attend their council sessions so they can be abreast with council projects conception, follow-up and execution.
- II.** Mayors should allocate resources for communication especially using community radios to inform village development presidents on the provisions of citizens to participate in council activities.
- III.** Education and sensitization of village development associations or the opportunities, rights and responsibilities within the context of decentralization.
- IV.** Municipal authorities should promote collaboration between the council, traditional authorities and community development associations.
- V.** The government put measures to ensure the return of peace and normalcy within different localities and divisions in the North West Region of Cameroon.
- VI.** The government should provide training to mayors, traditional authorities and leaders of community development associations within the context of decentralization as these stakeholders serve as key pioneers and custodian of decentralization.
- VII.** Surveys and inspections should be done to ensure that projects and decentralization modalities are implemented at local levels and do not merely end on paper but be actualized.

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