

Local Government Administration and Grassroots Development in Some Selected Councils in Fako Division, Cameroon

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Abstract:- This paper examines Local Government Administration in Fako Division, with a discourse on grassroots development. Specifically, it reported on how effective and efficient local government administration led to grassroots development whereas the contrary leads to community stagnation. Local Government Administration in Fako Division is currently highly ineffective and inefficient due to concentration of power at the center, mismanagement of funds and limited resources. This study provides information on Local Government Administration in Cameroon in general and Fako Division in particular. The Integrated Political Economy Framework developed by Denis A. Rondinelli, James, S. McCullough and Ronald in 1989 was adopted to support this work. The framework uses the Public choice theory in conjunction with the Public Policy Approach. The researcher adopted the mixed method of data collection using the case study design. Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources included; questionnaires, interview guide, and observation, while the secondary sources included journals, articles, books, magazines and internet sources. Findings revealed that, most communities who are the main beneficiaries of grassroots developments provided by councils do not benefit from the decentralization process. This is because of concentration of power at the center, corruption, and lack of autonomy and resources. Based on the findings, it was recommended that, the 2004 and 2019 law/code on the orientation of decentralization in Cameroon be reviewed to give councils more autonomy. The study provides data that can be used by the citizens to judge the performance of their councils. The study will equally enable the citizens understand the major challenges that their municipalities encounter in the provision of essential services regarding development.

Keywords:- Local Government, Administration, Grassroots, Development, Grassroots Development, Local Government Administration, Council.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is generally acknowledged that no central government can effectively conduct administration from the centre through the civil servants based at the headquarters. This has naturally necessitated the need for some forms of decentralization to enable the central government reach out

to the people at the local level (Finken, 1996). This underscores the rationale for the creation of local governments to provide services aimed at meeting the peculiar needs of people at the most basic level of society (Wraith, 1964). In other words, the major reason for the existence of local government in Cameroon and elsewhere in the world is to facilitate grassroots development and this has attracted serious attention both nationally and internationally. The objectives of grassroots development in Cameroon include the following: Reducing the level of rural poverty and rural unemployment; Integration of the grassroots communities into the national socio-economic and political development through effective participation in their own affairs; Improve incomes of the rural people whose major economic activity is agriculture and non-farm activities such as craft, petty trading, among others; and Improve the quality of life of the people through the provision of basic necessities such as food, potable water, electricity supply, health-care services, schools,

Local Governments have and will continue to be one of the bold step to development in different parts of the world and their importance and impact on daily activities of citizens cannot be over emphasized. Local government is the order of the Government closest to the people (Okolo and Onuoha; 2017). Local Government Administration is used as a form of devolution of powers of the state. It is the government at the grassroots level that is designed to serve as instrument of rural transformation and development to the society in general.

Local Government as a means for grassroots and National development has persisted in spite of modern achievements in the fields of politics, economics, technology, communication etc. (John, 2001). The existence of Local government has always been defended on the basis that it is a current aspect of the process of democratization and intensification of mass participation in the decision-making process. No political system is considered complete and democratic if it does not have a system of local government. The increasing demand for local government in every part of the world is being motivated by the desire of the rural populace to contribute directly in the affairs of their communities (Linn, 1992).

Over the years, the importance of local dimension to development has been overstretched and local territorial authorities in Africa are emerging as key actors of

development just like their Western and Asian counterparts (Linn, 1992). In fact, the emphasis on local government administration worldwide has resulted in almost every country having some form of sub-national government structure either to maintain control or to deliver public services across the country, or both (Heymans, 2006). These sub-national structures range from elected state, provincial, municipal or local governments with high degrees of autonomy, to local agents of the central state with minimum discretion (Devas 2008). The World Bank Report (1994) indicates that there are about 150 constitutionally decentralized countries in the world with all countries in Africa having some sort of shared responsibility in governance among centralized and decentralized units.

With the current global trend of streamlining the role of the state, the governments of most developing countries have devolved power to grassroots institutions with a view to enhance development. But in reality, such devolutions have in many cases been quite inefficient to achieve this goal. The need to empower the local people responds to the growing recognition that local people in developing countries lack control over resources and opportunity to participate in decision making processes. Unless rural people are empowered to participate in the development process, development efforts will only have partial positive effects if at all they have any positive effect (Eyong, 2007: 9).

Effective local government administration at the grass root level leads to development and growth of the country, state or community (Bird, 1995), but in the case of Fako Division; the practices are currently highly ineffective and inefficient and the performance of local government administration has been on a decline as service delivery to communities has become a challenge due to mismanagement, wide spread corruption, lack of social amenities in local government area and the concentration of power at the center. In almost every rural community in Fako Division, there is the lack of potable water, healthcare delivery facilities, accessible roads and good schools among others and also infant mortality rate and maternal deaths are on rampage (Ewumbue-Monono, 2007).

Over the years, efforts have been made to reform the local government system and to increase the participation of the people. Despite these reforms, there are still problems with the local government system like insufficient funding, lack of adequate human, material and financial resources in terms of quality and quantity to carry out its own activities, corruption and mismanagement of funds (Eyong, 2007).

Majority of the population in Fako Division live in the rural communities which have failed to witness any significant development, despite the strategic position the local government occupy in the scheme of affairs. Poverty is endemic and a stark reality that people die from unpreventable ailment. Farming which is the main occupation of rural dwellers is on a decline and the quality of primary education has fallen, healthcare delivery and access roads are in deplorable conditions (Eyong, 2007).

Furthermore, the Local Government in Fako Division lacks autonomy as a result of interferences by the central government. They lack freedom to plan, execute and evaluate their own projects without interference from the central government (Pilot study by researcher).

Local Government

The conceptualization of the term "local government" has been problematic; this is because there is no unanimous acceptance definition of local government among the scholars of local government and public administration. (Kyenge 2013) posits that the concept of local government has been given various definitions by various scholars but no matter how differently the concept is defined, it focuses on the transfer of political areas by involving the inhabitants in the provision of basic needs in their respective communities. At this juncture, it is imperative to note the definitions of some of these scholars in the subject matter.

Specifically, local government is a unit of government below the central, regional or state levels established by law to exercise political authority through a representative council within a defined geographical area (Chukwuemeka et al, 2017). Local government constitutes the most critical level of government at which the momentum to sustain national development can be created (Ndefru, 2020: 295). Appadorai (1975) define local government as government by popularly elected bodies' charges with administration and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or place. The International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences (1976), defines Local Government as "A political sub-division of national or regional government which performs functions which nearly in all cases receive its legal power from the national or regional government but possess some degree of discretion on the making of decisions and which normally has some taxing powers. As noted in the works of Adeyemi (2012)., Achimugu, Stephen & Agbom (2013), Chukwuemeka et al., (2017:29), the Nigeria 1976 Guideline for Local Government Reform defines local government as: Government at the local level established by law to exercise specific powers within defined area and to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas, and to ensure that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized. The United Nations Office for Public Administration quoted in Ola and Tonwe (2009). Ubani (2010), Achimugu, Stephen & Agboni (2013) defines local government as thus: A political subdivision of a nation or (in a federal system) state, which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such as entity is elected or otherwise locally selected.

In addition local government is seen as a system of government whereby the state allows the establishment of local units of government with powers and authority to make local decisions on matters that affect the local communities and to mobilize local resources for

implementation or execution of the decisions made (Eboh & Diejomaoh, 2010).

The aforementioned definitions by various scholars above clearly show that local government is a multi-dimensional concept. However, the main features of these definitions of local government are noted in the works of Maddick (1963), Mawhood (1983), Tumini (2011), Eziani (2012) and Chukwuemeka et al.(2017), Otinche (2014). These features include the facts that a local government:

- Operates within a defined geographical area
- Has certain population living within the confines of a defined territory
- Operates at the local or grassroots level.
- Has a range of constitutionally delineated function to perform
- Has a relative autonomy or independence.
- It is a legal entity of its own and can sue and be sued.
- Has council composed of elected representatives.
- It is the lower level government in a unitary political system and lowest level government in a federal three-level government.

Thus, local government in Cameroon context is established as the third tier of government, protected by the constitution, which comprise of democratically elected representative whose purpose is to provide basic services to the people at the grassroots (Adeyemi, 2013). In the system of government like Cameroon, local government is usually the fifth tier of government. In a unitary system, like Britain, it usually exists as the second order government to the national level. However, what the local governments have in common, either in federal or unitary system of government is responsible for the most immediate needs of their citizens without any other body between them and individual. In other words, it is the order of government closest to the people (Chukwuemeka et al., 2017).

Service Delivery

Service delivery refers to the provision of social or public goods that will promote socioeconomic wellbeing of the citizens. Public services offered by government are numerous and may include the provision of public utilities, economic development projects, enforcement of law and so on. The delivery of public goods and services at the grassroots level is aimed at moving the standard of living of the populace to the next level (Angahar, 2013).

Consequently, the efficient and effective provisions of basic amenities and social infrastructures for the people at the grass root are key factors to the existence of any government (Bolatito & Ibrahim, 2014). In sequel to the above, the Cameroon constitution assigns service delivery responsibilities to the three tiers of government with states and local government playing the most significant role in the delivery of basic services. Some of the service's expected from the local government authority include education, health, housing, water, rural electricity, waste disposal services, roads, transport, and so on. Thus local government councils are required to serve the public interest in areas of constructing roads, public markets, healthcare centers,

drainages, transportation, motor parks, building primary schools, among others (Bolatito & Ibrahim, 2014). In support of this position, Agba, Akwara, Idu (2013) contends that as agents of rural development, local government are to use funds made available to them by both federal and state governments and their internally generated revenue to improve the lives of the people within their areas of operations through initiating and attracting developmental projects to the local government such as provision of access roads, water, and rural electricity. Apart from being a viable political and administrative organ for the transformation of rural communities, local government also act as the training ground for the breeding of the grassroots democracy fundamental in national development (Adeyemo, 1995; Lawal and Oladunjoye, 2010).

Sadly, Cameroon local governments have not lived up to expectations in terms of efficient service delivery to the grassroots. This is evident in the poor environmental state, deteriorating public school buildings, poor market facilities and limited health care centers. The provision of basic social services such as education and health, as well as maintenance of roads and public utilities within the jurisdictions of local government is now both a myth and mirage (Agba, 2006).

The above observations apparently show that local government has not really facilitated rapid development at the grassroots, which is the essence of their creations. (Amaechi, 2012). As a result of abysmal failure of local government in service delivery, the citizens at the local level are beginning to lose trust in the existence or otherwise of local government councils in Cameroon. At this juncture, it is pertinent to ask questions; what could be the factor or factors responsible for the failure of local government in efficient and effective social service delivery at the grassroots?

Factors Affecting Service Delivery at the Local Government

An in-depth examination of local government performance in Cameroon reveals that local governments have failed in effective service delivery due to a number of factors. Some of these factors underlying the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of local government in their service delivery responsibilities were identified in a study conducted by Bello-Imam and Roberts (BelloImam and Roberts, 2001). These factors include: (a) revenue inadequacy (b) the erosion of local functions particularly in the revenue yielding areas by state governments and their agencies (c) politico-administrative problems such as inadequacy of skilled and technical manpower. Lackadaisical attitude of existing local government staff, official corruption, variable structures/sizes of local government among others, and (d) lack of integration of the relevant communities in the execution of local services. Also, some scholars in the field of public administration and local government studies identified the following factors affecting service delivery at local government administration in Cameroon as; lack of funds financial constraints.

Corruption, undue political interference/ lack of autonomy, lack of qualified professional staff unskilled workers, leadership problem, poor work attitude, among others (Eboh & Diejomaoh, 2010; Adeyemi, 2013; Agba, Akwara, & Idu, 2013; Ibok, 2014; Bolatito & Abraham, 2014; Chukwuemeka et al., 2017). Some of these factors will be discussed below.

Financial constraints: For local government to effectively provide essential services at the grassroots, enabling environment most especially funds must be available to carry out its assigned responsibilities. In Cameroon, aside from other common problems, non-provision of enough funds to local government has hindered effective performance by the local council (Enow, 2014).

Aside from the fact that statutory allocations and grants from the federal and state governments to councils are inadequate, the problem is exacerbated by the low revenue generation capacity of the Council. Associated with this problem is also exacerbated by frequent sundry deductions by the state governments from their monthly allocations. Worst still is failure of most state governments to fulfil their monthly statutory obligations to local government by outright refusal to remit 10% internally generated revenue accrued to the state monthly. In some situations, it has become so bad that many local councils cannot pay staff salaries not to talk about basic need provisions". These financial constraints account for the inadequacy of fund in the local government administration in Cameroon and they inhibit the efforts of local council to provide better, efficient and effective social services to the grassroots.

Local Government and Local Governance:

Attempts to provide a universal definition of the concept of Local Government have largely been unsuccessful. This is because scholars have divergent conceptualization of the term. While some like Kaul (1987), Kuditsini (2008) and Chiweza (2010) use local government interchangeably with decentralization, others such as the Turala and Oulasvirta (2009) put a fine line between the two concepts, arguing that one (local government) is a product of the other (decentralization). This lack of conceptual consensus on local government is observed not only among scholars but also among national and regional institutions. However the contention is viewed largely among scholars. Olowu (1988) for instance remarks that there are two approaches to the definition of local government. One approach, which is usually in comparative studies, is to regard all such national structures below the central government as local government. A second approach is more circumspect in that local governments are identified by certain defining characteristics. These characteristics usually focus on the following five attributes: legal personality, specified powers to perform a range of functions, substantial budgetary and staffing autonomy subject to limited central control, effective citizen participation and localness. Olowu (1988) consider these as essential to distinguish local government from all other forms of local institutions and also ensures its organizational effectiveness.

On the other hand, the difficulties in measuring effective citizen participation as posited by Olowu (1988) as an essential ingredient of local government came under severe criticisms. In the process of criticizing the above definition, Kjellberg (1988) distinguishes between two different types of models of local government, namely the autonomous and integrational models. The autonomous model reflects the traditional liberal view of local government, whereby central and local governments are viewed as two clearly separated spheres of government. Local government should have its own functions and activities. The role of central government (or provincial) is confined to an indirect monitoring function. The integrational model sees greater functional interdependence between the various tiers of government. Local government is part of a larger institutional order and may be required to implement national policies.

Montin (2000) argues that it will be inappropriate to draw a line between autonomy and integration in trying to conceptualize local government. The author suggests that in reality local governments are a combination of both the autonomous and integration models. He equally posits that the development of the welfare state caused local governments' autonomy to be subordinated to the interests of the welfare state and that local government is seen as an instrument for implementing national policies.

Meanwhile Robson (1937) adopts a legal dimension in defining local government. He observed that in general, local government may be said to involve the conception of a territorial, non-sovereign community possessing the legal right and the necessary organization to regulate its own affairs. This, in turn, presupposes the existence of a local authority with power to act independent of external control as well as the participation of the local community in the administration of its own affairs.

Gomme (1987) on his part completely ignores Kjellberg (1988) two dimensional analysis and contends that local government cannot be an autonomous unit of government. He defines local government as that part of the whole government of a nation or state which is administered by authorities subordinate to the state authority, but elected independently of control by the state.

Meanwhile, other scholars like Marshall's (1965) and Cameron (2010) focus on the characteristics of local government as essential elements for defining the term. Marshall (1965) identifies three distinct characteristics; "operation in a restricted geographical area within a nation or state; local election or selection; and the enjoyment of a measure of autonomy". On his part, Cameron (2010) argues that a classical definition of a decentralized local government would mean that local authorities are constitutionally separate from central government and are responsible for a significant range of services, they have their own treasury, separate budget and accounts and their own taxes to produce a significant part of their revenue, they have their own personnel with the right to hire and fire staff, have the right to make local policies through elected

councilors, consisting predominantly of local representatives, and where central government play only indirect advisory, supervisory and inspectorate role.

In his study of local governments in Western Europe, John (2001) contrast local government from local governance based on the evolution of local government in Europe. According to the author, and corroborated by Stoker (2002), there has been a shift in Europe from local government to local governance.

This study aims at critically assessing Local Government Administration and grass-roots development in Fako Division.

- To identify the current level of Local Government Administration with regards to service provision for grassroots development in Fako Division.
- To examine the methods used in the provision of essential services by councils in Fako division
- To investigate the challenges to effective service provision by councils in Fako Division.

II. METHODS

This research adopted the mixed method of data collection which consisted of both the qualitative and quantitative data collection, using the descriptive design. The quantitative method was used mainly to measure level of Local Government Administration as an instrument of grassroots development in Fako Division, through statistical records and questionnaires. Also the qualitative method was used to collect and analyze data.

Data for this study was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source was collected from questionnaires, interviews and observations. The secondary source was obtained from books, related academic journals, articles, internet sources, official documents and statistical information and particularly useful was the rich material on local government administration kept and documented at the councils. This study is largely descriptive and quantitative thus percentages, ratios and proportions, constitute its major analytical tools.

Population

A sample of 374 participants was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. At the first stage, simple random sampling technique was used to select four towns in each council area. Since the population in these areas is largely heterogeneous, stratified sampling was then used at the second stage to break down the population into homogeneous sub-population of Mayors, traders, councilors, farmers, quarter heads, students and workers. The number of respondents for each selected community was determined on proportional. For each community, purposive sampling was then used to select respondents. Using the formula $n(P_1/N)$ where:

n: the total sample

P_1 : the total population of each community

N: the total population of the Municipality

The sample population for each community was calculated as shown in the table below

Table1: Sample Population per Community

Council	Community	No. Sample
Tiko	Misselele	16
	Ebonji	14
	Tiko Town	35
	Mutengene	18
Buea	Great Soppo	22
	Maumu	9
	Bokwaongo	14
	Molyko	24
	Bokova	16
Limbe	Bonadikombo	30
	Mbende	20
	Mokindi	20
	Mokundange	13
Idenau	Njonji	21
	Bibunde	20
	Etome	22
	Bakingili	20
Total Sample		334

Source: Generated by the researcher 2020

The table above shows the total population that were issued questionnaires in the respective villages which were selected randomly and the formular above used to work out the total number of respondents per municipality and community.

Table 2: Sample of mayors, deputy mayors and councilors

Place	No of Mayors	Deputy Mayors	Councilors
Buea	1	2	10
Tiko	1	2	10
Limbe	1	1	10
Idenau	1	1	10
TOTAL	4	6	40

Source: Generated by the researcher 2020

Procedure for Data Collection

A total of 334 questionnaires were administered on-site to the sample population in each of the selected study areas. This was equally followed by an in-depth interview with 10, mayors, deputy mayors, and chief of services in the different councils covered by the study. The interviews were intended to elicit information about the methods of service delivery at grassroots level, and the challenges councils encounter in delivering basic services to communities. Administering the interviews and questionnaires were complemented by detail study of documents such as council annual budgets and administrative accounts (to see the percentage of budget reserved for provision of essential service at grassroots), council annual reports (to see how much services were provided at grassroots), communal development plans (to see the needs of each council area) and other essential documents. Also, the researcher worked in collaboration

with village heads to fill the observation checklist in each community.

III. RESULTS

The findings are discussed in accordance with the research questions by using the hypotheses results that guided study. In discussing the findings of the study, the hypothesis results were first presented. Thereafter, the hypothesis findings are supported with descriptive findings. In addition to this, the findings are also compared to that of other researchers and finally, backed by theories and concepts reviewed in the chapter two.

To investigate the first research question, based on the provision of services by the council authorities since 2004 to 2021, findings showed that (45.6%) of the respondents accepted that council authorities since 2004 have been providing essential services (both social and economic ones) to foster development while (43.2%) of them disagreed which is significantly higher. In other words, this implies that since 2004, the council authorities in the Fako Division have not been able to satisfactorily provide essential public services/goods to communities at grassroots level to foster development.

To be more specific, when the provision of essential services to foster development in Fako by the various municipalities since 2004 was compared by the municipalities, findings showed that the Limbe City council is far better in the provision of essential services to communities at the grassroots level than Buea and Tiko while Idenau was the worst as a majority of the inhabitants denied that the Idenau council authorities since 2004 to 2021 have not been providing essential services to the population to foster development.

For example, the population needs good roads, electricity, water, etc. to carry on with their daily activities. As such, when these services are not adequately provided by local government, the population finds it difficult to carry on some essential activities that aimed at empowering them. In support of this, Bolatito and Ibrahim (2014:82) said that the efficient and effective provisions of basic amenities and social infrastructures for the people at the grass root are key factors to the existence of any government.

Local government councils are required to serve the public interest in areas of constructing roads, public markets, healthcare centers, drainages, transportation, motor parks, building primary schools, among others (Bolatito & Ibrahim, 2014:84).

Thus, the local government administration has failed to satisfy the needs of the community at local level. In support of this, Benneh (1977:18) had opined that local governments have the ability to drive local development and, the proponents of decentralization and local government have always based their argument on the fact local government active involvement in the development of grassroots

communities will result in the resolution of rural problems and hence ensure equitable economic growth in the country.

However, despite this, Cameroon local governments have not lived up to expectations in terms of efficient and service delivery to the grassroots from 2004 to 2021. This evidence in the findings of the study as a significant proportion of the inhabitants most especially from Buea, Tiko and the worst Idenau municipalities attest that their council authorities still have much to offer to the grassroots communities.

With such findings, it is evidence that local government administration since 2004 to 2021 in Fako Division has not really facilitated rapid development at the grassroots, which is the essence of their creations. As a result of the abysmal failure of local government in service delivery, the citizens at the local level are beginning to lose trust in the existence or otherwise of local government councils in Cameroon.

According to the public choice theory, it considers local government administration to acts to maximize the welfare of its residents. The theory holds that just as self-interest motivates people's private choices; it also affects their communal decisions as it relies heavily on deductive hypotheses about the nature of goods and services. Consequently, adopting an approach that integrates both the public choice and public policy perspectives gives credence to the broad nature of issues affecting local government service provision.

Therefore, while the findings of our study has shown that a significant proportion of the inhabitants are not satisfied so far with the services provided by the local government to foster the development of grassroots communities, at this juncture, it is pertinent to ask questions; what could be the factor or factors responsible for the failure of local government in efficient and effective social service delivery at the grassroots? The answers to this question will be explored in the next section.

In exploring the second research question, the researcher was interested in the institutional arrangements for service provision in Fako division. A structured interview guide was designed and administered to 12 senior officials of the four councils studied. The informants were asked to assign scores to denote the quantity of services provided directly by the council, government agencies, through private companies or NGOs. The Results indicated that 42.3% of essential service provision in Fako division is provided directly by councils, 31.8% by government, 17.9% through private companies and 7.9% through NGOs. The study observed that 44.4% of council authorities interviewed are against the view that using private companies to provide services leads to more efficiency and effectiveness.

After investigation the third research question, the study found that the major challenges to effective service delivery by councils in Fako Division are both internal (micro) and external (macro). The micro problems identified

as major obstacles to service provision by councils are categorized as managerial deficiencies and includes issues such as limited revenue generation capacity, low investment expenditure, limited expenditure on essential service provision, poor planning, budgeting and control, unqualified and less committed staff. Meanwhile the macro problems identified as having negative impact of service provision by councils consist of inadequate regulatory framework, slow implementation of some provisions of the law, limited autonomy of councils, increase demand for services, and the overwhelming influence of politics.

IV. CONCLUSION

It has been observed by some scholars that decentralization or local governments as a whole has the potential of improving livelihood at the base and facilitate local development better than the central government. The argument is that local governments are closer to the people and can easily identify community needs and address them using participatory and democratic approaches. The findings of this paper showed that services provided by the council authorities is far below the expectation of a good number of the inhabitants,

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