

Local Government and The Politics of Decentralization In Cameroon: The Case of Elak-Oku Municipality, 2007-2017

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Abstract: Government authorities owe their populations the responsibility to plan, facilitate and sustain the provision of communal services. This is usually achieved through several methods, one of which is decentralization. The concept of decentralization consists in breaking down heavy government machinery into smaller administrative units down at local levels. In Africa, some states are in the process of decentralizing the central government decision-making process to offer more acceptable local services. Though some states are engaged in the decentralisation process, their programs are far from being effective. The design of the decentralization process in Cameroon, an ethnically diverse country, constitutes a major challenge for state power and government. In response to these demands and threats, and in conjunction with reforms to improve democratic governance and service delivery, Cameroon's state administration has, in the last decade, resorted to decentralization as a technique for promoting national unity. In Cameroon, the reorientation of the Local Governments (LGs) system towards decentralization has been a major preoccupation since the advent of democracy. This paper adopts a historical approach to provide an account of why and how the Elak-Oku Council Area via the system of Local Governments has considerably achieved in terms of economic and social development during recent times despite the difficulties faced in the decentralization process in Cameroon. This work equally highlights the historical background, difficulties faced and the way forward for Local Governments to meet the Council's objectives.

Keywords: Local Government, Decentralization, Council Area, Elak-Oku Municipality.

I. INTRODUCTION

Institutional reform in African countries in recent years has been marked by trials of various forms of decentralisation. In general, hitherto centralized governments have initiated a reform agenda with the aim of transferring some powers, tasks and resources to regional governments and local authorities. In line with the current global trend of streamlining the role of the state, the governments of most developing countries have devolved powers to grassroot institutions with a view to enhance development. Cameroon is one of these countries. Decentralisation is a process whereby the government seeks to get feedback from local communities and provide assistance to those communities in terms of initiating and prioritising projects for the effectiveness of government interventions and

outcomes.¹ It is a democratic, political as well as a service delivery tool of the central government. Decentralisation is aimed at devolving government decision making machinery to local authorities. It is an attempt by the government to institute the bottom-up approach in decision making, prescribed by international development actors, to ensure that obsolete or expert undesired services are not imposed on the local populations. However, the situation in Cameroon is not different from the above explanation.

Before the advent of multiparty politics in the 1990s, Cameroon experienced different forms of decentralisation. Whatever the case, it was noticed that during the past periods, there was a creeping centralization in favour of the central government, which exerts strong control over decentralized local units. Decentralisation in its current form is based largely on the Constitution embodied in Law No. 96/06 of 18th January 1996. The decentralization law of 22nd July, 2004 transfers powers to local councils which have the responsibility to initiate development in their council. Following the 2004 law on decentralisation, the authorities and people within council areas were to enjoy administrative and financial autonomy in the management of local interests. This bottom-to-top approach to development will enable grassroots populations to be fully involved in the development of their communities by identifying problems, translating them into micro projects and actively taking part in resource mobilization and implementation of such projects. Such micro projects constitute an essential part of a Council Development Plan.

It is against the backdrop of the advent of decentralisation in Cameroon that this paper attempts to examine the effectiveness of Local Government (LG) in the Elak-Oku Council area, Bui Division of the North West Region of Cameroon from 2007 to 2017. 2007 marked the first time, since 1996, that the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) political party took control of the Council from the Social Democratic Front (SDF). The year 2017 was a turning point in the history of Cameroon because of the

¹ J., Litvack et al, "Rethinking Decentralisation in Developing Countries", Sector Studies Series, The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / World Bank, 1998.

ongoing Anglophone crisis that reached its climax and affected all developmental projects planned in the Council area. Nevertheless in this work, we explored besides its limitations, the economic and social changes noticed in the Elak-Oku municipality in this current contest of the decentralization process in Cameroon.

1. Theoretical Clarifications and Presentation of the Council Area

In this section, we shall clarify some major keywords used in this paper and discuss their relevancy in the understanding of main issues raised in our subsequent analysis. This section ends with the presentation of the Elak-Oku municipality.

1.1. Theory of Decentralization

In many countries around the world today, some kind of decentralization is taking place, or is at least being considered. The World Bank generally defines decentralization as “the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to subordinate or quasi-independent government organizations and/or the private sector”.² Central governments around the world are increasingly decentralizing administrative, political, functional and fiscal power to sub-national levels of the state. In developing countries decentralization is often viewed as a response to political pressures for greater sub-national autonomy.

As later examined in this section, the general definition of decentralization by the World Bank covers the various types of decentralization: administrative, political and fiscal decentralization. Countries understand and apply decentralization differently. The World Bank Decentralization Thematic Team states that the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to subordinate or quasi-independent government organizations and/or the private sector is a complex multifaceted concept. In general, decentralization can take one or more of the following forms: political decentralization, administrative decentralization, and fiscal decentralization.³ The following paragraphs examine the various types of decentralization for their relevance to the issue of our study area.

Administrative Decentralization involves the redistribution of responsibilities and financial resources for service delivery, governance and administration among the different levels of government. It is the transfer of responsibility for the planning, financing and management of certain public functions from the central government to sub-national units of government. These sub-national units include subordinate units of government, semi-autonomous public corporations,

regional and local authorities. Administrative decentralization is generally practiced by way of deconcentration or delegation.⁴ Deconcentration involves the central government dispersing responsibilities for certain services to its regional and local branch offices. This is a form of decentralization which can directly be used to achieve national unity through local government because decisions are made and implemented by appointees of the central government. These government appointees most often take instructions from the central authority and are compelled to give priority to national interests. Delegation, as a form of decentralization, refers to a situation in which the central government transfers responsibility for decision-making and administration to local authorities or semi-autonomous organizations that are not wholly controlled by the central government but are ultimately accountable to it. The provision of basic services such as communication, water and electricity are not directly handled by the government but by decentralized entities in the form of state corporations.⁵ This kind of administration is somehow visible in the Elak-Oku municipality where the chain of command and administrative procedures works in accordance to this definition.

Political Decentralization specifically involves transferring the power to select regional and local political leadership and representatives from the central government to the sub-national levels of government. Political decentralization further entails the transfer of power and authority for making political and socio-economic decisions from central governments to local governments and communities.⁶ This dimension of decentralization is fundamental to participatory governance because it gives citizens and their elected representatives more power in public decision making. This transfer of political powers to local levels is referred to as the devolution of power. In a devolved system, local governments have clear and legally recognized geographical boundaries over which they exercise authority and within which they perform public functions.⁷

In contributing to local government and national unity, political decentralization sets the pace and standards for political representation. Sub-national units expect to have more power and independence in electing their political leaders, representatives and councils. This representative autonomy ensures that the interests of the communities are included in the national agenda. The representation of regional and local interests at the national level is a major expectation raised by the notion of political decentralization. Political

⁴ D. Rondinelli, *Government Decentralization in Comparative Perspective: Theory and Practice in Developing Countries*. International Review of Administrative Sciences 47 (2): 1989, pp.133-45, Sited by R. E. Yosimbom, “Breaking to Build”.

⁵ R. E. Yosimbom, “Breaking to Build”, 2010, p.20.

⁶ John -Mary Kauzya, “Political Decentralization in Africa: Experiences of Uganda, Rwanda and South Africa”, Discussion Paper by Division for Public Administration and Development Management Department of Economic and Social Affairs United Nations New York, December 2007.

⁷ R. E. Yosimbom, 2010, p.20.

² J., Litvack et al, “Rethinking Decentralisation in Developing Countries”.

³ R., Eyiomen Yosimbom, “Breaking to Build: Decentralization as an efficient mechanism for achieving National Unity in Cameroon”, Degree Magister Legum-LLM (Good Governance and Decentralisation), University of the Western Cape, South Africa, 2010, p.19.

decentralization is thus a device for enhancing local government and why not national unity by ensuring participatory democracy and political stability.

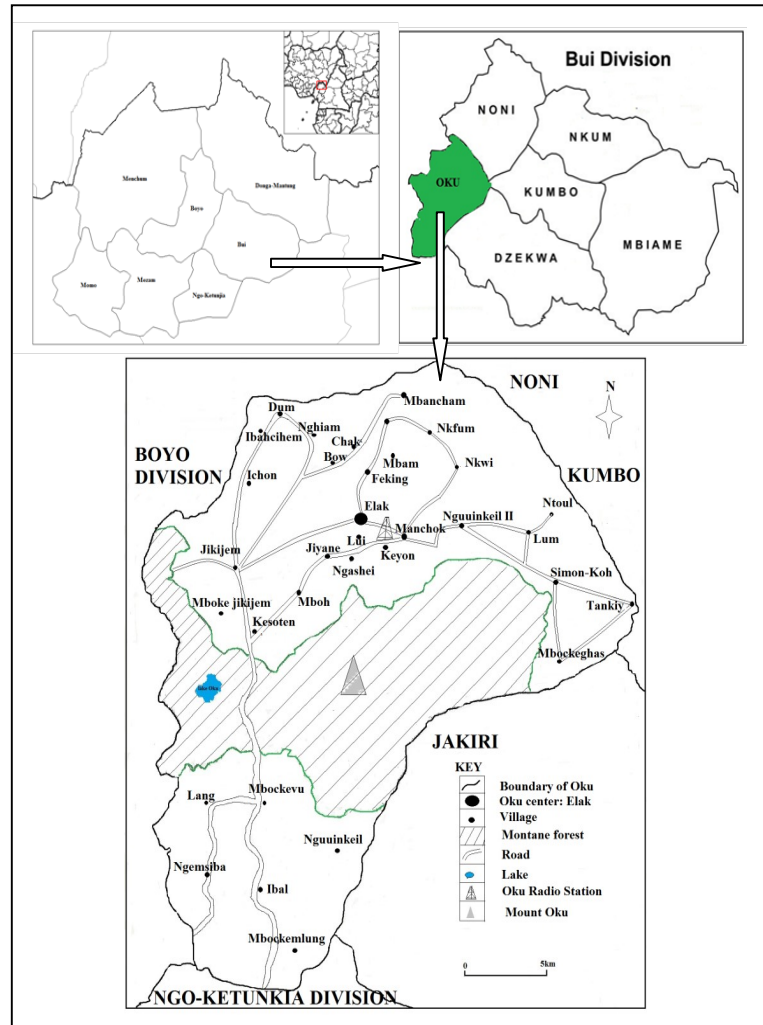
On the other hand, *Fiscal Decentralization* is the financial dimension of devolution. This form of decentralization focuses on how public revenue and expenditure is organized between the levels of government in a state and how these intergovernmental relations are financed. Fiscal decentralization is informed by three main principles. First, the assignment of expenditure responsibilities to sub-national governments is at the core of fiscal decentralization.⁸ This involves the allocation of public functions and responsibilities to sub-national units. The second element is the assignment of tax and revenue powers to sub-national entities to ensure that expenditure assignments are underpinned by sustainable funding. The central government often determines the tax or non-tax revenue allocations which will be placed at the disposal of the local governments to enable them carry out their specific functions and responsibilities. The taxing of economic activities taking place within regions and municipalities is a major source of public income. In more centralized systems, the central government commonly reserves the power to collect these taxes. Fiscal decentralization encourages the central government to allow local governments to manage local taxation. Thirdly, in addition to assigning revenue sources, central governments may provide regional and local governments with additional resources through a system of intergovernmental fiscal transfers or grants, particularly when sub-national units provide functions on behalf of the central government.⁹

Fiscal decentralization can be structured to build public confidence at all levels of government. Public participation in governance results in an all-inclusive method of governance which is generally considered as democratic. The adherence to democratic principles by a regime attracts to itself national support and loyalty. This support and loyalty by the public resulting from the merits of fiscal decentralization is a tool for achieving the genuine successes of local government. It is against the backdrop of the above clarifications that one can see and understand the relationship that exists with regards to the Elak-Oku municipality. However, these decentralisation tools shall be cross-checked when handling socio-economic achievements in the said municipality.

1.2. Presentation of the Elak Council Area

Geographically, Elak-Oku council has the same territorial boundary as Oku Sub Division. It is located in Bui Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. It is bounded to the north by Noni and Kumbo councils, to the south by Ndog council, to the east by Jakiri council and to the west by

Fundong council. The surface area is estimated at 372.50km².¹⁰ The Elak-Oku council area is made up of 36 villages illustrated in *Map 1* below.



Map1: Localisation Map of Oku Sub-Division

Source: Elak Council Development Plan (CDP), 2017.

Demographically, Elak municipality has a population of 87,790 inhabitants on a surface area of 3750.50km² distributed in 36 villages. Women constitute 51.6% while men constitute 48.4% of the population.¹¹ The population of the council area is stratified into children, youths, adults and the old. The council area has a vibrant active population which consists of youths between the ages 15 to 35. The majority of the population within the council area comprises children within the ages of 0-5 and 6-16years. The rate of emigration is high amongst the youthful population between 18 to 35 years.¹²

⁸ *Decentralization and Democratic Local Governance Programming Handbook*, Centre for Democracy and Governance, Bureau for Global Programs, Field Support, and Research, U.S. Agency for International Development. Technical Publication Series, May 2000.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ R. Ngek Monteh, "Oku and her Neighbours in Conflicts, 1982-2002", Master Dissertation in History, University of Yaounde I, 2004, p.9.

¹¹ According to the 3rd generation population and housing census (BUCREP), 2005.

¹² Elak Council Development Plan (CDP), 2017.

Culturally, Elak-Oku council area has a very strong tradition under the leadership of a second class chief (*Fon Nsetieh II*, since 2006 ranking as the 15th *Fon* in the Oku dynasty).¹³ The Oku people have two main Juju houses “Ngiri and Nwerong or Kwifon” and other traditional groups like Nfuh and Samba. Their traditional regalia is a marked black dress known as “Vikumvekom” won with a handmade multi-colour cap. Their stable food is fufu-corn and vegetable (huckleberry). According to their traditional calendar, their week is made up of 8 rotating days instead of 7 found in the normal calendar.¹⁴

The people of Elak-Oku council belong mainly to the Tikaris ethnic group following ethnic groups and inter-ethnic relations. Generally there are several other group communities found in the council area like the Nso, Noni, Mbororos, Bamunka, Kom, Mbessa, Wimbun and Ibos.¹⁵ These people from different ethnic backgrounds co-exist and interact in many domains including social groups, professional groups, amongst others and they also inter-marry.

As far as religion is concerned, there is freedom of worship in Elak-Oku council area just as in the entire country. Generally, and besides the African traditional ways of worship, the people have practiced Christianity since its advent in the area in the early 1900s. The main Christian denominations in the area include: Roman Catholics, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Full Gospel. There are also Muslims and traditionalists in the municipality. The religious institutions contribute to the development of the municipality by providing educational and psychosocial facilities.

Historically, The Elak Council which makes up one of the 34 councils in the North West Region and the third largest in terms of land in Bui division, was created in 1977 under Presidential decree No 77/203 of 19th June 1977 to set up councils and to define their boundaries. It should, however, be made mentioned that the Elak council was created as a split from the then Nso council so as to decongest local government (LG) machinery. The council actually started functioning in July 1978. At the time of creation, Elak Council covered the territorial jurisdiction of Oku and Noni communities with the administrative headquarters in Elak-Oku. Today, Elak Council covers the territorial jurisdiction of Oku Sub Division spread over the 36 villages it comprises with headquarters at Elak Oku. The status of Elak Council comprises 41 Councillors, a Mayor and four Deputies. Elak Municipality consists of 34 villages ruled by third class chiefs and two ardorates ruled by ardos making the total number of villages to 36.¹⁶ The population of Oku is mostly peasant. The Elak Council since creation has experienced the rule of three

Municipal Administrators and three Lord Mayors. *Table 1* illustrates that fact.

Table 1: Mayors/Municipal Administrators that have served in Elak Council

SN	NAME	POSITION	PARTY	PERIOD
01	Babah Fabian Djofui	Municipal Administrator	CNU	1978-1982
02	Tah Christopher Kindong	Municipal Administrator	CNU	1982-1991
03	Nforme John Tata	Lord Mayor	CPDM	1991-1996
04	Yongka Simon Babey	Lord Mayor	SDF	1996-2002
05	Ndishangong Thaddeus Tata	Lord Mayor	SDF	2002-2007
06	Ngum Jerome Njioh	Lord Mayor	CPDM	2007-Present

Source: Field Data from the Elak Council, July 2018.

It is from the above theoretical framework and the presentation of the study area that one can actually understand how the policy of decentralisation and local government really operates in the study local. But in order to have a look into that, it should be necessary for us to first of all picture the advent of this administrative system in Cameroon.

II. THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF DECENTRALIZATION IN CAMEROON

While providing a detailed history of local governments is beyond the scope of this paper, it is instructive to mention aspects of this history that sheds light into understanding the current decentralization reforms. In fact, municipal administration in Cameroon dates back to the colonial period. Before 1884, the territory which later became the German Protectorate comprised many independent indigenous polities varying in size and administrative system.¹⁷ Between 1884 and early 1914, the Germans occupied and began to administer the territory as a single polity, and thus laid the groundwork for a subsequent Cameroon identity, citizenship and centralized system of government.

2.1. The Colonial Era

The idea of decentralization can be traced back at the mandate period when this territory was placed by the League of Nations under the administration of France and Great Britain after the World War I. The former West and East Cameroon experienced different culture and practices of decentralization before 1974 and a sort of assimilation since then from their different colonialists.

In former West Cameroon, effective occupation of West Cameroon by British authority required a form of governance with which the Cameroonians would comply willingly, rather than coercively as under German authority. This imperative led to the indigenization of the colonial state through the

¹³ Elak Council Development Plan (CDP), 2017.

¹⁴ Hans-Joachim Koloss, *World-view and Society in Oku (Cameroon)*, Berlin, Verlag Von Dietrich Reimer, 2000, p.145.

¹⁵ Author's filed work observations.

¹⁶ Data from fieldwork with supplementary material from Elak Council Development Plan (CDP), 2017.

¹⁷ Bongfen Chem-Langhëë, “The road to the unitary state of Cameroon 1959-1972”, in Fowler, Ian and Zeitlyn, David (eds), *Perspectives on the State: From Political History to Ethnography in Cameroon*, Essays for Sally Chilver, First Published in Paideuma, 1995, cited by Herman Touo, 2014, p.9.

adoption of the system of indirect rule. The system of Indirect Rule would have been the subject of experiments in Scotland at the end of the 16th century which was applied to manage many British colonies afterwards. In short, The British rulers allied themselves with the local indigenous rulers by granting them great local power in exchange for their collaboration in all matters important to the real masters.¹⁸

As from June 1923, the intention to decentralize had become a reality with the 'Cameroon order in council' which divided this part of the territory in Northern Cameroons administratively integrated with Nigeria and Southern Cameroons, the current North West and South West regions where, however, the 'Native Court Ordinance' of 1914, 'Native Authority Ordinance' of 1916 and 'Native Revenue Ordinance' in force in Nigeria, were implemented. These ordinances constituted the legal framework of the 'Native administration' or 'indirect rule'. This indirect administration was supported by traditional rulers or 'native authorities' relatively well organized in the grassfields zone of the North West and less in the forestry zone of the South West.¹⁹ This institution of the native authority or court enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy in the management of local affairs. The native authority was in charge of maintaining law and order, justice, health, local development and the collection of taxes with the possibility to use part of the money collected in its constituency.

It was, however, noted that during the British era, the chiefs could play a crucial role in the achievement of the colonial project, the British tried to portray them as natural leaders of communal societies untroubled by a plurality of political ideologies, for which consensus was an inherited state of mind rather than an ideological weapon of social conflict. The new consensus was precarious as it depended on the ability of the ruler to satisfy demands that emanated from his society. During the years 1940s, the term 'local' replaced progressively the term 'native'.²⁰ In the early 1950s, all the 'local authorities' became councils composed by traditional rulers and elected personalities. In this regard, most of the decisions were taken by the local authority on issues concerning education, health, and regulation of commerce, judicial police, hunting and fishing. However, this situation persisted during the federal era till 1974 when new laws were passed harmonising the two subsystems.

2.2. Post-Colonial Era

Between 1961 and 1974, local authorities became local councils with local assemblies made up of some designated members (traditional rulers) by the Minister in charge of territorial administration or Interior Minister besides the

majority elected. The Chairman is designated by the Minister while his vice is designated by the Council.

In 1966, multiparty politics was abandoned in favour of a one-party system, with the Cameroon National Union (CNU) to implement authoritarian rule that characterised the period in which most African countries got their independence. Local Governments still existed, but did not maintain a British style wherein LGs could exercise some authority over their people, because the French administrative system overcomes the English system of administration in Cameroon. In the French administrative system, the local elites had little or no saying in projects that directly or indirectly affected their lives, thereby undermining local Governments. In French Cameroon the colonial high commissioner supervised LGs because he insisted on having authority over them in order to keep the natives under control.²¹ This was transferred to the British part of Cameroon which institutionalized the decline in LG autonomy. The central government was the sole decision making body with the influence of the French who still had a grip on the country.

In 1972 a referendum was organised in which the people of Cameroon voted for a unitary state. The centralised government which ensued further undermined Local governments' autonomy. In 1974 councils were organised as LGs. Though they generated revenues through taxes basically, they could not utilise them directly because the figures were registered in the national treasury. In reality, they had no financial autonomy. The consequence of this tendency has been inadequate and inefficient development projects within local councils. As it is the case now, Mayors were statutorily controlled by administrators (Senior Divisional Officers, SDOs) who are representatives of the state within local communities.²² The active role of S.D.Os and D.Os in this form of LG however highlights the limits and the instrumentality of this version of decentralization.

It should however be noted that, the recent process of decentralization in Cameroon was initiated with the passing of Law No. 96/02 of 18/01/1996 amending the 1972 Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon. The 1996 constitution is considered as a landmark in the development of decentralization in Cameroon because it established the decentralized nature of the State and stated the general principles of decentralization in Cameroon. Article 2 of the Constitution clearly states that the Republic of Cameroon shall be a decentralized unitary State.²³ In actualising the process of decentralization, the Constitution provided for Regions and Councils as decentralized entities. The result of this provision on the administrative setup of the country is that

¹⁸ Herman Touo, "Decentralization, crises of governance and citizens' participation in Cameroon", in IPSA World Congress, Montréal Canada, 2014, p.10.

¹⁹ H. Touo, "Decentralization, crises", p.11.

²⁰ John Lonsdale, "African Past in Africa's Future", in Canadian Journal of African Studies, 23(1) 1989: 126-146.

²¹ E. Eyong Manyi, "Local Governments and Rural Development: A Case Study of Buea in Cameroon", Master of Philosophy in Culture, Environment and Sustainability, University of Oslo, Blindern, Norway, 2007, p.63.

²² Ibid., p.64.

²³ *Implementation of Decentralisation in Cameroon: Problems, Challenges and Strategies*, Policy Paper by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, in charge of Local Councils, Republic of Cameroon, 2007.

today, Cameroon has 366 councils and 10 Regions created by Article 61(1) of the Constitution. The Constitution further entrenches decentralization by stipulating, in Article 55(2), that regions and councils shall have administrative and financial autonomy in the management of regional and local interests.²⁴ In advancing the development of decentralization in Cameroon, the 1996 Constitution provided for the transfer of powers, functions and responsibilities from the central state to the local authorities. The interpretation and implementation of these constitutional provisions has been the basis for the orientation of decentralization in Cameroon.

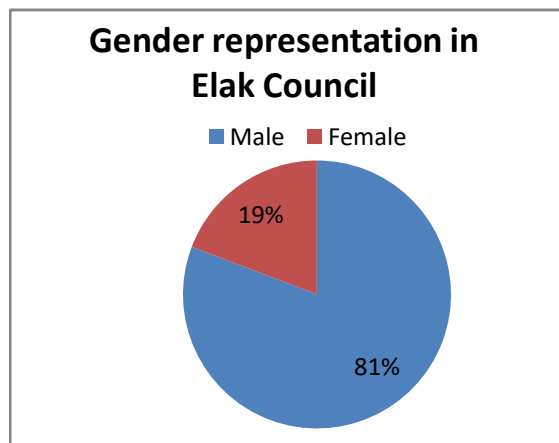
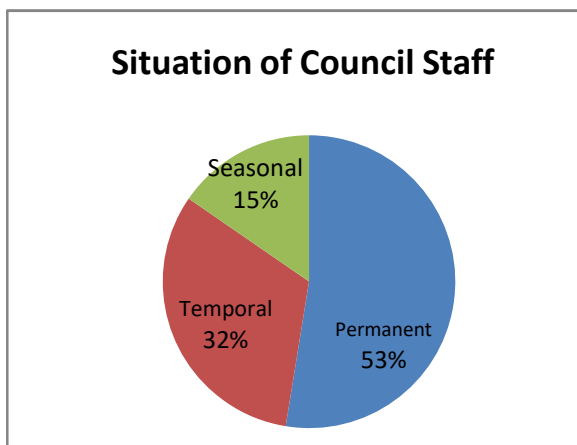
It is from the above standpoint on the origin and evolution of decentralization in Cameroon that the next subsection pictures on the organisation of the Elak-Oku municipality since it remains our study area.

2.3. The Organisation and Functioning of the Elak Council

The role of the Council as a local government organ charged with the social and economic development of its area of jurisdiction was spelt out in Law No. 96-06 of January 1996 amending the Constitution of 2 June 1972, part one article 1 paragraph 2 that made Cameroon a decentralized unitary state. In order to fulfil this mission, the Council must have the human, financial and material (assets) capacity and relate well with other development actors. This section presents the human, organisation and functioning of the Elak council.

Based on the 2017 baseline data, the Elak council has a staff strength of 78, (41 permanent, and 25 temporal and 12 seasonal). Out of the 78 staff, 15 are female, representing 16.44%, which is below the required 30% quota.²⁵ Diagram 1 illustrates this statistics.

Diagram 1: Elak Council Staff, 2017



Source: SG Office and field data collection, November 2017.

The 41 permanent staff represent 53% of the staff strength. This is a good indication for the council, given that temporary and seasonal staff cannot easily halt activities with an industrial strike relating to their status. Out of the 73 staff, 52 (63%) have the First School Leaving Certificate as their highest qualification which may not be good for efficiency in the carrying out assignments. Besides, there are 10 seasonal workers all involved in road maintenance. Although they are termed seasonal workers, they work all year round and are paid for all the months of the year.²⁶

The Elak municipality had 41 councillors after the 2013 municipal elections. The last time our study was conducted, one of these councillors had died and 2 had resigned, leaving 38 councillors all belonging to the CPDM political party. Following the chain of command, there was a mayor and 4 deputies. Two of the deputies were female. Each councillor belonged to a committee. Out of the 38 councillors 2 were of the minority Mbororo lineage. 12 councillors were female, giving 31.5% of women representation in the council, thereby meeting up the required quota of 30%.²⁷

Looking at its functioning, the Elak council has 8 departments, each with a department head. The General Secretariat, which is headed by the Secretary General, is the main administrative organ of the council and oversees the day-to-day functioning of the council. All correspondences to and from the council or mayor are supposed to pass through this department.²⁸

Besides the Secretary General is the Economic and Finance department. This department is divided into sub departments including a Municipal Treasury headed by a municipal Treasurer who is the Custodian of council finances and accounts for them. He equally prepares management accounts. The Finance officer keeps financial records of the council, proposes solutions to improve council revenue, identifies tax

²⁴ R. E. Yosimbom, "Breaking to Build", p.28.
²⁵ Elak Council Baseline Data Report, June 2017.

²⁶ Elak Council Baseline Data Report, June 2017.
²⁷ Interview, Ngum Jerome Njioh, 59, Mayor Elak Council, November 2017.
²⁸ Interview, Taal Timothy Babey, 43, 4th Deputy Mayor Elak Council, April 2017.

pillars and inputs basic accounting entries into specific software; Market Masters, sees into the cleanliness of markets under them, collects market tolls and pays same to the treasury. As a Tax Clerk, he assesses and collects all taxes; Revenue collection, Collect council revenue in the field.

There exists the Hygiene and Sanitation department whose role is to ensure the cleanliness of the municipality. Then, the Communication department's main responsibility is the diffusion of information between personnel and the municipality, the publication of council projects, budget, auction sales, banns and orders, effective communication during council sessions, the production of documentaries on council achievements, and publication on economic activities of the people living within the council area and their socio-cultural activities. All this is done through mass media, the publication of letters, social groups, interpersonal communication and the public notice board.²⁹

There is also the Town planning Department which tours the villages to check whether villagers are constructing houses following town planning regulations or not. The Local Development Department is in charge of the development office, tenders board, tourism, capacity building and the follow-up of projects as sub departments. its role is to design and follow up the implementation of projects, plan and program Council activities in the short and medium term, take part in participatory Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of activities especially projects (CDP), the promotion of local economy and ensure the consideration socio environmental aspects in the implementation of activities.³⁰

The library and internet department has a library and internet sub departments for public consumption and research . The Tourism department registers all tourists entering the council, collects revenue and takes tourists to tourist attraction sites. The Civil and environmental department ensures the regeneration of the forest and prevents bush fire. The Road work department maintains the roads, especially during the rainy season. The Education department on the other hand, handles the construction of schools, the supply of needs, the recruitment of teachers and payment of their salaries, and checks on assistance and minimum package to schools. The Health department sensitizes the population on health hazards and seeks to improve their health by ensuring sanitation. The Art and craft department carries out inventory of craft men within the council area, keeps records of craft and craftsmen, ensures the annual organization of art and craft exhibitions.³¹ The Water department being the last but not the least is in charge of water treatment, water maintenance, the extension of water to households and collection of revenue from private tap owners.

But during our study, we noticed that most staff do not pass through their head of departments to reach hierarchy. They simply go directly and even by-pass the Secretary General and go straight to the mayor. This situation makes the Secretary General not to have a firm grip on the staff in terms of respect. The Secretary General indicated, during an exchange with me, that Elak Council uses the official organizational chart as approved by MINATD.³² The council is working towards the implementation of this chart and so does not have another chart for the moment. However, municipal police is not functional at the moment in the council. The next section deals on the economic and social transformation witnessed by the Elak council during this phase of the decentralisation progress in Cameroon.

III. THE ROLE OF THE ELAK COUNCIL IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF OKU

The role of the council is to administer local affairs to secure the economic, social and cultural development of its population. In this respect, the Council plays a major role in the effort to create conditions for sustainable development and poverty reduction by ensuring more effective and accountable local infrastructure and service delivery for the poor, and by improving dialogue between the state, citizens and their communities and the private sector. This is facilitated through their various activities under different projects which have been creating multiple long term and short term employment opportunities for the people. Between 2007 and 2017, the Elak Council has recorded some achievements scored in the economic and social projects.

3.1. Economic transformation

In this section, we shall discuss economic elements such as agriculture, livestock, market, commerce and the council incomes in order to picture these transformations.

Agriculture and Livestock

Farmers in the Elak council area practice mainly subsistence agriculture. About 95% of the population of Elak municipality practises agriculture. There is available vast land and the presence of agricultural common initiative groups. The main crops cultivated are maize, beans, selenium potatoes, tomatoes, cabbages and huckleberry. The main cash crop is coffee while a good number of people practice apiculture. It is in this light that the council established some multi vegetables gardens across the municipality with some 15 varieties of improved seeds in partnership with volunteers from America. Besides that, there was introduction of large scale cultivation of huckleberry known locally as NJIOH and a market by the council.³³ Farmers in this council gained financial assistance at the Elak council and Mbockevu. The opening of farm to markets roads through the municipality remains a priority to the council.

²⁹ Interview, Taal Timothy Babey.

³⁰ Interview, Chiatch Kingkoh Godlove, 35, CDO Elak Council, April 2017.

³¹ Interview, Chiatch Kingkoh Godlove.

³² Interview, Yai Tam Moses, 52, Secretary General (SG) Elak Council, November 2017.

³³ Interview, Chiatch Kingkoh Godlove, 35, CDO Elak Council, April 2017.

Elak Council generates more than 75% of its revenue from the buying and selling of agricultural and livestock produce as well as Non Timber Forest Products-NTFPs (honey). The most interesting thing about Elak Council is that with the present Mayor Ngum Jerome, the promotion of agricultural, forestry and livestock produce is primordial. This could not leave the council indifferent in promoting these activities. Since 2007, the Elak Council has made the farmer's jamboree a yearly event. Annually, the Council organizes agro-pastoral shows and prize awards in a way to promote sustainable development through agriculture and livestock. The council sponsors the show every year as a way for farmers to share ideas, knowledge and experiences as illustrated in *Plate 1*. And at the end, distinguished farmers are awarded prizes and certificates as a way to stimulate growth and perfection.³⁴ To the Mayor, the best way to go industrial is to promote the agro-pastoral and apicultural sectors. Through the show, the best farmers in the municipality are promoted and awarded compensation for hard work. In this direction, this scope of intervention by the Elak Council in the fight against poverty and promoting sustainable development was well elaborated in the council developmental plans. To the Mayor; "besides providing assistance to beneficiaries, we take into consideration the needs of the concerned and it should be an on-going project that its impact will reach the entire community or village".³⁵

However, traditional livestock keeping is still widely practised by producers within the municipality. Improved livestock farming is rare but gradually coming up the reason why most farmers still practice rudimentary methods. Consequently, income from livestock production is relatively low compared to crop production. Other benefits from mixed farming can be exploited to further enhance agricultural production through the use of animal droppings.

Market and Commerce

Oku council area has 14 markets, among which 7 with temporal structures, 1 with a permanent structure (Elak) while 6 have no structures. Most of the markets are held weekly while others are periodic (during the harvesting season). These markets deal with farm products (buying and selling farm produce) mostly for local consumption but a few like maize, beans, selenium potatoes and honey are sold to external purchasers. These markets have limited waste disposal facilities or garbage cans. However, most of these markets lack market management committees and are managed solely by the council. Cleaning of the market surroundings is done by council seasonal workers. Survey is done periodically by officials of the delegation of commerce to ensure that there is a fair market play, to remove expired products from the market and sensitize traders. Group sales

are not very common in this Subdivision except within coffee farmers and bee farmers who own cooperatives.³⁶

Plate 1: Mini Agro-pastoral show in the Elak Municipality 2015



Source: Data collected in the 2016 Elak Council Investment projects.

The only well organised market within the municipality is the Elak central market with 87 sheds, a sales point (hanger) with 32 spaces and spaces for parking of merchandise. The market operates on a weekly basis, though some traders do open their shops on daily basis. It was constructed with financial assistance from FEICOM and inaugurated in 2011. This market has a warehouse, is electrified, and has toilet facilities. This market has some stand taps but a limited space for the disposal of refuse. Besides the Elak main market, the council also did well to construct seasonal markets at Ibal, Tolon and Itoh, all in Oku Subdivision. In the same direction, the Elak council slaughter slab is found near the market. However, the way to the slab is often blocked by other traders, especially on market days, due to limited market space.³⁷ The slab is neat

³⁴ Fai Cassian Ndi, "2014 Annual Weblog Awards Finalist, 2015 2degrees Champions Awards Winner, 2017 Public Peace Prize Finalist", in *The Eye Newspaper*, April 2017.

³⁵ Interview, Ngum Jerome Nchio.

³⁶ Interview, Ngum Jerome Nchio.

³⁷ Elak Council Urban Space Diagnosis June 2017, Updated with the support of the National Community Driven Development Program (PNDDP), <http://www.facebook.com/sirdepcameroon>.

and the butchers pay tolls to the council to use it each time they have to slaughter animals.

Council Incomes

Our sources revealed that the council raises income from operational activities more than from investments. Investment revenue represented only 0.30%, 4.61% and 6.81% of the total revenue for 2014, 2015 and 2016 respectively. In 2014, more income came from external sources (53%) than from internal sources, totalling 47%. However, in 2015 and 2016, the council was able to mobilise more income internally 53% and 100% respectively. Each inhabitant had a revenue of 3.276frs, 3.753frs and 2.401frs for 2014, 2015 and 2016 respectively. On the other hand, each inhabitant contributed 1.544frs, 1.979frs and 2.401frs for the internal revenue for these years respectively.

The council spends on investments and for day-to-day running or operational costs. In 2014 and 2015, the council's 31% of expenses was for running costs. This is commendable and should be upheld. In 2016 the council spent 52% of her revenue in running costs.³⁸

The previous Council Development Plan (CDP) for Elak was developed in 2012 and expired in 2016. From discussions with the Council Development Officer (CDO), mainly projects in the Council Development Plan (CDP) that were supported by National Community Driven Development Program (PNDP) were executed. The mayor, however, used the CDP to lobby for some funding, even if this did not materialize. Other projects came directly to the council from central administration in Yaoundé. Within the context of the last CDP, a CDO was recruited and these staffs are of great help to the council. A Council Financial Officer (CFO) was also recruited. Council revenue has improved significantly since the presence of this official.³⁹ The next section shall handle changes drawn from the social aspects in the Elak municipality.

3.2. Social transformation In the social domain, the Elak council recorded much within the time framed. These transformations were noticed in the field of infrastructural development, telecommunication, education infrastructure, water and energy, tourism and leisure amongst others, were and are still found in nearly all the 36 villages that make up the Elak Oku municipality.

Infrastructure Development

Developing farms to market roads and linking villages to villages was one of the major axes of the Elak Council under Ngum Jerome from 2007. In collaboration with GP DERUDEP and FEICOM, he has developed and opened the highest number of earth roads in the North West Region. The council also adopted an approach to stimulate community work by villages on road maintenance. This new approach

ignited the council to empower road maintenance committees of some with basic road maintenance tools made up of spades, wheelbarrows, digging axes, etc., we learnt from a young man along the Oku-Noni Road. The construction of the Tolon-Balu road from HIPC Funds as well as the bridge over river Mii was done by the Elak council.⁴⁰ In order to restyle Oku town, the council also carried out maintenance and rehabilitation work on a number of streets. Taking into consideration the construction of the Elak Council Chamber at the old market, there was the need to give the site more visibility.

The Elak council lobbied and obtained funds from FEICOM for the construction of a Council Chamber to accommodate all the council services. Elak Council became the first in Bui Division to put up a befitting Council Chamber which enabled council services to move from the old building to a befitting structure. The Council Chamber is one of the numerous legacies of Ngum Jerome at the helm of the Elak Oku Council that always draws admiration. Moving the council from an obscured location to the present site has helped to bring municipal services closer to the population. Oku council also embarked on providing marketing avenues in the municipality.⁴¹ The construction of sales points and market sheds in the community have been cited among some of the projects whose impact is tremendous on the population.

The construction of bridges and culverts was also part of Elak Council's priorities. Some of these bridges include the Mieh bridge, the Itoh-Chak bridge, Mbam-Mbancham bridge, 03 bridges in Manchock, 03 bridges in Jiyane, 02 bridges in Bow, a bridge over river Kwawi leading to GBHS Tolon, a bridge in Ngvuienkie II, Jio-Nkie bridge in Ibal, Jin-Jioh Lang bridge, the bridge over river Mffeu in Kfum and the bridge over Ketume have disinclaved the entire municipality. Besides these bridges, the construction and rehabilitation of farm to market roads in Mboh- Mbockejikejim, Nsang-Ichem, Ngvuienkie II- Nkfui-Mbancham, Mbam-Itoh and the Elak-Fekeng-Mbam were achieved.⁴² However, the Elak council urban space could cheerfully boost of some kilometres of tarred roads linking Elak-Manchock-Keyon and Ikal. The innovation and improvement of street lighting system in the urban space was realised by the council, this besides the extension and innovation of the Municipal grand stand in Elak and Ibal respectively.

Telecommunication

Communication is a very important tool to measure the development level of a people. Within the Elak municipality, different communication means do exist. Amongst the identified were radio, television as well as mobile telephony. Elak council area is covered by Nexttel, Camtel, MTN and Orange mobile telephone companies. They cover about 90% of the council area. There is also a community radio station in

³⁸ Elak Council Baseline Data Report, June 2017.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Interview, Taal Timothy Babey.

⁴¹ Elak Council Baseline Data Report, June 2017.

⁴² Data collected in the field complimented with visibility studies by author, November 2017.

Keyon which serves as a good communication media in the council area though initially, the signals do not cover the Shinga zone due to the hilly nature of the municipality. Since 2017, a relay station of the community radio was installed at the mountain site, not far from Lake Oku thanks to the Council's collaboration with the divisional delegate of communication for Bui Division. This relay provides villages like Ibal, Mbockemlung and Ngemsiba with signals. The community radio usually relates with CRTV radio station for news and other programmes.⁴³ It is, however, regrettable that no newspaper distribution outlets were identified, thus newspaper readers have to order from Bamenda or Kumbo. Elak council could take an opportunity of this gap and develop a newspaper of its own, to use as a means to inform the public of her activities while also raising income to run some council activities.

There is also a community Tele-centre with internet facility which facilitates not only communication, but also provides internet services to those who need it. This council area also has a CAMPOST post office which operates money transfer, money order, cash savings account and post boxes as well traditional mailing services. However, the main problems in this sector include insufficient network coverage, weak radio signals and inadequate modems in the internet centre, insufficient journalists in the radio station and technicians, and insufficient means of movement for radio staff.⁴⁴

Education Infrastructure

Elak municipality has a host of educational institutions in the basic and secondary education sectors. There are 12 nursery schools, 15 primary schools and 6 secondary schools. Most of the primary schools are hosted on the same campus as the nursery schools. The construction of classrooms through FEICOM, PNDP and GP DERUDEP support has resulted to an improvement in pupils and students' performances which can directly be linked to the council's work.

Besides the building of schools, the council employed teachers to primary and secondary schools within the municipality. The council provided construction and equipment of classrooms in most primary, secondary and technical schools throughout the Municipality including GS Tankiy, GTC ang GS Mbockeghas, GNS Simonkoh, GS Ntowel, GS Keyon, GTHS Oku, GNS Mbam, GNS Ichim, GNS and GS Mbockjikijem, GS Nsang, GS Ndum, GTC and GS MbocKevu, GS Ngemsiba, GNS and GS Ngvuienkie I out of many. The council equally employed support staff for the Inspectorate of Basic education in the municipality. A good number of these schools have well-equipped playground and gymnasiums equipment for nursery schools in the Municipality. The introduction of public library and the reception of 1000 books from the French Government for the

library promoted research programs in the municipality.⁴⁵ Since 2007 the council went a long way in creating and promoting International School Partnership programs with some foreign teacher volunteers within the secondary and primary schools in Oku. Nevertheless, the Elak council has always assisted vulnerable and needy children in primary and secondary schools as well as paying school fees for the pupils of the entire GNS *Fon's* Palace when need be.

Water and Energy

Before 2007, one of the major problems in the municipality was the scarcity and poor distribution of potable water, given the fact that the council area is endowed with enormous water potential which serve both the council area and neighbouring council areas. With the collaboration of the government and development partners some giant water schemes were constructed to serve the entire community.

The sloping nature of the urban space and the municipality at large, together with numerous water catchments, give a good topography for the construction of gravity water supply schemes. Only a few of the possible water supply catchments have been harnessed and developed. They need to be properly protected to minimise encroachment by populations and stray animals. There are four potable water supply schemes all by gravity within the urban space. These include the Elak water supply scheme, the Ngvuienkie II water supply scheme, GTHS water supply scheme at Kenyon and Jiyane Scan water scheme.⁴⁶

Elak water supply scheme was constructed in 1987 by the Canadian government and handed to the community. It supplies four villages namely Elak, Keyon, Manchok and Fekeng. The council took over the management of this water scheme in 2009 and has been managing it since then. GTHS water supply scheme was initiated and constructed by the GTHS Oku authorities to bring water to the school. The project cost the school about two million francs excluding labour which was provided by the then students. The school later handed the water scheme to the community for management with a committee put in place. Ngvuienkie II and Jiyane water supply schemes were initially designed following the scan water format, and later converted to the gravity water systems. It should, however, be noted that besides these giant water scheme projects earlier mentioned, many of such water projects saw their days. The council designed and lobbied for the construction of Ngham, Ndum, Mbockevu, Ibal, Ngvuienkie I and Ngemsiba water projects. The donation of pipes for the water supply of some villages and quarters in Ketokeyon, Nankwei, Manchok, Ibalichim, Luick-Manchok and Fekeng remained in the hands of the Elak council's authority.⁴⁷

⁴³ Elak Council Baseline Data Report, Updated with the support of the National Community Driven Development Program, PNDP, June 2017.

⁴⁴ Data from field study, November 2017.

⁴⁵ Interview, Keja Denis Babey, 42, Member Education Committee, November 2017.

⁴⁶ Interview, Bongioh Quinta, 50, 3rd Deputy Mayor, November 2017.

⁴⁷ Interview, Angelina Kemai, 65, Member Finance Committee, November 2017.

Besides potable water, the council area is electrified by AES SONEL. More than 70% of the council area is electrified. There are also solar panels though not effectively used. The solar panel at the relay radio station is functional. The quantity of available energy is also small, as there are frequent power cuts that may last for more than a couple of days. The municipal authorities are looking into possibilities to apply for upgrading from 2 phase to 3 phase supply. Most of the poles carrying lines are old and need replacement. Some of the villagers own generators, especially those fully involved in commercial activities.⁴⁸ The source of fuel energy within the locality is from wood. There exists neither a petrol station nor a gas depot in the council Area. **Plate 2** summarizes these achievements.

Tourism and Leisure

Elak municipality has numerous tourist sites both natural and manmade. These include: Kilum mountain forest reserve a well-protected forest reserve that has species peculiar in the whole world, Lake Oku, Tolon water fall, Kenshing water fall, Enfwe water fall, Tankon water fall, Mbancham waterfall, Kedse water fall, Oku *Fon's* palace, Oku cultural and touristic centre, Oku area cooperative union ltd, Oku honey cooperative society ltd, Oku paper industry, Lumutu shrine, Ijim mountain and Caves (mbvek yeafon, mbvek ngailai, mbvek tafon, tongkol, mbvek mawes, kinaki, efiane, ekak, and emfee).⁴⁹ These sites, if well exploited and managed, could serve as a major source of income for the council.

Plate 2: Summary of some achievements in the Elak Council



Source: Data collected in the Elak Council, November 2017.

However, the touristic sector remains under exploited. There is equally a conflict situation between the traditional authorities and the administration over the control of the Kilum mountain forest reserve sites. Information we gathered

⁴⁸ Administrative accounts of 2016 complimented by field study, November 2017.

⁴⁹ Interview, Babey Julius Ghoyume, 32, Member Infrastructure Committee, November 2017.

from some councillors indicates that a tourism board was created in 2017 pending the appointment of personnel. Once this is done, it will go a long way to improve on the tourism potentials of the council. At the Lake Oku tourist site, two bucarous, hotel, restaurant, the development of access road to the Lake besides the training of some professional eco guides which provide minimal services were created and inaugurated in November 2017.⁵⁰

In a nutshell, from 2007 when a new team took over the Elak Oku Council, a lot was realised in the domains of economic and social. The total development of Oku has been up rising. Oku for this period has been turned into a construction site. Sectors like agriculture, public works, public health, social affairs, basic education secondary education, religion, culture, etc. projects earlier discussed have been initiated and realized despite the current difficulties in the decentralisation process in Cameroon. Pending aspects such as employment and professional training in the council area remain a major preoccupation. But trough training programs such as PIAASI small and medium loans to the tune of 150 million FCFA were granted to many actors of the municipality. Projects in these domains include agriculture, livestock, bakery and commerce. Nevertheless, the decentralisation processes coupled with these transformations were not challenges freed as recorded in the internal and external aspects.

IV. PROBLEMS FACED BY THE ELAK COUNCIL IN THE DECENTRALIZATION

Data collected in the Elak Municipality proves that a lot was recorded in the council area with the limited available resources placed at the council disposal. Most of the successes enumerated are infrastructural, as discussed in our previous section. However, in the process of mobilizing resources, councils face a number of challenges not only in the Elak council, but everywhere in Cameroon. These challenges range from internal to external .

4.1. Internal Challenges

Internal challenges are those which originate within the council area or premises.

Incompetent and Limited Personnel

Most of those who are in charge of resource mobilization in Elak council have little knowledge on how to go about it. They lack the required skills to embark on resource mobilization. This is due to inadequate knowledge on resource mobilization strategies, especially as they are not trained. This has caused them to collect too much or very little from the population. Most of those involved in the collection of market fee are incompetent, but some hold such posts because of their village or personal relationship with their immediate supervisors. Most of the officials are performing their functions without the relevant qualification and training. As a result, the available resources for accelerated

⁵⁰ Data from field study, November 2017.

and sustainable rural development are inefficiently utilized for the purpose intended.⁵¹ This reduces the chances of councils to realize their plans and budget.

Besides, insufficient man power is a challenge faced in the mobilization of resources by the Elak council. From our findings, the Elak council do not have enough personnel to embark on resource mobilization. This has caused most people from the border areas of the municipality to avoid the payment of tax because tax collectors do not come to them frequently. The Elak council needs to improve on their human resource in order to harness the desired financial resources. Shortage in personnel was the reason advanced for this challenge. The Mayor of Elak council equally made mention of shortage in personnel when he said they do not have enough personnel to cover all sources of revenue.⁵² To him, the inadequate amount generated on building permits is because the current team cannot cover the entire council area and people use this as an advantage and build without building permits.

Poor Collaboration with Elites

Local development is a process of diversification and enrichment of economic and social activities on a territory based on the mobilization and coordination of its resources and energies. It is therefore the product of the efforts of its population. Local development is above all a process of mobilization of local actors around common projects. However, the elites are the main actors. By simple understanding, elites are those who distinguish themselves within the community. In a broader sense, we speak of political, economic and intellectual elites otherwise known as the new African forces. These are people with a high level of education and a significant economic weight that can help the Elak community. But in Elak, many of these political elites based in the capital city of Yaounde act indifferently when it comes to the development of the Elak council area. Some elites preferred to work alone in their own village, on their own account and with their own chosen people. This act, thus aggravates the spirit of personal interest than collective one.⁵³ The council is thus isolated, and this harmed the active forces that can support the developmental initiatives and objectives of the Elak council area.

Besides, the Elak council needs to develop a clear resource mobilization strategy. This has to be monitored to ensure its applicability because writing documents without implementing them will not change the situation. From field observation, adequate planning is not done by council staff for resource mobilization. This is a major challenge especially as most of the resources mobilized, especially

taxes are spontaneous. External challenges are also major problems facing not only the Elak council.

4.2. External Challenges

Here, we talk of challenges which exist out of the council.

Poverty and Poor Cooperation of the Population

In most African countries, poverty remains a major hindrance to council resource mobilization. In the Elak council, most of those who are expected to pay tax are very poor. This creates a situation in which they find it difficult to meet their tax obligation. Those who sell seasonal products such as maize, potatoes and fruits by the road side for example make very little profits which make it difficult for them to pay temporal occupation tax charged to them by the council. With such flexibility on the part of the council and the inability of such tax payers to pay tax, the resources that could be generated by the council are significantly reduced.⁵⁴ Tax being the main source of income to councils all over Cameroon hindered by poverty.

Besides the above, the local population is not always willing to cooperate in the resource mobilization venture. Most of those who operate stores are usually unwilling to cooperate with the council. When their stores are sealed because of failure to pay tax, they often destroy the seals and keep operating. However, the council workers usually tolerate most of them for fear of the party not being voted into power in the subsequent election. They look at it as being sorely the duty of the Mayor or council workers. They deviate from tax payment because they expect the council to provide services to them but they are unwilling to meet their duties. The entire population wants to see development in the council area, yet, they keep evading taxes. There is thus the need to educate their ignorance on the various taxes which they are to pay in order to make tax collection smooth.⁵⁵

Tax Identification and Poor Investment Budget Declaration

The identification of tax payers is a challenge faced by the Elak council in administering taxes. A lot of tax payers carry on businesses without a fixed address or formal registration. An example is the running of a bar in a family compound which is very lucrative but informal in nature. Nearly all the villages that constitute the Elak municipality are not properly planned with streets and houses not named and numbered making it difficult for tax administrators to identify to carry out their duty.⁵⁶ This urge absence of tax identification greatly affected resource mobilisation throughout the council area.

In Cameroon, Councils usually prepare their budget and plan for resource mobilization before the declaration of the

⁵¹ Cuba Haman Gohnchu, "Resource Mobilization by Local Councils in Cameroon: A Case Study of Local Councils in the Fako Division, South West Region", Master Dissertation in Regional Planning and Project Management, Pan African Institute for Development, Buea, 2015, p.61.

⁵² Interview, Ngum Jerome Njioh.

⁵³ E. Eyong Manyi, "Local Governments and Rural Development", p.96.

⁵⁴ Elak Council Baseline Data Report, June 2017.

⁵⁵ C. H. Gohnchu, "Resource Mobilization by Local Councils in Cameroon", pp.64-65.

⁵⁶ Interview, Yai Tam Moses.

public investment budget allocated for councils. Seven steps are used in the preparation of the CDP; preparation process, participatory diagnosis, strategic planning, resource mobilization, programming, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. The declaration of public investment budget after the planning process is a major challenge to councils. This is because, programming is done with respect to the resources that are available or that will realistically be mobilized.⁵⁷ The declaration of this budget causes wastage of resources because the Mayor still has to call an extra ordinary session to mainstream the public investment budget in the council budget. This goes further to distort programming and is a major way for corrupt Mayors to embezzle council funds because it can be twisted and fitted in the budget. In this regard, transparency of this budget is not guaranteed.

Limited Finance and Autonomy

With the recent law on decentralization, local elected officials have to think about the development of their municipality by relying on their own means. The council does not have the necessary financial means. Some citizens refuse to pay taxes because of the inertia observed at the level of council action. For them, the council does not do anything with the tax money it collects. But they fail to understand that even if these funds are collected, they are not directly managed by the mayor of the council itself. These funds are managed by the municipal tax collector. All the revenues of the council are in the State's coffers, which alone controls the real amount of the council's revenues. In this regard, the financial autonomy of the councils is undoubtedly linked to administrative and legal autonomy. This then explains why there is an inadequacy between the means allocated to local authorities and their responsibilities.⁵⁸ This financial lack of autonomy by the councils of Cameroon in general and that of Elak in particular lead to the backlog of salaries of council workers. Many a time, the staff of the council suffer from salary arrears. Indeed, this situation pushes the employees of the Elak council to desert the offices.

The utilization of the law of 1974 creating councils is a problem in Cameroon. The regulations laid down in this law depicts such a system that is why councils had no autonomy, neither financial nor administrative, to engage in any activity without notification and approval from the central government. This also accounts for why there was supervision at all levels of government to ensure that the state had absolute control, from the preparation and debate of the budget to approving of a project and procuring the signature of the most immediate supervisory authority to commence a project.⁵⁹ The law states that a council is a decentralized political and administrative unit with legal personality and

financial autonomy; yet, the budget has to go through a lot of scrutiny before it is approved by the state. So, there is a lot of administrative interference. It makes no sense to vote local representatives when in effect they are to be supervised by appointed delegates, who are more corrupt than the democratically elected administrators. All evidence points to the fact that Cameroon is still operating under a very centralized system of administration because decentralization has in effect not been accompanied by democracy and empowerment.

The failure of the central government to devolve power to local council institutions and the failure to accord the local people the right to free and fair elections to choose who they desire to be their representative are accountable to the inadequacy and inefficiency in the performance of the local authority. These could be considered failures of institutions to champion the course of rural development. Despite these challenges faced by the Elak council, a considerable amount of resources have still been mobilized. However, there are a series of opportunities which exist in the Elak council of which if fully exploited will increase the council resources.

V. CONCLUSION

The objective of this research work was to gauge the weight of decentralized local authorities in the implementation of public policies in the Elak-Oku municipality within the years 2007 to 2017. Also, the study assessed the effectiveness of decentralization in the economic and social transformation of the said locality despite the numerous challenges earlier discussed. The study was approached from an interdisciplinary perspective this is a scientific method that approaches phenomena holistically. Data was fished out in two phases, including primary and secondary data. Many sources of data increase the validity of results.

The result was a mixed weight of decentralization on the local development front. This reflects the efforts required for local authorities to be genuinely involved in the formulation and implementation of local public policies. The results of the study revealed that the council, a decentralized unit, has achieved relatively more within the ten years period under study (2007-2017) than during the previous years. Since 2007 Elak council has witnessed remarkable changes in the domains of structure, infrastructure, revenue, personnel and community development. This is due mainly to the change of leadership. Following the recruitment highly qualified staff like the CDO and the CFO the council has remarkably improved its effectiveness and efficiency in rendering services to the population. Human resource management, ICT, municipal police and legal department are some important departments to be looked into while waiting for the effective implementation of the law of decentralization by completely transferring competence from the central to the local organ which is the council. The CID carried out for Elak council reveals that the council is meeting-up with the government

⁵⁷ C. H. Gohnchu, "Resource Mobilization by Local Councils in Cameroon", p.67.

⁵⁸ Interview, Chiatch Kingkoh Godlove.

⁵⁹ E. Eyong Manyi, "Local Governments and Rural Development", p.97.

regulations as concerns council management. However, the Elak Council should carefully examine the weaknesses and threats sorted for measures to mitigate their impact on the functioning of the council.

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2.	Babey Julius Ghoyume	32	Member Infrastructure Committee	November 2017
3.	Bongioh Quinta	50	3 rd Deputy Mayor	November 2017
4.	Chiatch Kingkoh Godlove	35	CDO Elak Council	April 2017
5.	Keja Denis Babey	42	Member Education Committee	November 2017
6.	Ngum Jerome Njioh	59	Mayor Elak Council	November 2017
7.	Taal Timothy Babey	43	4 th Deputy Mayor	April 2017
8.	Yai Tam Moses	52	Secretary General (SG)	November 2017

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