

Conspiracies of Skills Transfer and Local Development in Cameroon: A Social Reality in Question

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ABSTRACT

Debates on the transfer of powers from central to local government are raging in Cameroon. Historically, since 1884, when Cameroon was under German protectorate. The transfer of power was a reality, notably through the division of the country into administrative districts.

Following the German defeat at the end of the First World War in 1916, Cameroon was placed under a Franco-British mandate under the coordination of the League of Nations (SDN). In the British region of Cameroon, particularly in North-West and South-West regions, the administrative system was based on the principle of “indirect rule” which consisted for the British administration in integrating local administration into the management of affairs. public; and in the French-speaking part, the administrative system was based on the principle of “Direct rule”, that is to say the hierarchy of administration from top to bottom with the intermediary of the agents of this system. Thus, these two systems have the common denominator in Cameroon of bringing the administration closer to local populations.

It was through this hierarchical structure that decrees, laws and the first texts on decentralization were issued. Decentralization in Cameroon, through the transfer of powers to decentralized local authorities, offers greater participation by the population as a whole in the management of local affairs, and in the efficient, participatory development of local authorities. Beyond this appreciable aspect, it also encourages closer ties between administrators and citizens. Despite this qualification, we have to admit that the long-awaited skills are still languishing at, beside our administrations, particularly those in charge of deploying them in good and due form to the CTDs to help our communities take off.

Keywords: Skills, decentralization, development, local development, skills transfer, Cameroon.

INTRODUCTION

According to the OECD (2017), Decentralization is a process of transfer of competence from the central State to decentralized local authorities. In other words, decentralization is a process of reforms which is a political choice and which must be developed and carried out as part of a broader process of reforms, including for example reforms of territorial development, of the judicial system, the public service and the regulatory framework, while increasing the accountability of local elected officials and reducing political instability. In this choice, it covers three dimensions: political, administrative and budgetary. In other words, administrative decentralization implies a reorganization and a clear allocation of missions and functions between the territorial levels with a view to improving the effectiveness, efficiency and transparency of the

territorial administration of the State.

This decentralization is generally linked to the transfer of powers from the central State to lower levels of administration of decisions regarding planning, financing and management of certain public functions. Political decentralization determines the legal functioning of decentralization. It involves a new distribution of powers in application of the principle of subsidiarity, between different levels of administration, with different objectives, and often with the aim of strengthening democracy. Finally, budgetary decentralization corresponds to the delegation of prerogatives in matters of taxation and expenditure to levels of territorial administration. This degree of decentralization then depends on the importance of the delegated resources and the degree of autonomy in resource management. All in all, these dimensions are interdependent, that is to say, budgetary decentralization is necessarily accompanied by political and administrative decentralization. Paradoxically, without budgetary decentralization, political and administrative decentralization will have no purpose.

However, talking of decentralization without considering the notion of local development that it engenders is not to be taken for granted. Local development is understood as an economic and social dynamic, concerted and driven by individual and collective players – local authorities, economic players, civil society organizations, local services and decentralized State administrations – in a given territory. For more than two decades now, local development has been gaining ground in economic policy discourse. Presented as an alternative mode of development, it reflects the ability to increase the effectiveness of public policies by bringing them closer to the agents concerned, mainly local players. While the principles of local development have become firmly rooted in practice, and are gradually being translated into concrete development recommendations, the concept is yet to stabilize in the literature. From a theoretical point of view, it is accepted that a territory can produce development depending on the way it functions and organizes itself. If we refer to the work of Joseph KI-ZERBO (1989), the need for development is urgent because it recalls the spirits of the past as a project of freedom through civilization, i.e. the transformation of nature to create a universe where we feel at home.

Development for local communities is a process that allows them to promote their initiatives in complete freedom; empower themselves in complete freedom without being a prisoner of a past that would always hold them in captivity. Indeed, the effective implementation of decentralization in our local communities proves to be saving because it will allow local communities to rediscover themselves and be able to exercise their authority in close collaboration with local elected officials.

Local development is therefore not the rediscovery of a sum of past knowledge ready to be consumed, but rather the appropriation of symbolic knowledge as an emblem of our desire for freedom, as a symbol of our ability to redeploy our intellectual creativity in the scientific, technical and politico-economic fields.

What more, when we talk about local development, we're also talking about respect for democratic principles. Democracy in the broadest sense of the term refers to respect for the principles of legality and equity. In African societies, democratic principles reinforce the notion of "authenticity" specific to each people and each local and territorial authority. It enables Africans and Cameroonians in particular, to be themselves, to think within and not out of the box, to reach the heights of their growth. For Cameroonians, local development must be an opportunity, a dynamic, a specific function for local players to develop their rationality and know-how, in order to break with the imperialist doctrine defined as a limitation on the emancipation and determination of local communities. Developing oneself is putting forward a talent that makes an individual aware that everything around him must be exploitable, profitable and beneficial to the community. Developing means thinking about creativity, the new, social and national authenticity, and rejecting imperialist artifacts. To develop is to think in terms of local consumption, of motivating your alter-ego, of valorizing your resources. Finally, development means being proud to belong to one's social milieu.

At the same time, decentralization and local development are two related concepts. Indeed, decentralization, which refers to the transfer of powers, advocates participatory democracy and the management of local affairs in a given territory by the people who live there. As for local development, it implies economic growth, social solidarity and improved living conditions for the populations concerned.

This work is structured around three main themes: research methodology, presentation and analysis of the main results, and discussion.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research in Anthropology of development aims at analyzing the impact of decentralization on local development in Cameroon in general and more specifically in the East region of this country. Qualitative methodology was used to collect and analyze data. The study population was composed of five local elected officials, four administrative authorities, three local actors and four social leaders. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted using the interview guides.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF MAIN RESULTS

The analysis of the main research findings on the Intrigues of skills transfer and local development in Cameroon: a social reality in question is presented as follows:

1. The impact of decentralization on the local development process (bottlenecks and the specific nature of decentralization in Cameroon)
2. Local development in our communities
3. The relationship between decentralization and development in Cameroon

Impact of decentralization on the local development process

From a local development perspective in Cameroon, decentralization is a way of organizing the State so that citizen participation, from Cameroon's point of view, can be improved and produce the desired effects. HAURIOU (1923), goes further, stating that decentralization "is a way of being of the State characterized by the fact that the State resolves itself to a certain number of administrative persons who enjoy the rights of public power and who ensure the functioning of public services by exercising its rights, i.e. by making administrative acts". With this in mind, it's our duty in this section of the work to illustrate some of the bottlenecks in the transfer of powers to Cameroon's decentralized local authorities, and then to explain why this transfer is justified and even positively specific.

Decentralization bottlenecks in Cameroon

Decentralization in Cameroon is plagued by a number of problems that paralyse and mar its effective implementation in our decentralized local authorities. These problems are administrative, legal and socio-economic.

Administrative bottlenecks in decentralization in Cameroon

Decentralization, in the broadest sense of the term, consists in the transfer of powers to decentralized local authorities so that they can be autonomous and freely dispose of themselves in all respects. But today, after the promulgation of the 2019 law on decentralization in Cameroon, nothing has been done at all, except to put in place institutional and administrative staff. The crisis, indeed in this situation, stems from the fact that the State transfers powers on paper and by decree, but nothing is visible on the ground. It still exercises its

hegemony through its administrative institutions, such as the governor's office, the Senior Divisional officer and the Divisional officer. In the regions targeted by our research, it is clear that local development policies are implemented and coordinated by central government representatives, who steer these projects without consulting local elected representatives and the local population, who are the beneficiaries. As for local elected representatives, field observations have shown that they are only in charge of human resources, with the head of the communal executive, the mayor, having limited powers to recruit communal staff. This may reflect a prince of minimal administrative decision-making power.

To the question of what is struggling to be transferred to the Decentralized Territorial Collectivities on the administrative level, the local elected representatives surveyed implied in their discourse that among all that is said, written and effective on administrative decentralization, the power of decision does not rightfully belong to them, yet it is clearly mentioned in article 55 paragraph 2 of the constitution of January 18, 1996 that the Decentralized Territorial Collectivities "enjoy administrative and financial autonomy for the management of regional and local interests". Despite these provisions, administrative autonomy is dying in our CTDs. In most cases they are under the administrative control of the administrative authorities, and comply with the prescriptions imposed on them by the central administration. A local councillor from Haut-Nyong Division explained his position in the following terms:

"Administrative autonomy for local elected representatives consists in deciding what needs to be done within their council or region of competence. This is what the texts, says but the State does not allow us to impose and implement our decisions. As far as the State of Cameroon is concerned, we in charge of the Decentralized Territorial Collectivities should align ourselves with its management and development policies. How can we expect the State to impose its management principles and policies on local populations without consulting the grassroots? We have all come to understand that the transfer of competences in Cameroon is a deception on the part of the State, which in its policy has cleared itself of the demands of the Territorial Collective Decentralizations by promulgating its own laws and decrees for its own interests. The councils and Regions in Cameroon decide nothing, it's the State that's the master, the sovereign by virtue of its decision-making policies, and we just apply them. Super- mayors and regional councillors have been useless since they were created, and nothing has been done at communal and regional level to give them access to positions of power. No communal or regional development policy or project driven by local elected officials has been implemented to date".

From this account, we can deduce that the administrative autonomy of decentralized local authorities is nothing more than a pure illusion in Cameroon. In the Central region, more precisely in the Mfoundi Division, the opinions of the local elected representatives we met converge in the same vein as those of the Eastern region, with a few differences. Administrative autonomy in the Central region is 5% effective for these elected representatives, justified by the fact that their area of jurisdiction is located in Cameroon's political capital, the epicenter of decision-making and powers. A local elected official from the Yaoundé VI Council had this to say:

"The transfer of powers from an administrative point of view is effective, but not implemented by local elected representatives. We have some prerogatives because we work in the political capital, which is also the place where decisions are made. This is why the State grants us the privilege of deciding independently of its will on sanitation, property, taxes and levies. Other elements also came into force when the State, in particular MINAT, ordered us to take on a new responsibility that had passed them by, namely the supply of National Identity Cards to our fellow citizens. As you can see, we do what is imposed on us, but what we have to do and dispose of ourselves, we are controlled and guided on how to do it, and then everything is done at their own pace. Even what we're doing here is under the control of the Divisional officer and the Senior Divisional officer. You can imagine that the council can't carry out systemic checks on shopkeepers for used products; that's done by the Ministry of Commerce, while the Senior Divisional

Officer controls entertainment venues such as nightclubs and the like. It's always the Senior Divisional Officer who decides when to go out into the field. So what is our duty in our councils given that we are the people chosen by the people, We are chosen by the people but it is the State that decides and solves the problems we're supposed to solve. What a lack of understanding about decentralization and the decision-making power of localelected representatives in Cameroon. The State just won't let us work and manage our communities the way we want".

In another council of the capital city, another local councilor suggested in his speech that the fact that local advisors (conseillers municipaux) and decentralized local authorities are not sufficiently autonomous means that the local development we want and promote will not be as effective as we think. In our decentralized local authorities today, it is impossible for a local elected official to support a youth project, either because he or she lacks the financial means to do so, or because the project in question does not correspond to the ideals of the State. To emphasize this point of view, let's listen to what he has to say:

"The local development desired by Cameroonians cannot be effective if the Decentralized Territorial Collectivities are not sufficiently autonomous. We have the power to drive development in all its aspects, but sometimes the opinion of the hierarchy, which is the central government, is imposed on us in order to do so. You always have to consult the governor, the Divisional officer and the Senior Divisional Officer before doing anything. If we don't collaborate with them, we won't be able to do anything. Personally, I don't know what the Governor, the Divisional Officer and the Senior Divisional Officer do in terms of decentralization and local development policies. They need to leave us alone, and then our populations will be satisfied with our results".

Based on the arguments and speeches above, it noted that, from an administrative point of view, the transfer of powers is not at all favorable to Cameroon's decentralized local authorities.

Legal bottlenecks to decentralization in Cameroon

From a legal point of view, decentralization in Cameroon still gives rise to conflicts that mar the mission assigned to Decentralized Territorial Authorities. If we take a look at the socio-political crisis in Cameroon (North-West and South-West), commonly known as the Anglophone crisis or the NOSO conflict, which began in October 2016, we can see that the issue of transferring legal powers was a tangible indicator of the demands of decentralized local authorities. This is why, from a second angle, Law N°2019/020 of December 24, 2019 on the General Code of Decentralized Territorial Collectivities will see the light of day in Cameroon, with the aim of operationalizing decentralization in Cameroon and then institutionally reinforcing the creation of Decentralized Territorial Collectivities with the creation of a CTD code, as well as the organization of elections for Regional Councilors in 2020.

According to the law of December 24, 2019, the Collective Decentralized Territories are legal entities under public law, with the council and the region as their constitutional status. They have administrative and financial autonomy, as well as free administration by elected councils, except that these prerogatives are not in line with their legal autonomy. In some parts of our territory, certain local elected representatives are unable to make legal decisions concerning their territory. This is because the CTDs do not have the local legal machinery to make decisions. In Cameroon, no local elected official can make a legal decision in his or her area of jurisdiction, nor provide a legal document. For example, if an ordinary citizen wants to obtain a criminal record, he or she can't go to the CTD. On the contrary, he or she has to go to the customary court. Ideally however, the decentralized local authorities should have access to all the machinery of the State.

In a second sense, it is the representatives of the State who have the power to make legal decisions. For example, it is the governor, the divisional and the senior divisional who take legal decisions and have them implemented by municipal councilors. Similarly, decisions to close commercial areas, private structures and

institutions, and car traffic zones are legal acts taken by representatives of the State, to the detriment of local elected representatives. It is clear, then, that the decentralized local authorities are auxiliary institutions of the central government in Cameroon. The municipal councilors we met expressed their indignation at this administrative policy, which does not suit them at all. One of them reiterated the idea that Cameroon's Collective Decentralized Territories do not have all the equipment that is rightfully theirs. Some are still in drawers of state institutions. This can also be explained by the fact that if all powers are transferred, certain State institutions will disappear in favor of the Collective Decentralize Territories

Then there are the internal tensions between local elected officials, and the failure to take into account the traditional chiefs who are the custodian of tradition in matters of land management and leadership.

Socio-economic bottlenecks of decentralization in Cameroon

There are still many socio-economic bottlenecks facing the decentralization process in Cameroon. These include, on the one hand, the applicability of the social competencies assigned to local elected representatives to improve the living conditions of the population in all areas, and on the other hand, the transfer of economic resources intended for them to implement their activities and development projects.

With regard to social burdens, it should be recalled that the eleven competences transferred to the decentralized local authorities are struggling to be effective and implemented, sometimes due to a lack of resources. However, in every local authority, the local elected representative, in this case the mayor, has the capacity to recruit qualified citizens in any department or field of activity. If, for example, the mayor finds that a particular citizen is qualified in the field of health, and the local health district is in need of an employee, the mayor, because he or she is competent, can recruit him or her as a municipal staff member to work in the hospital. The same applies to education, where mayors manage the APEE and other local basic services. In spite of this, local elected officials are still not free to exercise their authority, in the sense that the State still monopolizes all the posts to be filled. This point of view is magnified by a local elected official from Yaoundé, who suggests in his speech that:

The decentralization process in Cameroon is marred by a few grey areas. You see, we have the skills, but sometimes it's hard to put them into practice. Personally, I'm in charge of the social service in this commune, but what I do in this structure doesn't fit in with my function. I've never assigned anyone to a state structure as staff in charge of the council. On the contrary, here I look after the staff recruited by the council and who work here. It's a lot in the hygiene department, cleaning public roads and lighting public spaces, but if you assign someone elsewhere and take charge, nothing can be done, even sports, nothing can be done here.

With regard to the economic aspect, let's also reiterate that the 15% allocations that the State grants to the Collective Decentralized Territories are late in coming, as they refer to their communal income to finance certain urgent projects necessary for the well-being of the community. Despite Decree N°2023/405 of September 06, 2023 fixing the distribution of the general decentralization allocation for the 2023 financial year and those of previous years, municipal magistrates in Cameroon are still experiencing enormous challenges due to the slowness with which these funds are made available. Faced with this situation, some local elected officials still feel that the State does not respect the principles dictated by the decentralization consensus. One local councilor added to this point of view, suggesting that:

The problem of finances in our communes is ambiguous. Sometimes it's the result of mismanagement on the part of local officials, and then there are the unfulfilled promises of the State. We sometimes fail to satisfy our populations in terms of drinking water, which is the very essence of life, because of a lack of finance. I can also confirm that in the hinterland, there are communes that are unable to collect the minimum sum of 10 million CFA francs per year. So how do you expect us to cross our arms, can we satisfy a population of 10,000 people with this sum, given that these people pay no taxes, have no economic activities from which

the commune can deduct taxes? The State must really review everything otherwise, it will always be pinned down.

In view of the many constraints that paralyze the free administration of decentralized local authorities in Cameroon, the State's decentralization policy needs to review its operating mechanism and the distribution of tasks and missions assigned to each party.

SPECIFIC FEATURES OF DECENTRALIZATION IN CAMEROON

Questioning the specific nature of decentralization in Cameroon invites us to dwell a little on its operationalization, its purpose and ultimately on the citizen's contribution to the implementation process.

Operationalization of decentralization in Cameroon

Understood as an administrative and political system in which certain decision-making powers and competences of the State are assumed by elected bodies with their own legal personality, authority and resources, decentralization, as it has been observed and announced, is part of a resolution of the new constitution of January 18, 1996. In fact, decentralization brings together three different operations or equations in Cameroon. The first is decentralization, which is a way of organizing the State so that citizen participation, from Cameroon's point of view, can be improved and produce the desired effects. Then there's territorial governance, i.e. how decentralization is managed by involving the decentralizing players, in particular state and government players, and the players who are likely to benefit from the transfer of skills and resources, i.e. the CTDs and citizens, who are at the heart of everything that needs to be done from the decentralizer's point of view, as well as from the point of view of those who benefit from the transferred skills. Finally, the last equation of decentralization is to produce a continuous improvement in the quality of life of the population, which is commonly referred to as territorial development, appropriately called local development in Cameroon.

In his book entitled *Processus de Décentralisation au Cameroun*, Richard NDOUMBE (2020) argues that the operationalization of decentralization in Cameroon contributes to the strategic orientation of local development. This operationalization was magnified by a set of decrees dated December 28, 2021, concerning the standard organization of territorial administration, the distribution of the general decentralization allocation for the 2021 budget year, and the modalities for exercising certain powers transferred by the State to the regions in the areas of urban planning, organization and management of inter-urban public transport, environmental protection, tourism and leisure. According to Jean-François BRISSON (2002), quoted by NDOUMBE (2020), these presidential decrees, while confirming the State's role as operator, also confirm the public authorities' decision to allocate more resources, particularly financial resources, to the operation of regional councils in 2022. These resources should enable decentralization to reach a significant milestone, and decentralized local authorities in general to develop more effectively, with a view to accelerating local development.

Decentralization is an ongoing process in Cameroon. At the commune level, most powers have been transferred. However, it shifts the locus of competence, meaning that if we're in a region or a council, what was done by the administrative authority representing the Head of State in the context of transferred competences is now done by councilors, i.e. mayors. This has two consequences: The first is that the whole system remains in balance from the democratic point of view, i.e. from the point of view of the players. You have the same dualistic territory, i.e. the division and the council, or the region from the regional point of view. You also have the same factorial endowments and the same players who share the territory and value the factorial endowments, and who are undergoing a reorganization of the exercise of certain powers within this territory, whose territory itself remains identical.

Similarly, given their proximity to the local population and the increased decision-making power they are

granted, elected authorities can make decisions just as quickly as decentralized authorities, which are destined to become even more emancipated. The second consequence is that, as these local authorities are elected, they must contribute to the enhancement of social capital so that the local economy can be put in place. The development of social capital is the way to project all local skills so that they produce value and that the effects of synergies enable local authorities to develop. The result is a huge misunderstanding, leading some players to believe that the decentralization process is an opportunity to cut the cake, and that this cake belongs to the Collective Decentralized Territories, which gives the impression of behaving like senior divisional officers and regional governors at the height of their powers. The main thing now is for the population and decentralized authorities to seize the opportunities made available to them, so that local development immediately follows.

Decentralization and Citizenship in Cameroon

Reconstituting the citizen in decentralization policies is an imperative weapon for local development. Indeed, Henry Severin ASSEMBE (2023), speaking on the television channel Vision 4, implied that the State makes citizens understand that they are both the Alpha and the Omega. In other words, the State is there for the citizen, it is at his service, it is his agent and subsequently ensures the control of what the State does and consequently evaluates it. To this effect, the citizen must have the autonomy of thought capable of projecting a vision and discussing it with the government. The government is a missionary figure who orients and inculcates values in knowledge, and in return expects the latter to deliver the expected results of its mission. Decentralization is about reconciling the State with the citizen, i.e. we're starting from the strong statism of the 1960s, with a State that needed to build itself up, sometimes taking account of citizens, exercising State authority without taking the citizen into account. Today, however, we have a State that says that in a world of great liberalism, in a world of strong mediation, in a world of mobilized networks, we need to call on the citizen again, to reconsider his potential so that he can exercise his magistracy as a citizen.

Then, for Lydie NICOLLET (1994), decentralization, also known as the development of local authority responsibilities, at the end of the 70s, had two main themes: firstly, to relieve the central State, which had become hypertrophied, of some of its activities, including those relating to the daily lives of citizens; and secondly, to satisfy the growing demands of local elected representatives, who were less and less willing to put up with prefectural supervision and its various manifestations. NICOLLET (1994) has pointed out that, in the concept of decentralization, democracy appears under the term "new citizenship". The principle behind this form of decentralization is to bring power closer to the citizen, and consequently enable the citizen to play a greater role in local debates on subjects that concern his or her daily life, with officials, decision-makers and financiers who will commit funds drawn directly from the local taxpayer. The aim of this policy was to increase democratic control over decision-making. TCHACONDOH and DEHOUMON (2011) expand on this view by suggesting that, with decentralization, the division of tasks is based on the principle of subsidiarity, leaving major development projects under the responsibility of the central authority and grassroots projects to citizens at grassroots level. This point of view is contested by ASSEMBE (2023) who, in his speech, states:

In Cameroon, the government has given its all, and there's no holding back. Decentralization is about two things: enhancing social capital and developing local economies. Cameroon's current government policy is first and foremost to enhance its social capital. It's a citizens' decision, and in this policy we have two major absentees in the construction of our decentralization; the first concerns citizens, what we call clandestine citizenship. Decentralization is about reconciling the State with the citizens. In other words, we're starting from the strong statism of the 1960s, with a State that needed to build itself up, and that sometimes took citizens into account, exercising State authority without taking the citizen into account. Today, however, we have a State that says that in a world of great liberalism, in a world of strong mediation, in a world of mobilized networks, we need to call on the citizen again, to reconsider his potential so that he can exercise his magistracy as a citizen. What we observe is that the citizen to whom the state

gives all the power, refuses to take that power and refuses to participate in the local development of his community. This refusal is not a refusal of money. It's a fact that no young citizen takes part in the preparation of the State budget, even though this should be a major social movement. Young people have to say to themselves, development by 2035 must come through us, and for that to happen, everything has to be established at grassroots level by youth councils in the communes. The contribution of young people must be a reality, not a utopia or pure illusion.

Although local citizenship has always been a subject of concern, it has long been a matter of prejudice. For BRIQUET and COLLOVALD (1989), local citizenship, once seen as an obstacle, is now perceived as a lever for change, a citizenship of progress and innovation. The latest municipal and legislative elections in Cameroon demonstrate this, with an increasing number of young people taking the reins of local government. These new, dynamic, young elected representatives, who claim to be renovators through their actions, are accepted by public opinion as the bearers of change.

Local development in our communities

Originally, development emerged from a process of biological transformation that revealed a dual dynamic of growth and complexity. Around the 15th century, the noun “development” was used by analogy with the biological sciences to designate the process of growth and complexity of all living beings; development was thus perceived as “a set of mechanisms which, starting from elementary units, build up, in the sense of the individual, increasingly complex wholes acting in relation to one another”. With the Enlightenment, the notion of development appeared to be closely linked to that of progress. CONDORCET (1822), Jean Jacques GABAS et al (2020) discuss the various forms of local development that will enable any society to reach the ultimate phase of its progress.

Local development is defined as an economic and social dynamics, coordinated and driven by individual and collective players – local authorities, economic players, civil society organizations, local services and decentralized State administrations in a given territory. The value of the activities they practice, and to promote them. For these communities, it also means opening up to other areas and groups, putting them in competition with each other and, ultimately, giving citizens back control over their own development projects; it is this principle that enables local populations to aspire to be active and responsible for their own development from now on. In this context of development management and local governance the democratization of decision-making processes at local level requires the transfer of skills, knowledge and know-how to local communities, as well as the authority and resources needed for their involvement in development. Strengthening their capacity and know-how is essential if they are to function and become involved in a participative and responsible way, in response to citizens' concerns and needs.

Marielle TREMBLEY and al (2006) make a similar point, specifying that local development aims to enhance the value of resources by local players organized in partnership to create research, jobs and boost industrialization. In other words, local development is a way out for communities in the face of globalization. In the same vein, Frédéric TESSON (2019) believes that thinking in terms of local development implies starting from a simple hypothesis: the quality of relationships that bind players together in proximity helps to produce new margins for maneuver. This means thinking that space is not subject to purely exogenous dynamics, linked to globalization whose structuring effects are constantly being presented, but that it is set in motion by the men and women who inhabit it and are its actors. Local development can therefore be seen as a process that drives, builds and reinforces local dynamics, enabling a substantial improvement in living together and the well-being of all. Local development thus goes beyond the idea of economic growth, to take its place in the sphere of sustainable development combining economic, social and cultural dimensions, as the pillars of sustainable development.

For Jean-Pierre JAMBES (2003), local development can be seen as the ongoing invention of a social model

adapted to the territory in which it is implemented, and enriched by external experience, which in turn produces innovative experience. Following on from JAMBES (2003), we should note that local development rests on four keys: the territorial anchoring of local development initiatives, understood here as overcoming sectoral logics rather than as a spatial circumscription of decision-making. Territory is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Local development takes many forms: mobilization, citizen involvement,

taking cultural dimensions into account; local development therefore requires the identification of a system of values, beliefs and representations that must act as filters for the implementation of actions on the territory; finally, the adaptation of a complex way of thinking. Development is not a simple logic of reproduction, but a complex, cognitive process in which local players must invest. In view of this local development puts the actor at the heart of the process: the one who takes action and organizes change.

The relationship between decentralization and local development in Cameroon

First of all, for local development to take place there has to be a transfer of powers. In the past, we saw what was known as the centralization of power, which consisted in obtaining authorizations at the central level before carrying out a development project at the local level. The demands of certain political leaders, economic operators and civil society players led the Cameroon government to set up a decentralization system that transfers certain powers to decentralized local authorities, enabling them to initiate development projects at local level without ever having to obtain authorization from the central level or the top hierarchy. Decentralized local authorities do not work alone, but in synergy with the local population, hence the term “local development”. What does this mean? Although the head of the decentralized local authority, who may be the mayor or the president of the region, the region understood here as a decentralized local authority, is the initiator of development projects.

The fact remains that local development is also the responsibility of the people of the local authority, commune or community concerned. In the past, before taking initiatives to improve living conditions in his community, a citizen had to refer to the central level. Now, with the transfer of competences, this individual is called upon to approach the decentralized local authorities, which will mature his or her development project and together execute it, without having to go through the hierarchy at central level. This implies or enables what is known as participatory development. Development may be driven by the mayor, but it's development that concerns all the populations of a community or local authority. This means that citizens, as tax paying members of the community, have the right to participate in the development of their locality.

Secondly, when we talk about local development, we're talking about improving people's living conditions. Improving people's living conditions implies improving public services, improving people's health, improving people's literacy, etc. So the decentralized local authority that oversees or coordinates local development in a community or commune, drives local development, but it's the people who participate. If an average citizen has teaching skills, and knows that these skills can be made available to the local authority, he can simply approach the mayor – he no longer needs to wait to be recruited into the civil service to put his skills at the service of the population. They can approach the mayor, who is empowered by the 2019 Decentralized Local Authorities Code to manage temporary teachers in local schools. This citizen can approach the mayor and tell him about his training in teaching, and the mayor, with the means at his disposal, can recruit this teacher in a school where there is a shortage of teachers. This is his way of participating in local development. This is the case for nurses, and many others in the community.

Furthermore, this action is also visible in agriculture, fish farming and entrepreneurship. We no longer need to submit our files to the ministry to apply for funding, as these skills are now transferred to decentralized local authorities. The transfer of skills in Cameroon is really a task that requires the field, the field here referring to the territory, the land where the individual maintains a close relationship with his living environment.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The misallocation of powers assigned to local authorities and the mismanagement of their resources are problems that are crippling local development in our communities. Indeed, Cameroon's decentralized local authorities have the full right to create wealth and generate income, which in turn helps to empower the local population. However, since the promulgation of the law establishing the General Code of Decentralized Territorial Authorities, Cameroon's councils have struggled to take full advantage of the powers transferred to them. For some, it's a question of financial resources, while for others it's a question of total transfer of decision-making power. These perceptions can be explained by the fact that Cameroon's decentralized local authorities do not have sufficient revenues to promote local development.

Sectoral reform policies and the planning of local development policies at regional and communal level are two tools for supporting decentralization, the guarantee of local development in Cameroon. For there to be local development, there has to be a transfer of powers. In the past, we witnessed what was known as the centralization of power, which consisted in obtaining authorizations at the central level before carrying out a development project at the local level. The demands of certain political leaders, economic operators and civil society players have led the Cameroonian government to set up a decentralization system that transfers certain powers to decentralized local authorities, enabling them to initiate development projects at local level without ever having to go through central or top-level authorizations.

Although these powers have been transferred to decentralized local authorities, they don't work alone; their work must be carried out in synergy with the community's populations. Hence the term local development, what does this mean? Although the head of the decentralized local authority, who is the mayor or the president of the region, is the initiator of the development project, the region is understood here as a decentralized local authority. However, local development is also the responsibility of the local population. In the past, before a citizen could take initiatives to improve living conditions in his community, he had to refer to the central level. Now, with the transfer of competencies, the citizen is called upon to approach decentralized local authorities, which will mature his or her development project and carry it out together, without having to go through the hierarchy at central level. This implies or enables what we call participatory development. Development may be driven by the local elite, but its development concerns all the populations of a community or local authority.

The transfer of skills in Cameroon is truly a task that requires the land, the land here referring to the territory, land where the individual maintains a close relationship with his living environment. From an economic point of view, agriculture in general among the Maka is an essential part of the economy, especially the recovery economy. Trade, fish farming and animal husbandry are also part of the economy. In terms of infrastructure, we don't expect the State to create the infrastructure; once the infrastructure has been created, the local populations and elected representatives take charge of erecting the buildings.

Despite the constraints faced by our local authorities, decentralization is a system that enables the population as a whole to participate more fully in the management of local affairs, and in the efficient, participatory development of communities, without undermining or calling into question the activities of local populations. The democratic model on which this decentralization is based on an optimal system of collective participation; in other words, it is a model that takes into account the activities carried out by these communities in the management of their own affairs. This implies that decentralization can also be a model that fosters closer ties between the governed and administrators, as well as between administrators and local elected representatives. In other words, the decentralization process, with its emphasis on local community participation in development, goes hand in hand with the activities carried out by the communities themselves. As long as decentralization is based on the model of representative democracy, it

enables and encourages closer community ties. With the legislative, municipal and, above all, regional elections organized in Cameroon in 2018, the State has enabled populations to delegate the power to manage their sub-divisions, divisions and regional affairs to local elected representatives, who will be responsible for ensuring the smooth running and improved living conditions of their local populations, providing and meeting basic needs, placing the average citizen at the center of all development concerns and issues, and financing projects driven by these citizens who lack the means.

Decentralization's contribution to local governance requires the encouragement of social equity, the responsibility of group elders and the effective participation of the entire social stratum in development projects and programs. As positive as it is, it aims to put in place strategies to support local communities in their activities, which they see as levers for development. It also promotes dialogue, understanding and the equitable sharing of certain tasks, as well as the management of public affairs at all levels. In its singular dimension, it is an expression of solidarity between local and foreign communities. It is therefore proof of the socio-political consideration given by local communities to the need to reject discrimination, banish inequality and promote harmonious development. To this end, the State's contribution to this process has led to the solid economic emergence of local communities in Cameroon. It is sometimes tempting to say that decentralization is a sine qua non for local communities to develop themselves through activities that provide them with economic means. Indeed, since 2010, Cameroon has been subject to structural adjustment policies, which stipulate that each community must develop through development plans and programs to reduce poverty, promote the secondary sector and integrate young people, the driving force behind tomorrow's recovery, into local activities.

Moreover, decentralization in the context of social equity in Cameroon has allowed the preservation of a minimum threshold of equality between citizens and between leaders of civil society who work for their social integration in all local public activities. With regard to the law establishing the code of decentralized local authorities of 2019, it clearly appears that local authorities can be associated with the implementation of national solidarity, mutual aid and assistance in terms of financing micro-projects and subsidies that local authorities can grant to economic operators and economic investors in local communities.

However, the idea that decentralization promotes social equity may be fading. Indeed, it may happen that the central State which transfers powers to local authorities is impartial in the distribution of resources and sometimes tries to hold these CTDs captive for its personal interest. This situation can therefore hamper the nature of relations between local authorities and consequently limit the emancipation of local populations.

CONCLUSION

Decentralization in Cameroon is a process that ensures and nurtures the emergence of its immediate neighbor, local development. With the effective transfer of powers and the acquisition of financial resources overdue, Cameroon's decentralized local authorities, through their elected representatives, are helping to improve the living conditions of the population in a number of areas: socio-economic, institutional and even political. For this reason, decentralization can be seen as a driving force for local development. However, it is clear from the outset that these local authorities suffer from the fact that they are still marginalized by the central government which until now has exercised hegemony over the management, construction and implementation of local development projects and programs.

To remedy this much-debated problem, it would be preferable for the State to give Decentralized Territorial Communities free access to administer themselves, and to run their communities according to the opinions, views and desires of their communities. Local development that does not take into account consultations with local communities, that does not refer to the endogenous knowledge of local communities, is a development doomed to failure. Anything that comes from above, or is dictated from above, is not

synonymous with success for local communities. Decentralization as a process of skills transfer in Cameroon is nothing but a pure illusion and deception on the part of the central government vis-à-vis local authorities who, in their respective missions, are trying to get local populations out of the rut.

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