Equity and Social Inclusion in Municipal Development in the Northwest Region of Cameroon

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Abstract:*Despite the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS), efforts on leaving no one and no place behind remain insufficient, in terms of policy design, implementation and review. This has more far-reaching consequences at the municipal levels, especially in a decentralized state like Cameroon. Based on this, and from an organizational perspective, this investigation was undertaken in alignment with the strategic plan of the Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Services (CBCHJS) to improve its strategy in working with councils for optimal development outcomes. The study used an institutional development framework to underscore ways in which the meaning attached to equity and social inclusion shape 'the rules of the game' and, through these, the delivery of programs and services in Bamenda III Council. Data was collected from four sources with in-depth semi-structured interviews from major stakeholders in the municipal council administration. Results show that institutional development in the Bamenda III municipality is organized around actors that fall under four broad categories: government ministerial bodies, functional ministering bodies, technical and financial bodies, state support structures, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international NGOs, local civil society groups and individuals with no shared understanding of the concepts of equity and social inclusion as conveyed by the SDGs. Hence, institutional development is emergent out of complex struggles between actors who come into it with different and differing meanings of equity and social inclusion, and different and differing expectations, values, and interest. The study recommends a documentation and use of 'good practices' which promote equity and social inclusion as well as capacity building in partnership with stakeholders like the CBCHS on the SDGs and its underlying principles*

1. INTRODUCTION

The 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as a universal framework, represents a call for a transformative global agenda (Butcher et al., 2021). Its emphasis on 'leaving no person and no place behind' is a significant shift from the MDGs, which were sometimes criticized for targeting the 'low hanging fruit' of easier to reach populations, leaving behind those with the most complex and intersectional vulnerability (Stuart & Woodroffe, 2016). Likewise, the development of the SDGs has been applauded as a transparent, equitable and inclusive process, drawing together diverse actors through parallel, interrelated work streams, including representatives from across civil society, grassroots groups, local and national governments, local and international NGOs, Faith-Based organizations, academics, and the private sector (Klopp &Petretta, 2017; Cociña et al., 2019). In this logic, the SDGs represent a crucial global consensus towards shared development goals – adding critical new dimensions such as the reduction of inequalities (Goal 10), and sustainable urbanization (Goal 11). As such, the 2030 Agenda both shapes, and is shaped by, the ways in which it is interpreted and put into action by multilateral agencies, national and local governments, and non-government and civil society organizations. Crucially, then, the 2030 Agenda may also reflect diverse and potentially conflicting conceptions of sustainable development that exist between stakeholders and goals at multiple levels (Butcher et al., 2021). Based on the foregoing, this investigation unpacks the meaning municipal councils give to the concepts of equity and social inclusion and reflects on how it shapes the 'rules of the game', and through these, the development of programs and services. This study thus provides realistic recommendations to inform development managers seeking to support municipal councils achieve equitable and inclusive communities.

Background

A discussion of the background here will focus on the historical context of Cameroon's administrative system, the institutional context, the administrative and the organizational background. This sets the pace for an understanding of both the context and the problem under study.

Historical context

Cameroon has undergone three historical sequences of administration ranging from the German colonization from 1884 to 1914; and then, an associated French and British colonization from 1919 to 1960. In 1961, the nation became a federal republic consisting of East Cameroon (the francophone part) and West Cameroon (the Anglophone part). Like many other sub-Saharan countries, colonial Cameroon had decentralized entities and authorities, such as local governments, 'customary authorities' with delegated responsibilities, and divisional and district officers representing the central government. In West Cameroon, indirect rule principles as established by the British had a decentralizing sub-stratum, with the 'native administration' covered by a 'Native Authority' (Finken 1996; Stark 1980), while in East Cameroon, one could find a form of local government called the 'commune' (council). The former had control over natural resources while the latter did not. In 1972, after 12 years of independence, Cameroon's first president, Ahmadou Ahidjo signed a presidential decree which changed Cameroon's federal system to a more centralized system in what was known as the United Republic of Cameroon. This revolution led to a new administrative division of the country, with provinces, division, sub-divisions, and districts. These administrative units set up a pyramidal structure, which conveyed the state's authority downwards from the central government. However, with the successive crises that the African continent has experienced; political crisis, economic crisis, social crisis and the environmental crisis of the Sahel, centralized governance entered into a difficult context characterized by many disturbances, including violent popular demands for change, and state paralysis (Bratton& van de Walle 1997; Buitenhuijs& Thiriot 1995). These uprising and incessant demands for change stemmed from the fact that centralized governments adopted a top-bottom approach to governance and community development strategy which produced policies, programs and projects that were largely prescriptive in nature and hardly reflected the aspirations of the local populace. The Cameroonian government eventually began to realise that they could not achieve any meaningful development with the heavily centralized system. The 2004 decentralization laws were therefore the response aimed at relieving the problem of the central government by ceding some of its powers to decentralized units, in an attempt to initiate a more bottom-up approach to governance and development (Saliba &Alasambom, 2020). This historical context justifies the complexity, difference and emergent nature of institutional development.

Institutional Context

From an institutional perspective, the main laws governing local government in Cameroon are Law No. 2004/17 on the Orientation of Decentralization, Law No. 2004/18 on Rules Applicable to Councils, and Law No. 2004/19 on Rules Applicable to Regions. Cameroon is divided into ten administrative regions. Regions are in turn divided into divisions, which are further divided into sub-divisions, which correspond to the 374 local government councils. The Ministry of Decentralization and Local Government is responsible for government policy on territorial administration and local government. Of the 374 local government councils, 360 are municipal councils and 14, city councils. Council responsibility for service delivery includes utilities, town planning, health, social services and primary education (Commonwealth Local Government Forum, 2019). All councils are headed by a directly elected mayor who is supported by a team of councillors; their number depends on the population size. The council can appoint commissions to work on any relevant issues, and membership can include non-councillors and must be convened during the council's fist year. In the light of the foregoing, the rural development field in Cameroon now includes several institutional actors that fall under four broad categories, namely government ministerial bodies, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international NGOs. Municipal councils occupy the lowest rung of the government administrative ladder in Cameroon and are responsible for executing local development projects, delivering basic social services and executing other tasks aimed at ameliorating the living conditions of citizens within their respective jurisdictions. (Ambe, 2011). This variate of the context portrays municipal councils both as 'big players' – institutions that provide the framework for municipal development on the one hand, and on the other hand, as 'organizations' with the responsibility to get things done. Whichever identity the council, assumes, its actions take place within a certain administrative context worth understanding as presented below.

2. ADMINISTRATIVE CONTEXT

The Northwest Region is one of two English speaking regions of Cameroon. It has an estimated population of over two million inhabitants and a disability prevalence of 10.5% (ICED, 2014).

Administratively, there are 7 divisions and 34 sub-divisions, with each sub-division representing a municipality. The metropolitan city of Bamenda is the regional capital of the Northwest region and host to a city council and three municipal councils (Bamenda I, II, and III). With its urbanization has come disparities in access to infrastructure, services, participation, and jobs, thereby creating pockets of vulnerable urban communities (World Bank, 2008). This calls for municipal councils to develop institutions that support equity and social inclusion as a way of equalizing opportunities for a cross section of their population living in the margins of society.

Organizational Context

From an organizational perspective, this investigation is undertaken in alignment with the strategic plan of the Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Services (CBCHS). The CBCHS was established in 1936 by the Baptist Missionaries from the USA as the medical arm of the church. It later transitioned to local ownership in 1975 offering holistic healthcare services at facility and community levels. It grew exponentially to become the country's second largest healthcare provider after the government. Over the years, CBCHS has developed into a multi-faceted organization working with a wide range of stakeholders to offer quality health care and disability inclusive development services to millions of people in a holistic manner at both facility and community settings. As part of its disability inclusive development portfolio, in 2015, CBCHS established memoranda of understanding with 24 municipal councils in the Northwest region of Cameroon. This partnership allows CBCHS to liaise with her foreign partners in supporting municipal councils engage with and translate the values of the SDGs at the micro-level of community development. By investigating how the meanings municipal councils attached to equity and social inclusion shape 'the rules of the game' and, through these, the delivery of programs and services, CBCHS will improve its strategy in working with councils for optimal development outcomes. To achieve this, this development management investigation is taking place within the theoretical context of institutional development.

Research Problem

Equity and social inclusion are normative concepts with a long history in religious, cultural and philosophical traditions and are concerned with equality, fairness and social justice, topics which are also the subject of fierce debate among political philosophers. Power, politics and good governance on the other hand are and highly contested concepts intricately related with equity and social inclusion. As such, there will always be debates about the precise meanings of equity and social inclusion, and it is likely that several conceptions will compete to be the 'correct' definition.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasis an inclusive global development and demand a deep engagement with urban inequalities (Butcher et al., 2021). Drawing from the above, leaving no one behind, and no place behind lies at the heart of the 2030 agenda. However, in spite of the frequent use and reference to this principle, focused efforts to leave no one behind remain insufficient, in terms of policy design, implementation and review and have far more reaching consequences at municipal levels especially in a decentralized state. This explains why Schulze-Boing, (2010) placed the responsibility to develop and implement active inclusion policies on local authorities. He posited that economic and social transformations are challenging cities and regions and new strategies are needed to adapt to a changing environment and improve the quality and effectiveness of social services. That notwithstanding, systemic and persistent forms of discrimination have created cities and towns that don't work for everyone. When not promptly addressed, these issues grow and become more difficult to resolve. By applying an equity and inclusion lens that addresses gender differences, discrimination, marginalization as well as other social inequities (income disparities, ageism etc.), municipalities can better respond to the aspirations of ALL people.

Municipalities are the level of government closest to people and the decisions they make have profound impact on policy, service delivery, civic engagement, and community life. Cameroon created the Ministry of Decentralization and Local Development in March 2018. By doing so, the Government is supporting the decentralization and self-determined local development that has been anchored in its constitution since 1996. With the support of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Decentralization has already realized a fundamental institutional reform: the General Code for decentralised local authorities put in place in 2019 with the aim of increasing participation of citizens and community-based organizations in municipal development and decision-making processes (GIZ, 2018). Nevertheless, achieving equity in access to opportunities and inclusive municipal development

depends unavoidably on: (1) the meanings and values municipal councils give to the concepts of equity and inclusion; (2) the rules governing municipal development; (3) and the big players making such rules.

Within the framework of the SDGs, equity and inclusion in municipalities is imperative. Unfortunately, systemic and persistent forms of discrimination (Butcher et al., 2021), point to the fact that, the current understanding of the different and differing meanings given to the concepts of 'equity' and 'inclusion'; the different and differing agendas and rules defined to achieve development that is equitable and inclusive is an effective starting point.Therefore, as a first step, this study attempts to establish what 'the rules' are. Given that quite often it's not even clear what the rules are, thereby making it very difficult to move it to the next stage which is ... Are the rules sufficient? Are they taking account of everybody's needs?

It is expected that to understand equity and inclusion in municipal development, from an institutional development perspective which has been addressed above, this study will unravel the perspectives municipal councils give to the concepts of equity and inclusion and provide realistic recommendations to inform development managers seeking to support municipal councils achieve equitable and inclusive communities. The following research questions will serve as a guide.

Research Questions

Institutions as Meanings

1.   What are the meanings attached to equity and social inclusion by services of the Bamenda III councils?

Institutions as Rules

2.   What are the 'rules of the game' governing the delivery of services and programs in the Bamenda III municipality?

Institutions as Big players:

3. Who are the key players in setting the rules, challenging the rules and what power do they have?

3. THEORETICAL CONTEXT

In the words of Crewe and Axelby (2013), 'the meaning of anything interesting is usually unclear' and 'development management' is no exception. 'Development management is the management of interventions in the process of social change in the context of conflicts of goals, values and interest' (Thomas, 1996, pp. 101–3). The working through these conflicts to achieve social change is intrinsically political. While there are several definitions of politics, seen in the light of Hughes and Hutchison (2012) politics is understood as 'entrenched struggles between different groups emerging from structurally determined inequalities in the distribution of power and resources within a society. In their analysis, two groups are identified: those that have an interest in maintaining the status quo and those that have interest in change'. Inferring from the aforementioned, institutional development from a simplistic perspective can be understood as 'changing institutions.' Three theoretical perspectives of institutional development that underpin this investigation are highlighted here.

1.Institution as 'the rules of the game'

Douglass North, the Nobel Laureate, made clear that institutions are the rules of the game in a society…Characteristically, each rule performs a distinct function. But its effectiveness hinges on being complemented and supplemented by others. Together, the rules form a hierarchic structure of mutually supporting directives that influence jointly and can impact decisively the development of nations.' (Van der Linden, 2001). However, sometimes 'directives' are 'mutually supporting', sometimes they are not. Other times, rules do overlap, as is better suggested by Leftwich and Sen (2011) when they say 'Social, political and economic institutions overlap and affect each other – and they seldom relate to isolated spheres of human action and interaction. Change in one institutional sphere will impact on other institutional spheres.' Institutions in this sense – as rules – provide guidance as to what people should do, how they should behave, the paths their lives should follow and while these rules are not always written down, they are backed by sanctions for not complying with them (Brett, 2000, p. 18). Appraised from this point of view, institutional development means changes

in the rules, attempts to bring in new rules, attempts to make the old rules more appropriate, challenges to the old rules, and shifts in social norms.

2.Institutions as meanings and values

Engberg-Pedersen (1997, pp. 183–4) emphasizes that 'institutions, as well as constituting rules that govern rights and responsibilities, also 'contribute to shaping people's understanding of social meaning and order'. Institutions can also be understood as conveyors of shared meanings and values. In order to behave according to spoken or unspoken 'rules', their meaning has to be understood, individually and collectively. The reality of institutional development, is typically that meanings and values are not shared by all those involved in it. Seen in this light, institutional development is the emergence and acceptance of new sets of meanings, attempts to reinforce established meanings, challenges to established meanings, and the promotion of new values.

3.Institutions as 'big players'

Institutions set the rules for development, they provide frameworks of meaning – structures – within which they expect other actors to negotiate (Hulme, 2010, pp. 81–2). As big players, institutions establish the 'dominant orthodoxy' of development. However, this investigation recognizes that the dominant orthodoxy is an arena of constant struggle, as individuals and agencies challenge the dominant norms and values, and work outside the dominant principles and practices. As a consequence, the dominant orthodoxy undergoes constant change. Understood from this angle, institutional development is the introduction of new policies and programs to 'deliver' development, the emergence of new big players, the creation of new alliances between big players, and challenges to the power and authority of the established big players.Against this backdrop, this investigation proposes three concepts that define key qualities of the process of institutional development. These three concepts are: complexity, difference, and emergence.

Complexity: this quality is rooted in the reality that institutional development involves many interested parties (from multiple field and multiple levels [micro, meso, macro]) whose relationships make up a complex web. *Difference* is embedded in the reality that, all the interested parties come with their own specific identities (expressed in terms of difference in interests, values, agendas, cultures, and power), arising out of – and contributing to – their own specific histories. *Emergence* is rooted in the reality that institutional development emerges from the interactions between the interested parties, which constantly change the state of play in ways which can never be fully anticipated or predicted; and the reality that new parties might enter the process at any point in time, setting in motion new dynamics such as the following: uncertainty, which has to be lived with; unintended consequences, which may be variously judged good or bad; and unevenness, which reflects the specificities of different contexts.

4. METHODOLOGY

The vastness, complexity, and depth of development management investigations and research does not allow for compartmentalization within the construct of anyone "methodology." It seems intuitive that qualitative methodologies suit the multifarious nature of development management investigations given its suitability to understand a particular phenomenon from the participants' perspectives (Rosenthal, 2016). This drive to understand is what gives qualitative inquiry, and specifically case study research, its métier. Therefore, due to its ability to illuminate relationships within "complex social phenomena" (Yin, 2014, p.4), the case study methodology was selected for this research. Moral dimension, relationship and learning constituted key principles underpinned in this methodology and informed the selection of research participants and guided interaction during data collection.

The Case

Within the framework of a case study approach, the study focused on a single case study. As argued by Thomas (2007b), the point of choosing a single case to study is to explain how and why something happens by looking in some detail at the interrelationships involved and the inner workings of the case to be studied. Premised on one of his rationales for single case studies – 'The one next door' (Thomas, 2007). In this study, the subject of the case study was an organization, the Bamenda III municipal council. Key interest was in the detailed working of the Bamenda III municipal council, and there was no justification to differentiate the council from other councils in the Northwest Region.

Hence, this project studied Bamenda III Municipal Council on the basis of ease of access which is anchored on the existence of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Services (CBCHS) currently shares with the council with a focus to promote inclusive development with funding from Australian Aid and CBM.

Data collection strategy and Population

Data for this study was collected from four sources - through Key informant interview, focus group discussion, desk review and self-administered questionnaire. The nonprobability sampling methods were used to recruit participants for the aforementioned data collection techniques. Two sets of participants were purposefully selected: (1) participants for key informant interviews; and (2) participants for focus group discussion.

8 out of 21 council staff were recruited for the FGDs. There are 5 services that make up the council. Each service contributed the following number of participants: general affairs services (2), economic and financial services (1), technical services for regional development (1), hygiene, sanitation and environmental services (2), and social and cultural services (2).

4 participants were selected for key informant interviews including the mayor in his role as elected official and political head of the council; the Secretary General, in his role as head of administration for the council; and the Council Development Officer (CDO), in his role as technical staff responsible for council development planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The one other was: the Regional President of the United Cities and Councils of Cameroon (UCCC), These four people represented what Hanlon refers to as 'the Woman who Knows' (Hanlon, 2007).

In summary, 52 participants took part in the study. Four participants took part in key informant interviews, three of which are key staff of Bamenda III Council and one, the regional president of the United Cities and Councils of Cameroon (UCCC). In the focus group discussion, eight participants – all council staff took part; and in the self-administered questionnaire, 51 participants (29 council staff and 22 councillors) participated. In terms of male/female representation, in the key informant interview, the ratio was 1:1; focus group discussion, 1:3; and in the self-administered questionnaire, 1:1. 26% of the participants in the self-administered questionnaires reported a one form of disability or the other, ranging from moderate to severe. All participants identified with Christianity as their spiritual identity.

Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded and transcribed with a focus on content, excluding pauses and irrelevant remarks. Data collected through self-administered questionnaires and document review was transferred to MS. Excel for review and cleaning. Data collected from all sources was categorized in to emerging themes. In this process, statements that stroke the researcher as being significant and worthy of being quoted were documented. Attention was placed on identifying shared meaning among participants. After categorization, data was evaluated for thematic commonalities. In recognition of the complexities and contradictions inherent in development management investigations, to achieve contextual validity, attention was paid to both quotes that conformed and quotes that contradicted a particular line of argument. Rigour was ensured through triangulation and documentation considering multiple data sources and confrontation with empirical literature.

Considering that Information can only be understood with reference to the circumstances in which it was collected. That is, 'what we know is shaped by how we know it' (Thomas, 2007). Aware of the subjective judgement inherent in case studies, the study was keen in documenting sources of verification. These include, audio records of interviews, diary notes and scanned copies of key documents reviewed.

Study Findings

This section presents findings from the analysis of data with reference to the research questions.

Institution as shared meanings

Inquiry on the meaning of equity and social inclusion was directed at all 51 participants. There were differences in meanings given to the two concepts.

Equity

The following meanings of equity emerged:

- 53% of participants argued that equity means 'each individual or group of people should be given the same resources or opportunities to reach an outcome'

- 37 % maintained that equity means 'each person or group has different circumstances and should be allocated the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome'.

- 4% posited that equity means 'each individual or group should be given resources or opportunities based on their relationship with leaders.

- 6% others did not respond to the question.

Social inclusion

The following meanings of social inclusion emerged:

- 84% said social inclusion mean "a condition in which individuals and groups can access the range of available opportunities, services and resources and contribute to planning and decision making.

- 12% maintained that social inclusion means 'improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity'

- 4% opined that social inclusion means 'making all groups of people within a society feel valued and important'

While the meanings given to equity are different, the dominant understanding strongly equates equity is 'equality' as stated by the Mayor – *"Equity is a situation where every- body involved is on the same platform and there are no disparities";* the Secretary General *"when I think of equity, what comes to mind is treating everybody the same irrespective of their status, gender, their class, whatever, excluding discrimination."* The practice of this perspective of equity as equality was reflected in a media report published Friday 30th, Apr 2021 at 12:30 on the council's website under the title *Distribution of Agric Incentives to CIGs and Farmers.* The reporter noted that… *"40 beneficiaries of 20 men and 20 women applauded the effort of the Mayor for his involvement in promoting Rural Development".* The emphasis on equal number of male and female farmers speaks to the council's understanding and practice of equity.An unexpected perspective of equity that emerged from self-administered questionnaires is its association to access to opportunities and resources on the basis of one's relation with leaders.

Unlike the meaning given to equity, the emergent view of social inclusion among participants leaned significantly towards social inclusion as "a condition in which individuals and groups can access the range of available opportunities, services and resources and contribute to planning and decision making". Another view places emphasis on the involvement of disadvantaged groups. An interesting, but less popular notion of social inclusion is that of making all groups in the community valued and important. That, is promoting a sense of belonging among communes…" "when I talk of social inclusion, you get to involve everyone to taking part, feel a sense of involvement… involvement like I am part of this process…we have to leave out stigma, discrimination from every strata of society whether poorest to the richest, uneducated to the most educated, just carrying everybody along" – *head of civil status registry, Bamenda III Council.*An interesting observation made from the foregoing is that the global understanding and meaning of equity and social inclusion conveyed in the SDGs is not necessarily shared downstream.

Influence of meanings

To makes sense of the influence of the aforementioned views of equity and social inclusion on the rules of the game and by extension, the delivery of programs and services in Bamenda III municipality, the following emerging themes came up from three dimensions: the social, economic, and political were noted.

Social: once every year, the Bamenda III Council organizes inclusive mass legalization of marriages for couples in its municipality who for one reason or the other were not able to do so. The importance

of this move cannot be deemphasized as it equalizes opportunities that come with having a marriage certificate for lots of poor families who otherwise may never have. The council has also appointed focal points for: disability inclusion and gender and child protection. These focal points are charged with the mandate to mainstream the rights of women, children, and people with disabilities in decision making, and community development. Municipal order No 007/BIIIC/2021 bearing on the provision of a sign language interpreter for public events in the Bamenda III Council. In 2020, the council took part in reorganizing the community of people with disabilities and putting in place of a recognized Organization of Persons with Disabilities (OPD) to serve as a dialogue structure. Through this structure, the council undertakes regular consultations to ensure universal accessibility is observed in its projects and services. The engagement of traditional authorities and councilors to profile and update a database with information on people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups in view of facilitating equalization of opportunities is a remarkable move to facilitate inclusion. In addition, a measure of equity is seen in the decision of the council to provide reasonable accommodation to the elderly, pregnant and lactating mothers, and women as well as people with disabilities requiring official documents from the civil status registry.

"We have taken a commitment to financially support the Regional Inclusive Education Resource Centre as a way of facilitating participation in education for children with disabilities". – Mayor, Bamenda III Council.

Economic: The council is currently implementing the World Bank Social Safety Net project and was sensitive to the need for economic equity and social inclusion by including youths, women and persons with disabilities. On yearly basis, holiday Jobs are provided to youths with a focus on women and youths with disabilities. Further to this, the conception and putting in place of micro projects takes into consideration the needs of women.

Political: the council invites leaders of vulnerable groups to take part in council sessions but are not allowed to vote. There is regular consultation with vulnerable groups during the identification, design and implementation of priority projects.

Institutions as 'rules of the game'

Here, the focus is on identifying the 'rules of the game' governing the delivery of program and services in the Bamenda III municipality. It emerged through document review and interviews that the rules of governance in municipal develop are defined at the national (macro), regional (meso) and municipal (micro) levels.

At the national level, Section 55 (2) of the 1996 constitution of Cameroon states that regional and local authorities shall have administrative and financial autonomy and shall be freely administered by elected councils. The decentralization process currently relies on an expanded legal mechanism comprising:

- The three laws referred to as decentralization laws promulgated on 22 July 2004 (Law No. 2004/17 on the orientation of decentralization, Law No. 2004/18 to lay down rules applicable to councils and Law No. 2004/19 to lay down rules applicable to regions);

- Two laws of a financial and fiscal nature, namely, on the one hand, the Law of 10 July 2009 on the financial regime of RLAs and, on the other hand, the Law of 15 December 2009 on the local fiscal regime;

- Other laws covering various fields: town planning, regional development, civil status registration, elections etc;

- Several regulatory instruments, in particular those signed to specify conditions for the exercise of various powers devolved by the State to municipal councils and city councils, particularly in the economic, healthcare, social, educational, sports and cultural development fields, as well as those of distribution of the common decentralization fund;

- Many decrees and circulars that regulate the decentralization process. (MINDDEVEL, 2019)

At the regional level, the 'rules of the game' identified were mainly 'administrative approvals' issued by state administrators (representatives) including the governor, senior divisional officers and divisional officers of decisions and resolutions made by municipal councils. For example:

Article 70 of Law number 17 of the 2004 decentralization laws states that:

(1)   In addition to the disposition of articles 68, resolutions taken by local councils in the following domains – are subject to a preliminary approval from the representative of the state:

- Initial budgets, annexes, non-budget accounts and special authorizations for expenditure;

- loans and sureties;

- International cooperation conventions;

- Housing and real estate;

- Convention on the execution or control of tenders beyond the competence limit stipulated by the law;

- Award of tenders which extend beyond the mandate of the municipal council;

- The recruitment of certain personnel following modalities stipulated by law.

At the municipal level, the 'rules of the game' consist of municipal orders, council notices and public notices signed by elected Mayors, council deliberations voted by elected councilors, and the council development plan developed and adopted by councilors. For example:

- Deliberation N° B3C/010/MWE/2015, authorizing the Mayor of the Bamenda III council to sign a Memorandum of understanding with the Socio-Economic Empowerment of peoples with disabilities program (SEEPD), Article 1 of this deliberation stipulates that the Councilors of Bamenda III Council sitting in the Midway Evaluation Session on the 14th of August 2015, at the Bamenda III Council hall deliberates as follows: *"That the Mayor be empowered to sign a Memorandum of understanding with the Socio-Economic Empowerment of peoples with Disabilities for collaboration in achieving comprehensive Inclusive Development with emphasis on Disability Inclusive Development in the Bamenda III Municipality"*.

Thus, the 'rules of the game' shaping development in Bamenda III municipality consist of a particularly rich and extensive legal framework from the central administration, and also deliberations, municipal orders, and circulars signed by regional administrative authorities and the mayor in implementation of the laws and decrees.

Institutions as Big Players

The focus here was to identify the institutional actors defining the 'rules of the game' governing the delivery of services and program in the Bamenda III municipality, their interaction and power play. It emerged that institutional development in the Bamenda III municipality is organized around actors that fall under four broad categories, namely government ministerial bodies, functional monitoring bodies, technical and financial bodies, state support structures, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international NGOs, local civil society groups and individuals. For the purpose of this analysis, these actors have been organized under 3 major levels based on then scale at which their actions are felt. This includes the national Macro), regional (meso), and municipal (micro). The most notable of these institutional actors, and major roles in the municipal development field are summarized in Table 1

Table1.*Institutional actors in the Bamenda III, Municipal Development Landscape.*

N°	Institutional Actor	Function
National Level		
1.	The President of the Republic	Defines the Nation's policy and, as such, sets the decentralization guidelines;
2.	The Prime Minister, Head of Government	Chairs the National Decentralization Board (NDB). The services under his authority, as part of coordination of government action, ensure that decentralization is taken into account in sectoral policies;
3.	The Minister of Decentralization and Local Development	Responsible for formulating, monitoring and evaluating the decentralization and local development policy. In addition, he chairs the Inter-Ministerial Local Services Committee (ILSC), the National Local Finance Committee (CONAFIL) and the Inter-Ministerial Regional and Local Authorities Cooperation Commission (CICOD).

Nᵒ	Institutional Actor	Function
4.	National Decentralization Board (NDB):	It is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of decentralization.
5.	Inter-ministerial Committee on Local Services (ILSC)	To ensure the preparation and monitoring of devolution of powers and resources to Regional Local Authorities (RLAs)
6.	National Local Finance Committee (CONAFIL)	It is responsible for mobilization of the revenue of regional authorities as well as the proper management of local finances
7.	Inter-ministerial Commission on Regional and Local Authorities Cooperation (CICOD)	To enable the Government, regulate, monitor and evaluate cooperation between Cameroon's RLAs and foreign local councils.
8.	Special Council Support Fund for Mutual Assistance (FEICOM)	To provide financial and technical support to RLAs
9.	National Community-Driven Development Program (PNDP).	To provide financial and technical support to RLAs
10.	National School for Local Government Administration (NASLA).	Training of local government administrators and personnel
11.	United Councils and Cities of Cameroon (UCCC)	To foster decentralized cooperation among councils for exchange of values, experiences, and good practices.
12.	Programs under German Cooperation (GTZ) Programs under French Cooperation	Provision of technical and financial support.
13.	Cooperation with the African Development Bank (AfDB)	Provision of financial grants through the government.
Regional Level		
14.	Governor, Senior Divisional Officers and Divisional Officers.	Supervise and monitor the implementation of the law
15.	Regional Council President and the Regional Council (deliberative body)	Operational implementation of the decentralization law
16.	City Mayor and the City Council (deliberative body)	Operational implementation of the decentralization law
17.	Regional Delegates of Ministerial Departments.	Provision of technical and regulatory support to councils in the implementation of their decentralized functions.
Municipal level		
18.	Mayors and Municipal Council (deliberative body)	Responsible for the administrative function of the council.
19.	International and local NGOs and humanitarian organizations	Collaborate with councils to implement specific development and humanitarian actions
20.	Civil society actors	Involve in activism, advocacy, and demand generations in specific thematic areas.
21.	Individuals	Payment of taxes, participation in community development activities and consumption of services.

Source: MINDDEVEL, 2019

Municipal councils occupy the lowest rung of the government administrative ladder in Cameroon. They are charged with the responsibility of executing local development projects, delivering basic social services and executing other tasks aimed at ameliorating the living conditions of citizens within their respective jurisdictions. Within the framework of the country's current decentralization initiative, the state has devolved special powers and resources to enable the councils discharge their obligations. In theory, this framework further permits the councils to augment their resource pool from other sources, such as their local residents, civil society organizations, regional and local state or private institutional bodies, as well as international agents of development. However, in practice, councils, especially those based in rural areas, have no independent sources of revenue and depend on paltry funds from the central government to function.

The WGI [World Governance Indicators] authors define governance as the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised (World Bank Institute, 2008, p. 1). Judging from the function of each actors, its informed to state that the actors at national and regional levels presented in table 1 above play a significant part in setting the rules for development, they provide frameworks of meaning – structures – within which they expect other actors to negotiate – including the Bamenda III municipal council. This is evident in Article 70 of Law number 17 of the 2004 decentralization laws cited above. The article clearly indicates that the 'rules of the game' defined by the mayor or its representative council have to be submitted for the specific approval of the state representative before they become enforceable. This supervisory authority may be, for different purposes, the divisional officer, the senior divisional officer, the governor of a region, or the Minister of Decentralization and Local Development. This poses a very serious problem for municipal development for a number of reasons. First of all, the observation is that these state representatives who supervise and have the final say on the activities of the rural councils are most of the time from a very different cultural background from their area of jurisdiction. This aspect puts them in a disadvantaged position when it comes to understanding the underlying motivations that lead the local representatives to give priority to certain development programs and projects over others, since these motivations are usually rooted in their local cultures. Also, more attention finally gets usurped by the power tussle between the state representatives and the locally elected officials. This leads to a lot of frustrations among the communities as the local population feels left out in the development process.

5. CONCLUSION

In practice, from the analysis above, it is clear that in institutional development, meanings are not typically shared by all those involved in it. We can conclude from the findings that that there is no shared understanding of the concepts of equity and social inclusion as conveyed by the SDGs. Hence, Institutional development is emergent out of complex struggles between actors who come into it with different and differing meanings of equity and social inclusion, and different and differing expectations, values and interest.

That notwithstanding, the 'rules of the game' defined by the council are mostly influenced by the theoretical undertones of equity and social inclusion. As argued by the mayor, '"there can be no development without justice and fairness and without inclusion of the most vulnerable…for example, one of the criteria for selecting projects is environmental screening… this entails verifying the extent to which the project will be beneficial to minority groups…we try to find out if it's beneficial to every minority group in the municipality". For the council to make this assertion even in the context of constant struggles against regulatory mechanism of the central administration, its justified to argue that institutions as structures do not determine in any absolute sense how people behave. Actors are not 'cultural dopes': they have the capacity to reflect on the institutional context and act on the basis of their reflections. Accordingly, institutions can be viewed as external constraints to actors who conceive strategies to manoeuvre between institutional limitations.

The wide range of theoretical perspectives and findings from the investigation presented above argue that, there is nothing simple about institutional development. We need to find a way of looking at it that recognizes this; a way that enables us to discover the richness of institutional development at all levels including municipalities.

Others say that institutions 'persist over time' (Uphoff, 1986, p. 9). Yet institutions are not 'forever'. However stable they might seem; institutions are constantly changing. They come into being, mature,

change – and they usually, if not always, come to an end. Their historical rise, decline and fall can be traced – though in some cases the perspective has to be exceedingly long term. Institutional development should therefore be understood as a process that involves changing the rules, breaking them, going against established norms and creating new norms/rules.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Councils

The council was found to undertake several 'good' practices which promote equity and social inclusion, but which are not yet backed up by policy nor are sufficiently vulgarized That is, with the use of a municipal order, or a council deliberation and public notices to sensitize the public of the decision. For instance…providing scholarships to vulnerable children who are indigenes of Bamenda III municipality…or providing reasonable accommodation measures to pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, people with disabilities and the elderly who come to use the civil status registry.

The council should apply an equity and inclusion lens to all areas of decision-making by asking whether they are considering the needs of everyone in their community. Inclusion is about adopting policies that ensure all members of the community (regardless of gender, race, age, ability, or sexual orientation) have the same opportunities to prosper.

CBC Health Services

Explore a possible partnership with NASLA with a view to facilitate the development and introduction of a module on inclusive development in its training of local government administrators. Trainings offer a gentle opportunity to shift paradigms, challenge the old orthodoxy and introduce new meanings around the key principles of municipal development which will guarantee equitable, and inclusive local development and expected of the SDGs.

The CBC Health Services should lever its position in the region as a major and respected player as well as its partnership with Bamenda III Council as a conduit to organize capacity building session for both council staff and councillors, as well as representatives of technical and regulatory organs working with councils on the SDGs and its underlying principles. It is important for key actors on the institutional development landscape to have a common understanding of the concepts of equity and social inclusion and their centrality in achieving national and international development performance indicators.

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