

# Current Stakes and Challenges of Citizen Participation in Local Development in Cameroon: Case of Fako Division

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**Abstract:** *Within the development agenda, an inclusive and participatory community development strategy remains a key policy set towards driving effective transformation and efficiency. Since the early 1990s, government and stakeholders' policy strategies, plans, and legal bindings in many developing countries have paved the way for effective implementation. These efforts aim to drive local development, provide growth and opportunities, and ensure inclusiveness. However, in the Fako Division of Cameroon, implementation strategies are still hampered by limited investment and financial support, poor coordination, low information sharing, poor policy implementation, infrastructure, and collaboration. This study examines the stakes and challenges of citizen participation in local development in the management of councils' local development in Fako Division, a rapidly growing division of Cameroon. Using a mixed method approach, a total number of 180 key stakeholders across 34 communities within Limbe II, I and Buea municipalities and also working sessions and Key Informant interviews were conducted with Council officials. Secondary data sources were derived from reviewed council documents as well from literature review. Data were analyzed using both simple descriptive statistical techniques and thematic analysis and presented in the form of tables. Results revealed that, in the course of the enforcement of the decentralization process within the studied councils, there were limited information flow, low citizen participation in project implementation, monitoring and evaluation, consultation and prioritization of projects for local development. This goes against the national and international laws on decentralization and effective citizen participation. Thus, the effectiveness in the implementation of the contents within the approved Law No 2019/024 of 24 December, 2019 remains unsatisfactory in the Fako Division incising needed urgent actions to 1) engage the locals in local projects at all phases, 2) map out effective resources to address local needs, 3) recognized the integrated roles of stakeholders at all levels; 4) establish partnerships with Civil Society Organisations to drive needed local changes and 5) increase capacity building, education and awareness for better engagement to ensure effective awareness and participation for sustainable local development.*

**Keywords:** Citizen participation, challenges, local development, Fako, Cameroon.

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to critically examine the current stakes and challenges associated with citizen participation in local development in Cameroon, with a specific focus on the Fako Division. This involves assessing the effectiveness of existing strategies, identifying barriers to participation, and recommending approaches to enhance community engagement in local governance and development projects.

The inclusion of community participation in sustainable community development has been indicated to promote the attainment of community empowerment, promote meaningful change, and remains a key mechanism to address community problems and provide learning opportunities. Despite much debate on achieving development, the need to strengthen the level of awareness in people and the increase in mobilisation for community participation in community development by relevant stakeholders amongst others remains fundamental (Ugwu &

Aruma, 2020). This becomes critical as Article XXVII of General Assembly of United Nations proclaims that everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits (Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR], 1992). The implication of this is that, members of various communities have the right to participate in sustainable community development projects, and also share in the benefits. This will improve people's living conditions in the participating communities in the society. In line with this thought, Frank & Smith in Ugwu & Mbalisi (2016) affirmed that participation in community development process make community members responsible for their own development, strengthen their capacity, empower them and increase their skills, reduce ignorance, poverty and suffering, help them achieve social, economic, cultural and environmental goals and above all improve the quality of their life. It ensures that the efforts of members of the participating communities are united with those of governmental authorities, Non-Governmental Organizations

(NGOs), Corporate Organizations (COs), institutions and other relevant stakeholders to improve the living conditions of the people of present generation without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to benefit from the same opportunities to meet their own needs.

In recent years, community interest for participating in the decision-making process regarding local development, local governance and community management in Cameroon has grown steadily. In line with the current global trend of streamlining the role of the state, the governments of most developing countries have devolved power to grassroots institutions with a view to enhance development (Elizabeth, n.d). But in reality, such devolutions have in many cases been quite inefficient to achieve this goal. The need to empower the local people respond to the growing recognition that local people in developing countries lack control over resources and opportunity to participate in decision making processes. Unless rural people are empowered to participate in the development process, development efforts will only have partial positive effects if at all they have any positive effect. An important step in this process was represented by the public participation in development triggered by the implementation of policies and strategic plans across various economic sectors since the 1960s in diverse sectors. However, according to Akande, (2016) there seem to be an apparent parallel reality between the legal provision of the rights to civic participation and its actual implementation in Cameroon. Citizens hardly participate in decision making or their views considered in the control and management of resources and infrastructure. Studies on rural development have often had a narrow focus, concentrating on the agricultural sector which is the main economic activity in most rural areas in Africa. This paper adopts a broad focus on local development, examining the implication of decentralization on local political empowerment, an element that has been overlooked in studies of rural development. The general trend has been that the state has control of what, when, where and how rural development should be done to improve the lives of rural folks. Processes of democracy and decentralization are actually in existence in Cameroon, but the practicality is what needs to be questioned, and whether decentralization has led to political empowerment.

Decentralization has been one of the most fundamental changes to governing structures in Africa in the two decades since the end of the Cold War, which brought a wave of democratic transitions to the continent. Since about 1990, a large number of African countries have undergone fitful attempts to democratize power and decentralize it to levels below the center, whether to local Municipalities, districts, regions, or states (Dickovick, 2011). The decentralization of government tasks has been enshrined in Cameroon's constitution since 1996. The adoption of decentralization laws (2004), the establishment of national coordinating bodies (2008) and the increased formal transfer of areas of responsibility to the Municipalities since 2010 have been the most important steps. Also, the North West and South West regions have been granted a Special status effective in the dimensions of decentralization, education and legal dimensions (Section 3 subsection 1, 2 and 3 of Cameroon Law No 2019/024 of 24<sup>th</sup> December, 2019). There is the

growing opportunity for the Northwest and South West regions to have an improved development through the established special status provided to the regions. This brought in place the regional assembly, house of chiefs, availability of development agencies to drive local and regional development such as the North West Regional Development Authority (NOWEDA) and the South West Regional Development Agency (SOWEDA). In addition, the availability of the Public Independent Conciliators who are considered as watch dogs to follow up and reorient the works of local and regional institutions and councils to ensure development in the area (COME2 MAMA TV). However, tackling decentralization as a way of accommodating the special needs of the regions that are home to the Anglophone minority opens new avenues to redefinition and refocusing (Myerson, 2021). Development drive and action remains fundamental to the entire regions of the country and thus, the need for the consideration of devolution of power to local development authorities with the inclusion of communities and local populations in driving local development, peace building and sustainable community development.

Decentralization, can be expressed as transferring administrative authority such as planning, decision making and the collection of public revenues from the central government to provincial institutions, local governments, semi-autonomous public institutions, professional organizations and voluntary organizations outside of the administration (Erylmaz, 2011). The Cameroon Law No 2019/024 of 24<sup>th</sup> December, 2019 Section 5 subsection 1 and 2, defines decentralization as the devolution by the State of special powers and appropriate resources to local authorities and shall constitute the basic driving force for promotion of development (in the dimensions of economic, social, health, educational, cultural and sports development interest), democracy and good governance at the local level. The notion of power devolution is backed by accompanied resources and means to exercise such powers (Section 21). Moudio and Amougou (2021) uphold it as a tool for preventing insecurity and improving governance because its purpose is to bring decision-making powers closer to the local population.

The council's overall objective is to ensure local development and improve the living conditions of its inhabitants (Section 147 of Cameroon Law No 2019/024 of 24 December, 2019). Local development refers to participative process to address and solve a diversity of socio-economic, cultural and environmental problems with the aim of producing sustainable development and improve the quality of life of the population (Jover et al., 2006). This, therefore, builds on the core development agenda to be fostered by councils in Fako and their need to act in a succinct and selfless manner towards aiming to serve and devote their mandates to drive substantial local change in the dimensions of economic, social, health, educational, cultural and sports development. Councils in this process therefore can request assistance from civil society organisations, populations, other local authorities and international partners to drive the needed change within the Municipality with validation from Council boards. In addition, our councils are mandated to drive economic development in the areas of

agricultural development, tourism, infrastructural management through equipping and management of markets, motor parks, slaughterhouses; income generating activity and job creation micro projects and mineral resources exploitation within the municipal council area (Section 156 Cameroons Law No 2019/024 of 24 December, 2019); devolved with the need to support protection and management of the environment and natural resources through the provision of drinking water, waste management, cleaning of streets, road and public spaces, conducting reforestation works, protection of water resources, development of council environmental action plans, preparation and implementation of council plans for risk prevention and emergency response, and the creation and management of green spaces (Section 157 Cameroons Law No 2019/024 of 24 December, 2019).

It therefore, becomes essential for councils to map out essential resources both materials, human and financial to drive the change needed, as these constitute great dimensions to drive local development. Cameroon Law No 2019/024 of 24 December, 2019 provides regional and council authorities the equal rights (Section 2 sub section 3) and freedom in the execution of projects in partnership with one another, with the State, public establishments, public, semipublic and private enterprises, civil society organizations or foreign partners under the terms and conditions laid down by the laws and regulations in force (section 10 of Cameroon's Law No 2019/024 of 24<sup>th</sup> December, 2019). In conjunction they have the mandate to vote their budgets and map out their resources needs to drive their regional and local economic, social, health, educational, cultural and sports development interest (Section 11 subsection 1).

Within the Cameroonian context, it is clearly spelled out that "the budget shall present all the programmes that contribute to the economic; social health, educational, cultural and sports development of the local Authority. Although the legislative framework is now firmly in place, implementation still faces diverse challenges. The administration continues to be extremely centralized, and the transfer of sector-specific responsibility to the Municipalities is making only slow progress; they have minimal autonomy in planning and financial matters. The Municipalities often lack sufficient funds, and the actors at decentralized level are inadequately prepared for their tasks. Many decisions thus, remain at central level and priorities are set without consulting the Municipalities. The people have poor access to basic public services, such as health care, water supply and basic education. Their opportunities to influence locally relevant decision-making processes are very limited. Thus, a lot more remains to be done to ensure that the current stakes lead to a more effective democratization of the regulation of local development activities and projects in Cameroon.

## 2. Objective and Significance of the study

This study serves as a key contribution to engage discussions with respect to the celebration of the African Day of Decentralization. The African day of decentralization and local development is celebrated annually every 10<sup>th</sup> of

August, as a reminder to work towards the values and principles of decentralization, local governance and local development. The African Union (AU) announced the theme for this year's celebration, which is "Making Food Security a key Priority for Development and territorial Cooperation". Within the context of Cameroon which focuses on the Stakes and Challenges of Citizen participation in Cameroon, this study seeks to spur up stakeholders' discussions on the need of promoting and ensuring the effectiveness in the implementation of the decentralization process and citizen participation within Local development through an analysis of the current stakes and challenges of citizen participation in Local development in the Buea, Limbe I II Municipalities within Fako Division of the South West Region of Cameroon. In its specific nature this study seeks to:

- 1) Understand the profile of respondents within the communities of the council area in Fako Division.
- 2) Assess the current stakes of citizen participation within Fako Division in the dimensions of Citizen awareness and participation in local development, perceptions on the categories of prioritized development projects in Council area and the level of community awareness on rights to participation in local development.
- 3) Examine the challenges to citizen participation in Fako Division
- 4) Outline strategies to promote citizen participation in Local development in Fako Division.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding the intricacies of citizen participation in local development within the context of Cameroon, a domain critical for the effective implementation of decentralized governance and community-driven development strategies. The findings provide insights that can inform policy and practice, not only within Cameroon but also in other contexts with similar challenges.

## 3. Literature Review

### Concept of Citizen Participation

Ogwu and Aroma (2019) asserts the concept of community participation as a process whereby members of participating communities mobilize themselves to participate in groups as community members for the common purpose of addressing their problems with a view to improving people's living conditions in the concerned communities. In the views of Baum (2015) citizen participation refers to the inhabitant involvement in public decision making. In different interpretations, citizens may be either individuals or organised communities and participation could be either observation or power. The word citizen participation comes into use to denote remedial efforts to involve active citizens or clients in government activities, but it can involve autonomous citizen activities in the larger society such as locality or community development, social planning and social action. In addition to the above mentioned, it is stressed that community participation must be goal-oriented in community development in various communities in the society. The purpose of citizen participation includes communicating, information developing relationships, developing the capacity to act and preserving the changing conditions. Citizens can participate through groups and

formal organisations both national and international, meetings, inquiries, actions and technical assistance (Nkafu Policy Institute, 2020).

Hardina (2008) defines citizen participation as the process whereby those with the least resources – people on the margins of society – are involved in decisions about the services they receive on the part of those that represent them, namely, the government and not-for-profit organizations. Hardina emphasizes the benefits that result when these groups of people react to their economic and social oppression by taking local control of decisions affecting them. Those referred to in the term citizen participation are thus specifically ordinary people, whose sources of power are limited. Citizen participation is therefore fundamental to democracy and considered central to governance and for that matter good governance. Citizen participation within local development initiatives and programs also centres on ensuring citizen participation in

budgetary development sessions with designated local authorities. This is crucial as Development orientated budget programming remains fundamental drive towards ensuring the voice representation and effectiveness in related council development projects. The dimension of inclusivity and representation of budgets to development programmes remains a key issue to highlight if local development that meets the needs of the inhabitants (men and women, boys and girls and communities) is to be achieved.

An analysis of the different levels of citizen participation was presented by Arnstein (1969) which is still relevant till today for many developments including those in the local council areas of the Fako vision. In his “*Ladder of Citizen Participation*”, he describes how empowered public institutions and officials deny power to citizens, and how levels of citizen agency, control and power can be increased (Figure 1) in other to achieve the goals of sustainable local development and environmental protections.

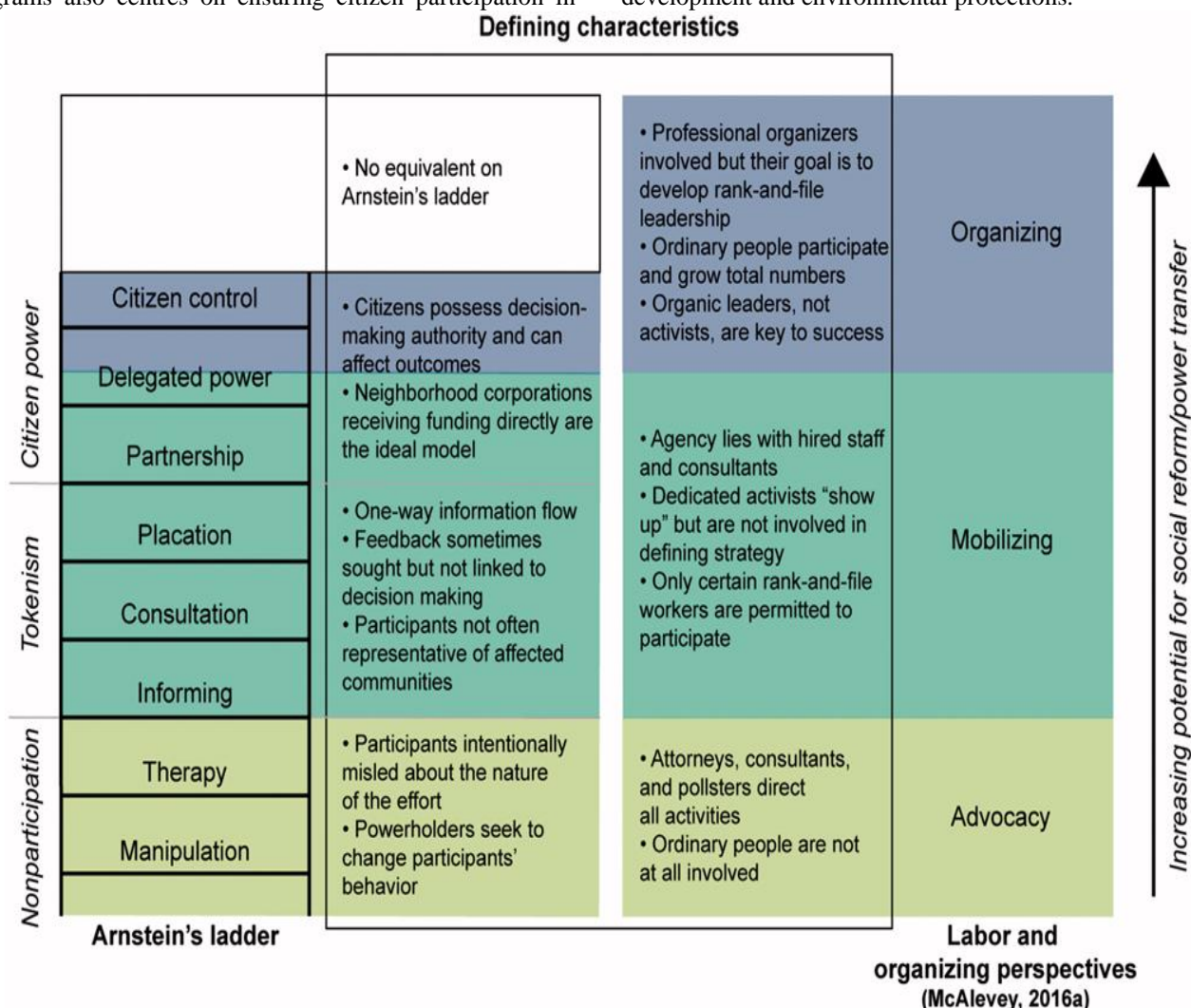


Figure 1: Ladder of Citizen Participation by Sherry Arnstein, 1969 modified by McAlevy, 2016a

The ladder features eight rungs that describes three general forms of citizen power in democratic decision making; nonparticipation (no power), degrees of tokenism (counterfeit power), and degrees of citizen power (actual power). The eight rungs are manipulation, therapy, participation, consultations, placations, partnerships, delegated power, and citizen control. In terms of the applicability of this concept to the current study, not all the

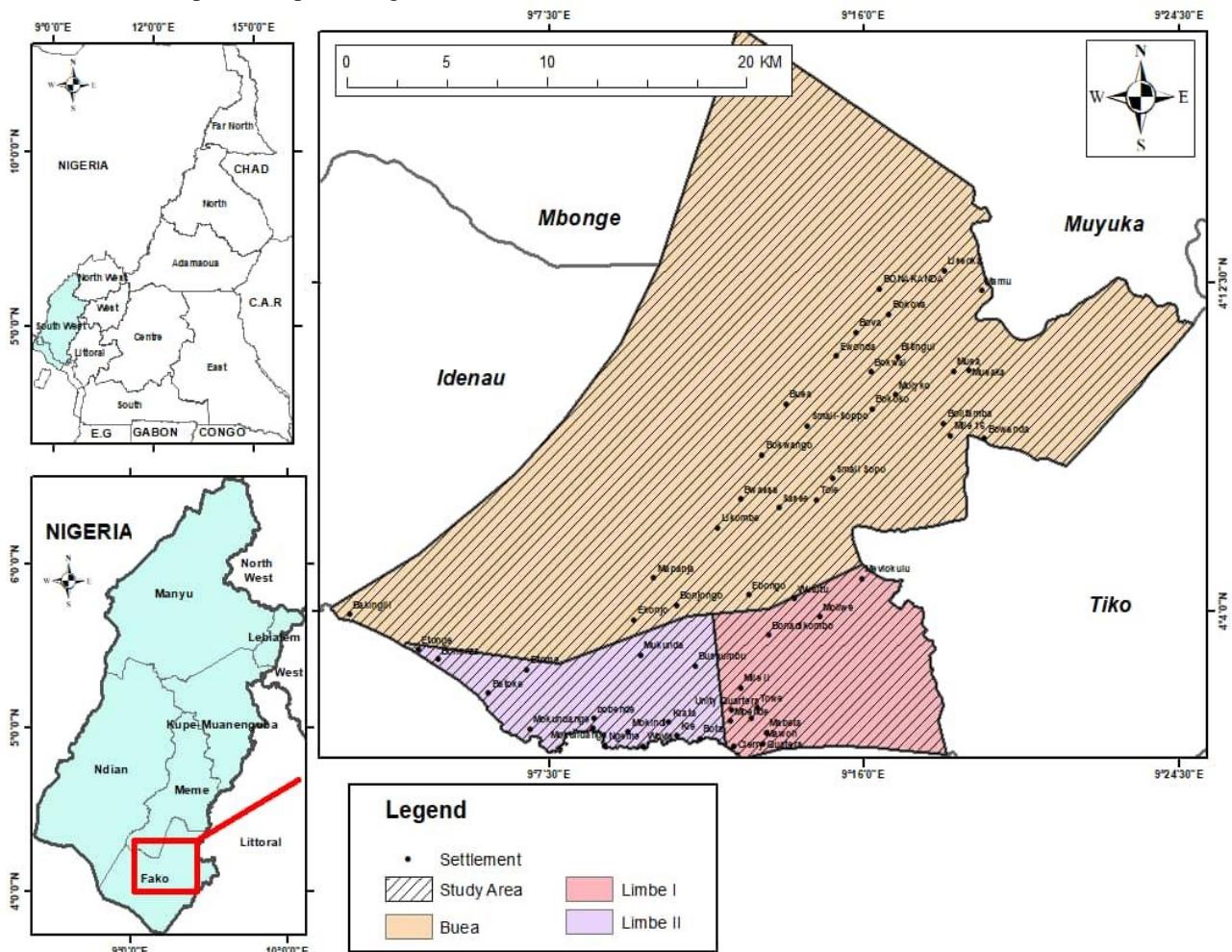
rungs were effectively implemented across all the three general form of participation in the various council areas in Fako Division to ensure any meaningful sustainable local development. Significantly, the level of information sharing, communication between the stakeholders and the local communities were limited across various departments of the councils. This could retard the level of local participation in decision making process during budgetary session or

consultation services for planning, implementation and evaluation of projects. In terms of mobilization of financial and human resources, mobilization was limited across all levels of organizations to ensure local participation in terms of sensitization, placement of activities partnership and delegation of power to ensure sustainable local development. Moreover, the level of organization in term of control, coordination and collaboration to ensure the implementation of strategies towards achieving the goals of community development were challenging for most of the local councils.

of the South West Region of Cameroon including Buea, Limbe I and Limbe II council areas. Figure 1 shows the map of Fako Division showing the study locations with the various Municipalities and major cities. The Division cover an area of 2,093km<sup>2</sup> and a population of over 466,412 inhabitants according to the National Census Report, 2005. Buea one of the council area doubles as the head quarter of the South West Region with diverse administrative functions. Also, agriculture is the dominant economic activities of the people in the Fako Division employing more than 70% of the population.

#### 4. Methodology

This study was conducted in the three selected council areas out of the five Municipalities representing the Fako Division



**Figure 2:** Buea, Limbe I, and II Municipalities in Fako Division, Southwest region of Cameroon  
Source. Adapted from the Administrative Map Unit of Cameroon (2016).

A total number of 34 communities within the area were selected with 10 from Limbe II, 12 from Limbe I and 12 from Buea Councils. These communities were selected with the consideration of geographical considerations, class considerations and the sample population were selected with high consideration for gender sensitivity, age and disability inclusion. The target areas were on boarded with enumerators who were trained on data collection and ethical considerations. The random sampling selection of respondents adopted an inclusive strategy to ensure the

inclusion of women, and men, IDPs and Host community persons. A total number of 180 respondents were selected for the study with 60 from Limbe II Municipality with 25 males and 35 females across 10 communities; within the Limbe I Municipality a total number of 60 respondents were selected for the study consisting of 28 males and 32 females across 12 communities while within Buea Municipality a total number of 60 respondents were selected consisting of 17 males and 43 females across 12 communities. These are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Sample Population for the study

Division	Sub Divisions	Sampled Communities	No of sampled persons	No of Neighbourhoods sampled
Fako Division, SW Region of Cameroon	Limbe II	KIE, Mokindi, Mokunda, Isokolo, Wovia, Batoke, Mokundange, Limbola, Bobende, Ngueme	60 (25M, 35F)	10
	Limbe I	Mile One, Mile 2, Lower Bussumbu, Bota, Bonadikombo, Cassava farm, Mabeta, Half Mile Church Street and Garden, Motowoh (Lower, upper and Middle), Lower Mawoh, Upper Mawoh, Makuka	60 (28M, 32F)	12
	Buea	Mile 16, Bomaka, Muea, Bokoko (Bunduma), Molyko, Small Soppo, Great Soppo, Mokunda, Old Government Stadium, Federal Quarters, Clerk’s Quarter, Bokwaongo	60 (17M, 43F)	12
Total	03		120	34

Data collection was conducted by trained data enumerators with good knowledge of their community stakeholders and terrain to ensure safety of staff and high level of acceptance. Authorizations to work within communities were provided during this process. Also, primary data was collected through inclusive working sessions with focal points from the three councils. We conducted working sessions within each council to identify planned or operational citizen participation measures including their inclusiveness and gender sensitivity; their structuring, characteristics, functionality etc, and models of management of local infrastructures. During these sessions, 2020 and 2021 budgets will be collected for examination, to identify the number of prioritised services and infrastructures measures on a participatory basis, exchange with the Secretary general and Community Development Officer (CDO) from the councils to know which participatory approaches is used to engage the citizens, and the outcomes of this working is documented in this report. The methodology used during the second working session was basically to interview SG and CDO and representative of the Mayor at the conference hall using an interview guide accompanied by detailed examination of available reports of ordinary council sessions, consultation sessions, emergency session to identify planned or operational citizen participation measures and models of management of infrastructure, it inclusiveness and gender sensitivity structuring, characteristics, functionality, Council staff and stakeholders’ roles in the process.

Data collected through the developed questionnaire captured respondents’ demographic characteristics, assessing the

level of council accountability to the population through assessing knowledge levels, awareness to related local development initiatives and assess their level of participation in projects and sessions within councils in the three council areas. Also, conceptual and other related views related to the concept of decentralization, citizen participation and local development were gotten from online reviewed sources. Data collected through the questionnaires was keyed into Excel spreadsheets, cleaned and analyse using simple descriptive statistical techniques and presented in Tables. While the quality data conducted through working sessions was analysed through thematic analysis.

## 5. Results and Discussions

### 5.1. Profile of Respondents

The study in the investigation of the issues at stake targeted selected communities within the Buea, Limbe I, II Municipalities. The residing community persons vary by sex, age, status, occupation and duration of stay as summarised in Table 2. The needed community development interventions and response within the council areas must ensure to target the population bearing in mind the intersectional differences to ensure inclusive community, accessibility, safety, resilient and equality as prescribe by SDG goal 11 of the UN 2030 on the important role cities play in the global political agenda. Specifically target 11.3 calls for more inclusive urbanization and participatory and integrated planning (UNEP, 2021).

**Table 2:** Sociodemographic Profile of citizens within Municipal areas

Variables	Category	Municipality (N=60 for each)		
		Buea	Limbe I	Limbe II
Sex	Male	28	48	40
	Female	72	52	60
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Age	19-25	23	15	15
	26-35	32	23	23
	36-45	33	32	28
	46>	12	30	33
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Status	IDP	32	17	22
	Host	68	70	57
	Returnees	0	7	10
	Others	0	7	12
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Occupation	Student/ Apprentice	22	20	14

	Employed	22	21	16
	Self-employed (Trader	47	46	54
	Unemployed	8	13	16
	Retired	2	0	15
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Level of education	Primary	10	15	45
	Secondary	37	45	18
	Tertiary (Undergraduate)	42	23	13
	Post graduate	12	17	8
	None	0	0	15
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Duration of stay in community	1 - 5 months	7	2	2
	6 - 12 months	5	2	10
	1 - 4 years	27	42	31
	5 - 10 years	20	20	19
	Over 10 years	41	35	39
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: FIELDWORK, 2022

Of the 60 sample respondents, 32% of the sample population within the Buea Municipality consisted of IDPs, 68% are host persons; within Limbe I Municipality of the 60 sampled respondents, 17% consisted of IDPs, 70% were host persons while 7% were returnees. Within Limbe II, of the 60 sampled respondents, 22% were IDPs 57% were host persons, 19% were returnees while 12% were of other categories not captured. Across all the Municipalities more than 50% of the respondents have stayed in the localities for over five years and more with over 40% of them engaged in self-employed activities and trade in the Municipalities and about 14%-21% across the Municipalities as students and involved in related apprentice activities. 13% within Limbe I and 16% in Limbe II are unemployed. Going by educational level, 45% within Limbe II had attained primary education, while in Limbe I and Buea Municipalities they consisted of 15% and 10% respectively. 54% within Buea Municipality have attained at least tertiary education, while 40% in Limbe

I and 21% in Limbe II Municipality. These demographic and socio-economic features are important for a better understanding of the role of citizen participation in local development across various communities including those in the study area.

**5.2. Assessment of current stakes of citizen awareness and participation in Local development**

In this section we sought to assess the level of community awareness on related council mandate and responsibilities towards communities and as well as the participation of communities and populations within council activities and planning towards development efforts. The level of acceptance of community priorities within projects constituted key areas assessed. The results are summarised and presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Assessment of community participation in local governance for development

Variables	Categories	Municipality		
		% Buea	% Limbe I	% Limbe II
Knowledge on existence of council communal development plan	Yes	25	37	25
	No	20	32	19
	I don't know	50	27	51
	Maybe	5	5	5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Citizen's participation in consultation meeting at the quarter levels?	Yes	68	77	40
	No	32	23	60
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Participation to council sessions or any other meeting organized	Yes	12	23	29
	No	88	77	71
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Community Awareness on Municipal development project undertaken in the last 12 month	Yes	38	74	34
	No	62	26	66
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Community participation in meetings on Project Prioritization	Yes	5	19	14
	No	95	81	86
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Consideration of community priorities in Projects	Yes	19	26	22
	No	81	74	78
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: FIELDWORK, 2022

As shown in Table 3, there is very low knowledge of community people on the existence of council communal

development plans. In relation to this within Buea Municipality, of the sampled population, only 25% indicated

to be aware of the existence of the council communal development plan, 37% within Limbe I and 25% within Limbe II Municipality only 25% had knowledge on the existence of these plan. With respect to citizen participation in council meetings at quarter levels, there is high level of community participation within the Municipality of Buea (68%) and Limbe I (77%) while only 40% from Limbe II. The level of community awareness on ongoing municipal development projects was found to be low within the Buea and Limbe II Municipalities with 62% and 66% non-awareness levels respectively. In addition, community participation in meetings on project prioritization was found to be very poor across all the Municipalities wherein 95% of respondents revealed not to have participated within the Buea council, 81% in Limbe I and 86% in Limbe II as shown in Table 3. Also, this translates as well to very low consideration of community priorities in projects across all municipal councils studied. 81% of the sampled respondents within Buea Municipality indicated that their considerations were not considered in project prioritization; while 74% was received in Limbe I and 78% in Limbe II as indicated in Table 3.

Corroborating the results on citizen awareness and participation in local development in line with the legal binding process on local development especially within the framework of the Cameroon Law No 2019/024 of 24<sup>th</sup> December, 2019, which highlights the rights of citizen

participation in council and regional development initiatives through admitting the rights to all nationals by nationality and by legal binding to propose local development projects to councils and regional executives; support rights of citizens to information such as reports of deliberative organs, access to budget, draft or annual performance reports as well as development plans; and the need for the setting of information sharing mechanisms and systems branded with uploaded documents; and the admittance of the collaborative role of council and regional executives with grassroots civil society organisations, neighbourhood and village committees to support development (Section 40 Subsections 1, 2, 3, and 4 of Cameroon Law No 2019/024 of 24 December, 2019), finding noted a very limited and gross awareness of citizens within the study area in community or local development.

### 5.3. Development Project Prioritized and Community Participation Level

This section presents results on the various category of prioritized projects within communities across the Municipalities (roads, water, school, health, public sanitation and market infrastructure), community participation in projects and the level of participation within project programming within the Municipalities. The results of these are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Community participation levels and prioritized projects within Municipalities

Variables	Categories	Buea (%)	Limbe I (%)	Limbe II (%)
Community Development Carried out in the last 12 months by sector	Road	24	31	29
	Water	12	20	34
	Schools	0	5	0
	Health	6	7	10
	Public Sanitation	50	35	17
	Market Facilities	8	2	0
	Non			10
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Community participation in Projects	Yes	42	40	11
	No	58	60	89
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Level of Community participation within Projects	Planning	16	43	40
	Implementation	76	52	20
	M&E	8	4	40
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

From table 4, results reveal that development project priorities significantly across Municipalities. For instance, within the Municipality of Buea, of the sampled respondents, 50% indicated that council’s key infrastructural development priority in the last 12 month was in public sanitation, followed by engagements in road projects (24%). Within Limbe I Municipality, 35% of the respondents acknowledged high engagements in public sanitation, followed by roads (31%) and water (20%) of the sampled respondents. In the Limbe II Municipality however, respondents confirmed councils’ engagement more in water supply (34%), followed by roads (29%) then public sanitation (17%). The main reason for the variation of development projects across Municipalities in Fako were due to government influence, availability of technical and

financial resources and humanitarian assistance or partnership.

Despite the present of multitude priority projects carried out by various municipal councils in Fako Division as shown in Table 4, there is a low level of community participation in development projects carried out in their Municipalities within the last 12 months. This as shown in Table 4, where a significant majority (89%) of the sampled respondent indicated their non-participation in priority development projects within Limbe II, 60% of the sampled respondents indicated non-participation within Limbe I while only 58% of the sampled respondents indicated their non-participation from Buea Municipality. In the dimensions of those who even participate as indicated in this study, there is still seemingly limited engagement at the level project planning,



implementation and monitoring and evaluation. Results as shown in Table 4 express low levels of citizen participation in the planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of Projects. With respect to planning phase of projects only 16% of the respondents indicated to have been involved, 43% in Limbe I and 40% within Limbe II. In relation to implementation of projects, 76% within Buea indicate to have been involved, 52% from Limbe and 20% within Limbe II; while with respect to Monitoring and evaluation of projects, there is a low level of community participation in the process across all the Municipalities. Also based on working session conducted with Focal point within the Councils, it was revealed that most of the citizens are not involved in the implementation process of most projects, neither in the evaluation and monitoring of the project and this was flagged to impact on community acceptance of the infrastructure put in place which affects the effectiveness and management of the infrastructures put in place as their own difficult, so they do not handle the infrastructure with care. Contractors are contracted to implement the projects in the community.

In addition, according to working sessions held within the councils, it was revealed that there is no monitoring mechanism put in place to ensure that the citizens are in communication with those representing them. According to our working session with the councils, there exist no reports, attendant list or picture to prove the community people's participation. Our conclusion is that, the representatives of the people do not hold meetings with those they are representing and most of the projects carried out in the community are not actually from the community people. This however contradicts Section 416 (2) of Law N° 2019/024 of 24 DEC 2019 the Bill to institute the General Code of Regional and Local authorities stipulates that projects budgeted and carried out in the community must be from the results of the consultation of the citizens.

From one Council to another, there are differences in the practices of citizen consultation: during the working session with some of the councils, the study noted a significant disparity in the choices and functioning of participation formats. This was more particular in the management of infrastructure and basic services like roads, water supply, health and hygiene and sanitation services. It was also difficult for number of Municipalities where the population has increased due to the arrival of internally displaced persons (IDPs), to ensure their effective integration in the decision-making process, even to find inclusive formats for the management of basic infrastructure and service. Similarly, the work of local civil society organisations that contribute to the achievement of the local authority's objectives (CTD Code Art 41) remains a challenge, mainly in the field of budget planning, management of basic infrastructure and local democracy in general.

A critical diagnosis of citizen participation within Councils through the working groups within the council reveals the following key results. Firstly, in relation to issues concerning council services (civil status services such as birth certificate among others), municipal laws, and council decision making that concern the citizen, the following was noted during the working session. It was revealed that the

council informed it citizens about events, projects, meetings through letters to quarter chiefs and quarter heads who uses the service of a town Cryer to notify the community and also send letter to churches. They also use the media (radio, TV and newsletter) and depending on the event they sometimes produce flyers and booklets. The team was given copies of newsletters, books to backup what is done in the various Municipalities. However no signed letter by the mayor was presented to support what was said on sending correspondence to chiefs, quarter head and churches.

For issue concerning the development and creation of the Council Development Plans (CDP), results revealed that the various councils have made use of other stakeholders, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and government related ministries (officials in urban planning, management and environmental protection) in the development of consolidated diagnosis report that were used to develop the community development plan for the Municipality. The citizens were informed through their local chiefs and quarter head of the various activities (although no report was shown to backup this claim) to be carried out in their communities and send letter to churches. The strategy used for the diagnosis of need were through field visit from community by community, village by village and quarter by quarter. The identify needs are documented and the community are invited for a special session to prioritized needs out of selected priorities considering the most important. Those involved in this activity were some community stakeholders and interested community members. There was no mechanism put in place to ensure those that attend the CDP meeting keep the rest of the population informed. There was no report or attendance sheet that could permit the team to assess the inclusiveness and gender sensitivity of council session and meeting that involves the citizens.

Community consultation meetings is done at the community level and the councilors are the representative of the community in the council and they hold meetings with the chiefs and their rabbinat and other community members to inform them on the plans of the councils (this is what is expected to be done unfortunately it's not the case because no report of such meeting with attendance list of participants have been submitted to the council as proof participatory decision making at the community). Also, the council have not put in place any mechanism to follow-up councilors in this important issue that enhance participatory decision making and local development.

Council consultation meetings is done at the council chambers and stakeholders are invited. Those that are mostly invited for these sessions are councilors, chiefs and quarter heads and other government officials. However, there is no proof to show that community representative informed their citizens of the decision made during the consultation sessions. Also, it was observed that there was no gender consideration and inclusivity was absent in all the documents (attendance list) presented to the team.

For issues that concern council projects the follow was obtained during our interview and document examination. It was revealed that Citizens within the Municipality are informed through the local authority when there is a project

to be implemented in a community. They also do involve the community at the engagement and start of the project. However, they do not carry out assessment to know the community acceptance/satisfaction of implemented project.

#### 5.4. Information channels to Community people on Council related Activities

In this section, we assessed the various information channel wherein community persons received information related to the development of their Municipalities. This is summarised in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Information channels and community awareness on rights to participation

Variables	Categories	Municipality		
		Buea (%)	Limbe I (%)	Limbe II (%)
Information channels for calling municipal council meetings	Town crier	3	8	24
	Radio	0	11	16
	Television	0	0	3
	Newspaper	3	0	6
	Invitation letter	13	26	13
	Phone (call, messages)	0	14	10
	They do not call for meetings	36	0	0
	I don't know	3	42	28
	Total	57	100	100
Citizen's awareness and sensitization on their participatory rights in local development by councils	Yes	20	24	12
	No	49	43	41
	Don't know	31	33	47
	Total	100	100	100

Source: FIELDWORK, 2022

Working group sessions with councils within the Fako region (Buea, Limbe I, and II) reveal the following stakes with regards to Citizen rights and awareness on their role in local development within the Fako Division of the South West region of Cameroon. This culminates around high non awareness of their rights to participate in local governance and development with only 20% awareness in Buea Municipality, 24% in Limbe I and 12% in Limbe II Municipality. This remains a key issue as the Law N<sup>o</sup> 2019/024 of 24 DEC 2019 the Bill to institute the General Code of Regional and Local authorities, in its section 40 (1) and section 40(1) gives the citizens and CSOs the right to foster development in their community.

#### 5.5. Operational and planned citizen participation methods and models of infrastructure management

The working session within the Limbe II council reveals that there are no evidence or written document that contains citizen participation methods in decision making, project selection and prioritization and other council activities that concern them directly and models of infrastructure management. They engage through information sharing, consultations and available budget sessions.

- **Information methods remains derogatory**

The population of Limbe II Municipality is informed through radio announcement, council notice board, banners and invitation letters but no tool was presented to proof the means of information of the local population. The mechanisms used by the council is inclusive and gender sensitive since most people are open to these means of information. However, the effectiveness of the websites remains questionable within Limbe II Municipality in particular.

- **Low citizen participation in Consultation and Budget sessions**

From feedbacks obtained during our exchange within the Councils revealed that consultation occurs at the community level and at the council level in the form of a local council session, special meetings upon a growing need in a particular aspect in the Municipality. The council gets prioritized needs of the population through chiefs and quaterheads. At some occasions, the council staff goes into the community to identify the needs of the community people with them, during which they involve the women and youth leaders but there were no field report or attendant list to justify the existence of this model of engaging citizens in development projects that concern them. The council consultation sessions, committee meetings that hold regularly is attended mainly by some key stakeholders, who assumes to be representatives of the voice of the community. After a detail examination of 2020 and 2021 budget documents, it was observed that these sessions were not inclusive and gender sensitive as most of the participants were all men in the attendance sheet. In the dimension of budget sessions, it was revealed that only the councilors have the power to vote and the rest of the people are observers. From the attendance list presented we could conclude that the people are not directly involved in the budget session.

- **Poor Citizen Participation in the Prioritization of Projects Budgeted for the year 2020 and 2021**

In the budget document of 2020 and 2021 we found a number of projects which were budgeted during the budgetary session. However, there was no document to support that these projects were actually what the people wanted, since the people were not part of this session but their Chiefs and Councilors who are expected to transmit the action points of these sessions to the community members.

- **Low level of citizen participation in project implementation and monitoring/evaluation**

In the implementation of projects, it was revealed that citizens do not participate in project implementation. As outlined a contractor is awarded the contract to implement the project who liaises with traditional council for the implementation of the project in the community. While with respect to Project evaluation and follow up, the council follow-up the contractors to implement the contract but the citizens have no mechanism through which they can evaluate and follow up projects.

### 5.6. Strategies for the promotion of citizen participation in local development

Within the framework of the decentralization process in Cameroon to improve local development, councils in the exercise of their mission dedicated to "local development and improvement of the living environment and conditions of their inhabitants", Councils face challenges such as the realization of infrastructure projects and services that meet the effective needs of the population. This issue, which emphasizes the participation of the population in the management of public affairs, is one of the responsibilities of the Councils to consider the needs and opinions of any physical or legal person (articles 40 (1) and 416 (2) CGCTD).

Ploštajner and Mendeš (2021) noted that amidst the various challenges of citizen participation in local development, effective local democracy is vitally important for higher levels of democracy to overcome fragmentation, underdeveloped mechanisms of public participation, a lack of highly educated professionals, and many other problems. Each citizen in a local community should have a chance to practice active citizenship and gain the necessary experience for participation at higher levels and to develop democratic political culture. For citizens to become motivated for participation, the authors noted that citizens have to get a feeling that their voice counts, and that they can influence the situation and the course of action. These authors noted that through public protests, individuals can be organized based on the citizens' initiative to lobby for policy change. Also, informal communication and interaction with the representatives of local government, on the basis of which the authorities change their decisions, takes place every day in various locations (streets, markets, cafes, restaurants, neighborhoods, and a like). In addition, widening the scope of participation was adopted in Romania to institute changes in policy. Instead of the choice of referendum which may be expensive, the local communities have formed consultative groups and thus, become partners of local authorities. This has enabled NGOs to put some pressure on the administration and empowered citizens in an unexpected way.

Ward and Menezes (2008) noted that the development of information technology is changing the context of governance and constitute key areas to be used in promoting awareness on citizen's rights to participation and information sharing. New communications technologies have allowed citizens to overcome the barriers of physical distance and to organize themselves more quickly and

effectively. The local government, city districts, neighborhood councils and the city-owned companies have been integrated into an interactive information system. The integration has raised the internal efficiency of the local self-government to a higher level. In this way, in addition to increasing work efficiency, the cost for the material has also been reduced.

As strategies for local participation in environmental issues of climate change communication in some communities of the north west region of Cameroon. UN Habitat (2021) noted the need for more interactive radio programs, capacity building and training, creation of journalism clubs in schools, radio quizzes, sensitization through sketches and poems, hands-on-the ground projects like tree planting should be encouraged through communities and NGOs, traditional address systems (Town Cryer), newspapers, the use of local languages, Posters, Sensitization and workshops at grassroots should be encouraged. The author underscores the dire need for youths and women to be fully engaged in local development sectors such as climate change communication through popular social media and community forums, management of natural resources, environmental protection as well as local decision making within communities and councils. According Ahenkan, et al. (2013) the adoption of media program to organize open government programmes to discuss the assembly planning systems and budgets and seek the inputs of listeners and contributors through phone-ins can be inculcated within the area. These programmes will have better reach if they are held in the local languages.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study sought to engage discussions with respect to the convened celebration of the African Day of Decentralization through an assessment of the Stakes and Challenges of Citizen participation in Cameroon with lessons from the Buea, Limbe I, and Limbe II Municipalities, in Fako Division of the South West region. Through fieldwork conducted within 34 communities across the three Municipalities targeting 180 respondents, the study found out that there is an overall low citizen participation in local development initiatives within the Division.

This culminates with very low Citizen's awareness and sensitization on their participatory rights in local development by councils in the area. In the course of the enforcement of the decentralization process within the councils, it is seen that there are the issues of poor information mechanisms used in the dissemination of information to the communities. In addition, the study found out that there is a Low level of citizen participation in project implementation and monitoring/evaluation programs within the Municipalities as well as low engagement of local people in the consultation and budgets session as well as in the prioritization of projects for their own development. Thus, the effectiveness in the implementation of the contents within the approved Law No 2019/024 of 24 December, 2019 remains unsatisfactory in the Division. There is therefore urgency for Regional and Local authorities to actively engage the local populations (women, youths and men) into their development agenda and map out effective

resources within their areas of responsibility to address the needs of the population. This opens up new avenues for the consideration and recognition of the key roles of community groups, civil society organisations and other local institutions as well international partner as key assets to drive development within the Municipality.

This study also admits the core role and the rights of participation citizen have on driving their local development and the need for higher engagements of citizens in the promotion of Local governance, peace building process in the region and country. Thus, Local authorities should have the right to establish and develop partnerships with all actors of civil society, particularly non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, and with the private sector and other interested stakeholders to drive this needed change within the Division and region as a whole. There is also to increase awareness raising and education of local populations and stakeholders on the role they occupy in local development of their communities for sustainability.

More so, participation through inclusiveness and empowerment of citizens should be an underlying principle in decision-making, implementation and follow-up at the local level. Elaborate presentation of projects to the citizens of a local community can promote citizen participation. This remains a consideration to note in that when the citizens are aware of the various projects to be carried out in their communities by the councils and contractors who are awarded them, there will be proper follow up of the projects to completion.

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