

**CHIEFTAINCY AND DECENTRALIZATION IN CAMEROON: OPPORTUNITIES
AND CHALLENGES IN A RURAL CONTEXT**

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ABSTRACT

The chieftaincy institution in Africa and particularly in Cameroon represents the oldest politico-administrative institution of governance that predates the colonial intrusion. Even with the advent of the colonial rule, this institution incarnated by the chief was used to consolidate colonial influence and governance in Cameroon. The effective politico-administrative organization of chieftaincy coupled with the traditional system governance explains why they were coopted as collaborators by the colonial administrators. However, at independence chiefs and the chieftaincy institution were relegated by the new political elites. They were not considered in the formulation and application of public policy like decentralization despite their rich pre-colonial and colonial experience. This can partly explain the failure of the decentralization policy in Cameroon as chiefs who are very influential especially at the level of grassroots are not implicated in the implementation of decentralization. Basing our findings on the analysis of existent secondary information in the form of published books, articles, journals, dissertations and on primary sources essentially based critical interviews conducted on the field with varied informants, our investigation reveals that the decentralization policy in Cameroon operational since 2004 cannot be totally effective especially at grassroots level if chiefs who have a strong politico-administrative and legitimate influence are not incorporated as major actors in the implementation of the decentralization in Cameroon. This is because apart from the rich pre-colonial and colonial experience in local governance, chiefs are revered than political authorities at grassroots level.

Keywords: *chieftaincy, decentralization, grassroots and local development*

Introduction

This paper examines the potential role of traditional rulers in the effective implementation of the decentralization policy and efficient local development at the grassroots level. Successful local development has been identified as essential to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) outlined at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000, and the World Bank Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRSP). This implies a stronger focus on decentralization, community empowerment and local governance in development work (G. Lutz and W. Linder, 2004).

Due to the growing interest and support for local development in recent years, many African countries and especially Cameroon have passed legislation to decentralize governmental structures and it has been supported by many international agencies with their own activities. It is fundamental to note that the way in which decentralized structures are organized, actors involve and how decentralization policies are implemented determines the resources available at the local level and the functions of local governments.

It is clear that successful decentralization is not just about building good political institutions, it is not only essential to improve overall governance at the local level and but also to involve any actor capable of boasting development, that is Civil Society Organizations, NGOs and traditional leaders who until now play very limited role in the case of Cameroon . This also includes meaningful participation of the local population and their inclusion into decision making processes to foster transparency, accountability and responsiveness, and to guarantee efficient and effective policy-implementation. Meaningful inclusion of all relevant actors at the local level is decisive for successful local development, to ensure that different local power structures work with each other.

The shift in focus from the national to the local level makes a closer look at the social, political and economic dynamics in communities more important in Cameroon. In developing countries in general the state is often weak, and the penetration of the state in rural areas has been poor (Ibid). Decentralization in these cases is not only about shifting power and resources to the local level and making local authorities more effective. It is often the case that the capacity for good local governance also has to be built in areas where governmental activities in general have been very limited. Coupled to this, local government authorities who are supposed to manned and boast decentralization at the grassroots level has not been able to do so. The paradox is even that most of local government authorities do not reside in their area of jurisdiction (councils), rather they live in major towns including the mayors. With their absence and with little or no impact of their authority on the development of grassroots, most people depend on village development associations mostly presided by traditional authorities.

As a matter of fact, a traditional structure has and remains very important in organizing the life of the people at the local level despite modern state structures. Traditional authorities, for example, regulate village life, control access to land, and settle disputes. The existence of traditional authorities means that both the decentralization and the strengthening of local governance are not taking place in a vacuum. Recent experience has shown that successful decentralization has to take existing traditional structures into account. While the standard view has been that they are a historic burden on the road to modernity, it is now widely recognized that for many people, traditional structures are often more legitimate than the modern state.

In many cases, people accept traditional structures because of central government failures in building functioning structures at the local level. To rely on traditional norms and rules is not only comprehensible but also quite rational, especially if there is no better alternative. If the state is unable to improve people's lives substantially on an everyday basis, it is not surprising that people continue to live according to their traditional structures and rules without taking much notice of the central government.

Most people are not familiar with democratic theory and therefore do not immediately embrace democratic principles and rules. They accept procedures when they make a difference to their lives and help to improve their daily situation. Most people also do not make a distinction between traditional and modern structures. We all simultaneously accept different forms of authority for different things in a flexible way. Authorities can include the elders, parents, religious leaders as well as traditional leaders or elected governmental officials. For some issues we will rely on religious leaders, for others we might rely on the state and accept democratic forms of decision making, and for some other matters we might accept the authority of our parents. Different authorities co-exist everywhere and sometimes they might even compete with each other.

The aim of this study is to analyze existing literature on decentralization and local development and the potential role traditional rulers could play towards effective decentralization policy at grassroots level in Cameroon and also to clarify the basic concepts of their contents and to identify information gaps. The paper is made up of five main sub topics;

The first discusses the historical evolution of decentralization in Cameroon. It traces the origins of decentralization in Cameroon from the pre-colonial traditional structures through the colonial and finally the post independent period. It emphasizes that it is because of the failure and weakness of the actors of decentralization policy in Cameroon that chiefs or traditional rulers because of their historical past and attributes could play an important role in effective decentralization at grassroots level.

The second part of this paper examines the potentialities of Traditional Rulers as Relevance Actors in Effective implementation of decentralization Policy at Grassroots Level and

followed by the challenges they could face. Finally the last part of this paper attempts to present the determinants for an effective implication of traditional leaders towards effective decentralization policy in Cameroon notably at the grassroots level.

I-Historical Evolution of Decentralization in Cameroon

The concept of decentralization refers to decentralized, directed from center to periphery, organized around and such. This concept, expressed as the transfer of authority from the center to subordinate ends, is important both for more effective and productive management of the areas outside the center organization in public administration and for strengthening these areas in terms of democracy conception. Because of the increasing interest all over the world in issues such as ensuring service–need compliance, the importance of decisions made by the closest unit to the public and the reduction of bureaucratization have made implementation of decentralized systems a necessity in local regions.

According to A. Ozmen (2014) Decentralization can be defined as the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to subordinate or quasi-independent government organizations or the private sector. In the classical sense, this concept, which refers to the transfer of authority, responsibility and resources from central government to local governments, has a decisive role in central government local government relations. Several definitions have been offered for decentralization. One of the most general defines it as the transfer of responsibilities and authority from higher to lower levels of government. Decentralization seeks to create relationships of accountability among citizens, service providers, and subnational governments and between the local and central governments.

G.T. Falleti (2004) maintains that decentralization is a process, a set of state reforms. It is a series of political reforms aiming for the transfer of responsibilities, resources and authority from higher level to lower levels of state. Decentralization does not include the transfer of authority among non-state actors. However, decentralization reforms may take place both in authoritarian and democratic environments, as decentralization and democratization do not have the same meaning. Even the political systems described as centralized and authoritarian can rearrange their structures and functions within the framework of decentralization.

Decentralization has political, administrative and financial dimensions. The political dimension includes the transfer of state administration, legislative authority and judicial autonomy to local governments. The administrative dimension refers to the transferring of some classical functions of the state to autonomous public institutions(A.K. Kose, 2004). The fiscal dimension includes intergovernmental fiscal relations in countries where, constitutional and statutory powers of taxation, budget and expenditure rights are given to federal units within the federal state. Decentralization in its current form in Cameroon is based on the Constitution embodied in Law No. 96/06 of 18 January 1996(C. Cheka, 2007) Law No.2004/17 of 22 July 2004 on the General Orientation defines decentralization as, the

devolution by the State of special and appropriate resources to regional and local authorities for their economic, social health, education, cultural and sports development.

The history of decentralization in Cameroon from a historical perspective can be examined under three major historical periods; the pre-colonial period and the traditional system of political organization, the colonial period with reference to the various colonial policies with a devolutionary tendency that involved traditional authorities in socio-political administration. Finally decentralization in the post independence era determined by exogenous and endogenous political forces.

Decentralization was Inherent in Pre-colonial Socio-Political Traditional System.

It should be noted that before the advent of colonialism to Africa and Cameroon in particular, the socio-political and administrative organization of the Cameroonian traditional societies was centered on a well-organized chieftaincy institution with the chief at the helm. In most African Traditional societies, political power was organized in such a way that the chief who was at the apex of traditional administration delegated some powers and competences to other institutions that made up the administrative architecture of the village. Using the case of the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon, power structure was organized from family lineage head which was the smallest political unit, passing through the quarter head that coordinated quarter activities, the village head managed activities and finally the Fon was at the head of several villages that constituted Fondom. In such architecture, instructions flew from the highest and largest institution which was the fondom to the smallest political unit known as the lineage. In this power structure each institution has its role to play and its specific responsibilities.

The Reaffirmation of Pre-colonial Decentralization in the Colonial Policies in Cameroon

The Germans were the first colonial masters to formally annex Cameroon. They arrived on the Cameroonian coast in the nineteenth century. Upon arrival, they found that the other European countries, notably the British and the French, had already established a noticeable commercial influence along the coast of Cameroon.

One of the main features of German colonial administration in Cameroon was the introduction of municipal administration even though it was not actually named municipal administration (Kaze, 2017). This is because municipal administration presupposes the existence and responsibility of State decentralized structures, in charge of the management of local affairs by local authorities. Initially the Germans were not out to develop Cameroon for development seek, but at the same time to exploit the territory for the interest of its home government.

As the administrative policy put in practice by the Germans was indirect rule even though with a strong grip on the administrative machinery. According to Engelbert Mveng, decentralization in Africa and Cameroon in particular is not new, because even German

settlers in Cameroon were concerned with getting local people to manage their own affairs (Ngoh, 1989). The implication of the indigenous population in the development of their territories was manifested in the administrative organization of German-Cameroon, economic and socio-cultural policy (M.N. Oyono, 2007). It should however be noted once more that traditional rulers were the pillars of German colonial administration.

However, the dream of a German empire in Central Africa notably Cameroon, and the careers of a generation of German speaking Cameroonians was destroyed by the outbreak of the First World War (A. Lee, K. A. Schultz, 2012). Following WWI, the British and the French took over the German colony of Cameroon, portioned it 1916 with each power introducing its own administrative system. The French introduced assimilation in their territory while the British employed the indirect rule system in theirs. This arrangement was confirmed by the Treaty of Versailles of 1919, which gave the allies the ex-German colonies as “mandates” under the loose supervision of the League of Nations. For the next 42 years, “East” (French) and “West” (British) Cameroon would have separate histories and local administrative organization and functioning. The British region of present-day Cameroon (West Cameroon) consisted of what are now the country’s northwest and Southwest regions, while the French region (East Cameroon) covered the country’s remaining eight regions (I. Brownlie, 1979).

Between 1922 and 1945, the British implemented the policy of Indirect Rule thought to be the best rule in British Cameroon. During this period, the British created Native authorities through whom they administered the people of British Cameroons (M. Finken, 1996). The Indirect Rule policy introduced by the British favored the devolution of competence to local authorities. They lorded over local council’s administration. This administrative set up was called Native Authorities and was guided by the Indirect Rule policy.

The British believed that through the chiefs, the local administration will be developed into an efficient organ of modern government (J. C. Anene, G.N. Brown, 1966). The Native Authorities were to be the rudiment or embryo of local government and through this a post-colonial system would eventually emerge. The British also thought that natural feelings would be raised through the NAs and chiefs were to learn from these institutions the technics in the running and management of regional affairs. With this experience, products from these Local authorities’ areas could be able to serve in the executive and legislative. In order to make this dream come true, the British worked hard to maintain the political divisions or natural boundaries they met and this could only be readjusted to fit the present dispensation. In segmented societies, like was the case in the Southern Cameroons Province, warrant chiefs were appointed to make sure that colonial realities confirm to colonial theory.

As a matter of fact, Native Authorities enjoyed much autonomy in the management of local affairs such as in sectors like education, health, trade, police, municipal prisons, environment, construction and urban planning areas land. Equally, Native Authorities enjoyed financial

autonomy(L. Ngongo, 1987). Their financial resources came from taxes, fees for services rendered, income domain, and grants from the federal state of West Cameroon.

The French colonial administrative policy, by contrast, was focused on the closer integration of the colonies with the metropole. The mechanism for this was the policy of assimilation, by which Africans who had received western education (évolués) were granted French citizenship and the legal rights of Frenchmen, including participation in elections to urban councils and the French parliament (N. Rubin, 1971).

France governed her portion of Cameroon as part of the French colonial empire although it retained its autonomy as a mandated territory of the League of Nations. The main consideration in France's colonial policy in Cameroon was to transform the colonized people into French citizens through assimilation. Though the French found it impossible to immediately dispense with the services of the German-era chiefs, they steadily reduced their autonomy and authority, treating them as petty bureaucrats who could be hired and fired at will(V.T. Levine, 1964).Hence, the French administrative system was in practice “quasi-direct”(Ibid).

By 1935, French Cameroon had 19 regions divided into subdivisions and administrative positions. The administrative division was made exclusively on the basis of ethnic criteria. The French ministry of colonies was responsible for the administration of French Cameroon. The Governor was the head of the administration in French Cameroon. He controlled all the civil and military activities and was responsible for the policy of defense. For the smooth functioning of the administration, the commissioner was assisted by the Secretary General, a cabinet director, heads of service and administrative council (R.Chot, 1954).

Furthermore, a council of notables was appointed by the commissioner from locally prepared lists of suitable individuals. The role was to represent and promote official policies, play the role of intermediary between the indigenous population and the administration and to advise French administrators on matters affecting the indigenes on matters such as taxation, road building and railway construction as well as legal issues.

Nineteen years after the implementation of Indirect rule in British Cameroon, a similar movement started in the French-speaking Cameroon with the introduction of mixed councils in which the Mayor was appointed and the Municipal Council elected in French Cameroon. No municipality existed yet. It should however be noted that each administrative division that constituted the major administrative units in French Cameroon later laid the basis for the creation of Councils (L.N. Tsimi, 2015) The first councils, called mixed Councils in French Cameroon were created in the two largest cities of French Cameroon; Douala and Yaoundé, following the decree of 25 June 1941 of the French governor in Cameroon. These two towns were each provided with an executive (head of the region) also called administrator or mayor for the occasion. They were also provided with a municipal commission, consisting of four French notables and two native appointed by the colonial governor. After World War II, an

order of 21th August 1952 created mixed rural councils and extended it into all subdivisions of French Cameroon.

Three years later, the French law No. 55-1489 of 18 November 1955 concerning the municipal reorganization of the Black African countries, with the exception of Senegal, introduced the (communes de plein exercice) Councils with Semi-functioning capacity (communes de moyen exercice). In both cases, the condition required by Article 2 of the aforementioned law was "the availability of sufficient level of development to have their own resources necessary to balance with the budget." The fundamental difference between these two entities was that, in Councils with full-functioning capacity the mayor was designated from among the municipal councilors, while in Councils with Semi-functioning capacity, the mayor was appointed by the head of the administrative district from officials of his locality. It is within this communal landscape that French Cameroon became independent on 1st January 1960. The British and French policies laid the grounds for the post-independent decentralization sequence in Cameroon.

Post-independent Sequence of Decentralization in Cameroon

Legal reform in African countries in recent years has been marked by trials of various forms of decentralization. In general, hitherto centralized governments have initiated a reform agenda with the aim of transferring some powers, tasks and resources to regional governments and local authorities.¹ Cameroon is one of these countries. Cameroon experienced different forms of decentralization before the 1990s. Decentralization in its current form here is based notably on the Constitution embodied in Law No. 96/06 of 18 January 1996. On the strength of the provisions of article 55 of the said constitution, 'decentralized local entities of the Republic shall be regions and councils ... decentralized local authorities shall be legal entities recognized by public law.

They shall enjoyed administrative and financial autonomy in the management of local interests. They shall be freely administered by boards elected in accordance with conditions laid down by law'. In Cameroon therefore, decentralization constitutes part of the framework of national policy on democratization that started in the 1990s². States embark on decentralization with the objective of bringing the government closer to the people and

¹ C. Cheka, "The State of the Process of Decentralization in Cameroon", *Africa Development*, Vol. XXXII, No. 2, 2007, pp. 181–196

² Ibid.

thereby involve them more actively in the process of development³. Donors and some theorists like Wunsch view decentralization as a means of combating corruption and alleviating poverty; considering that decentralization provides avenues for participatory management and better use of available resources.⁴ Sawadogo maintains that decentralization constitutes an excuse for treating diverse problems: good governance, development, democracy, poverty alleviation, administrative reform, and privatization at the same time⁵. This requires the presentation of the some major texts on decentralization, notably the 2004 Law on the orientation of Decentralization that replaced the hitherto disparate laws of 1974 on local councils with their multitude of subsequent amendments. The policy was given another face-lift with the signing of three laws on July 22nd 2004 concerning the functioning of councils and regions (V.K. Ngwoh, 2011). Between July 2009 and December 2010, eight laws were passed and close to forty decrees have been signed by the head of state to enable the process take root. In order to effectively implement the provisions of section 1(2) of Cameroon's constitution, the structure of the national territory was recognized in order to bring administration closer to those administered. Province and districts were transformed into Regions and subdivisions, respectively, while 59 councils and 12 city councils were created.

One of the major objective goals of decentralization is taking administration to the grassroots by engaging the local population to participate in the development of their communities through the election and sanctioning of their representatives through votes. However and most importantly the lack of credible and legitimate actors at the grassroots level in the decentralization process has significantly contributed in retarding/stalling the effective and efficient operationalization of the decentralization policy in Cameroon. It is against this perspective that the role and implication of traditional rulers or chiefs is necessarily significant towards the effective operationalization of the decentralization policy in the grassroots.

Chiefs as Credible and Legitimate Actors for Effective Decentralization in Cameroon

The term chieftaincy or traditional authority today is the relics of the multiple socio-political organizations that characterized pre-colonial African states before the advent of colonial rule. Chieftaincy is first and foremost a political unit created out of a multitude of kin groups all centered on a leader (G.M. Eyenga, 2015). Traditional authorities are the leaders of traditional

³C. Cheka quoting the "End of Year 2002, 2003 and 2004 policy speeches to the Cameroon nation by the President of the Republic".

⁴J.S. Wunsch, D. Olowu (eds.), *The failure of the Decentralized State and Self Governance in Africa*, Goulder Westview Press, 1990.

⁵A. A. Sawadogo, *L'Etat Africain face à la décentralisation*, Paris: Editions Karthala, 2001 p. 197.

communities. The word “traditional” refers to historic roots of leadership, which legitimizes the execution of power. There are many existing forms of traditional leadership.

“Traditional leadership” is anthropologically defined as including “those political, socio-political and politico-religious structures that are rooted in the pre-colonial period, rather than in the creations of the colonial and post-colonial states. By these key considerations, traditional leaders can include kings, other aristocrats holding offices, heads of extended families, and office holders in decentralized polities, as long as their offices are rooted in pre-colonial states and other political entities(R.Donald, 2003b).

Traditional leaders are the monarchs and aristocracies of Africa who have pre-colonial roots and their African language titles are often translated into English as “chiefs”, “traditional leaders”, “traditional authorities”, “traditional rulers”, “kings” and “natural rulers”. Chieftaincy includes those political, socio-political and politico-religious structures that are rooted in the pre-colonial period rather than in the creation of the colonial and post-colonial states, these offices we would consider to be “neo-traditional”.

3-Potentialities of Traditional Rulers as Relevance Actors in Effective Implementation of decentralization Policy at Grassroots Level

Within the perspective of governance and development, traditional authorities by their very historical nature possess a number of qualities capable of assisting the modern state to effectively implement its policies on the national territory. These qualities vary from the personality and politico-administrative aptitude of traditional leaders and their traditional legitimacy.

The Charismatic Personality and Politico-administrative Aptitude of the Chiefs

In most African traditional societies and notably in Cameroon, traditional rulers enjoyed both sacred and secular authority. In the Grassfields of Cameroon for example, by virtue of the ritual of the coronation ceremony, traditional leaders underwent a remarkable transformation and became virtually invincible and invulnerable people.

In fact, the newly made traditional leader or chief changed in status and was elevated and kept in a respectful distance from the ordinary man. He was at the apex of the visible hierarchy and his ritual of installation made him a sacred person and conferred on him a number of attributes and said to be endowed with divine powers and the incarnate of the political and religious life of their people. Once a prince had been enthroned as chief and undergone all prescribed rites, it was believed that the life force of his ancestors has automatically been transmitted to him. If the transfer of power did not follow the custom and tradition dictated by the ancestors, the usurper, after sitting on the ancestral stool automatically suffered a serious ailment such as sterility, madness or even death (M.T Aletum, 1980).

As a matter of fact immediately the chief assumed his ritual functions from his people, he automatically became the divine symbol of his people's health and welfare as it is believed that the life force of his ancestors is automatically transmitted to him (P.N. Nkwi, 1977). All of these characteristics gave the traditional leader a certain authority before his people. This explains why traditional leaders were feared and revered and their orders executed with diligence. Traditional leaders inspired traditional patriotism and the desire of belonging within their subjects. That is why in some instances in Cameroon, the local population respects orders from the traditional authorities than state authorities. In some circumstances, state authorities are obliged to always collaborate with traditional leaders to better exercise their duties, even though it has not always been an easy task.

The office of the traditional rulers in some traditional societies Cameroon and specifically the Grassfields was a composite one having many duties, responsibilities and obligations. In the Grassfields traditional society traditional leaders were considered head of the traditional government. They incarnated the function of the chief executive, chief judge, army chief as well as high priest of his community. This was so because in the Grassfields traditional societies, like in most African traditional societies, the power and authority of the chief were not considered separate or divisible. They were the guarantors of the traditional order or system in terms of political, security, justice, socio-cultural development of their chiefdoms.

Legitimacy of Traditional Authorities as an advantage

Political scientists and sociologists have recently developed very stimulating approaches to understand African states, to explain most of its failures and to indicate the way in which reforms should be led. They have focused their analysis on the articulation between state and society. On this particular issue it becomes common among them to speak of the illegitimacy of African state. This phrase expresses the fact that African state based on predictions is not (ex ante) locally appropriate or rooted (Englebert Pierre, 2000). It is a process of transplantation without any fundamental cultural and traditional basis.

Sindjoun Luc (2002a) justifies this assertion by talking, *L'Etat ailleurs. Entre noyau dur et case vide*, an assertion in which he holds that the state was created, ripe of its content before being exported to Africa. Most African countries at independence notably Cameroon copied their colonial masters' administrative system. Luc Sindjoun has described this as an institutional and political imaginary practice in post-colonial African States. By so doing the modern state was created without any legitimacy, but rather state legitimacy was imposed on the people. This of course gives rise to what Pierre Englebert, using Kalevi Holsti's terminology (J. Holsti Kalevi, 1996), has distinguished two sorts of legitimacy: the *vertical legitimacy* and the *horizontal legitimacy*. Vertical legitimacy corresponds to the quality of the relation between society and political institutions or in other words the presence of a consensus on the content of the social contract.

Even if ethnicity is itself a fluid concept and unreliable source of identity or institutional affiliation, as Englebert(2002) puts it, the fact that an ethnic group exists on both sides of contemporary border, no matter how intense the ethnic identity, means that the border cuts across a pre-existing area of common political culture. Therefore it becomes difficult for an imposing state to get the allegiance of a partitioned group.

Contrarily the chieftaincy institution which is the most noticeable feature of the socio-cultural heritage of the Africa and Cameroon in particular is very legitimate. This is partly because chiefs have been and continue to be a permanent feature of the Cameroonian society (Kaze, 2012). Throughout history chiefs have been at the centre of the political, socio-economic and cultural life of their respective societies. Although chiefs are referred to by various appellations, the core content and significance of chieftaincy and the functions of chiefs have lots of things in common.

Stressing on the importance of legitimacy vis-a vis power management Max Weber was famous for emphasizing that power relationships with the subjects are influenced by legitimacy. In political science, legitimacy implies that the subjects accept and recognize that a particular institution has ‘the right to rule’, and that their compliance to this institution is more or less voluntary(M. Weber, 1978). In other words, this means that a legitimate institution has got the right to exercise power it has got power through consent and mutual understanding, instead of through coercion. As Weber explains it; the subjects must have an *interest in obeying* that particular ruler. Seymour Martin Lipset (1984) provides a slightly different definition of legitimacy; however, his definition is still related to Weber’s understanding of the concept. Lipset argues that legitimacy is “the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society”

In order to assess the legitimacy of the chieftaincy in Cameroon, the term legitimacy must operationalize. In line with Oomen’s(2005) recommendation, legitimacy within African chieftaincy institution is necessarily operationalized as justified support. Justified as it takes into account the way in which people think of, speak about and justify the way in which the chieftaincy institution obtained its authority”(H.B.Markus,2017) and support it because support forms “a reasonable and measurable indication of whether people will comply when told to do so or not.

In fact because of the reverence citizens have for the chieftaincy institution, chieftaincy is more than ever legitimate. As such, traditional authorities have the capacity based on their legitimacy mobilize local communities for political participation, thereby empowering them to play a part in influencing policy on the distribution of public services. Traditional authorities also have the potential to support the efforts of governments in service delivery by participating in the administration of justice and by mobilizing human and financial resources for expanding educational and health services. African traditional values, thus, not only

converge with modern democratic values but also have the potential to complement the mechanisms of modern democracy by filling the gaps in the applicability of modern democratic mechanisms.

4-Chiefs as relevant actors for effective grassroots local governance

From their historical past traditional leaders enjoyed much legitimacy and influence at the grassroots level and their relevance to the evolution of the modern state has very crucial. Just like Peter Skalnik notes; the consolidation of the state in Africa and democracy necessarily needs the incorporation of traditional institutions that had existed in Africa prior to colonial rule. Chiefs could be very effective in the decentralization process in Cameroon but their involvement is doomed to fail because of a number of reasons.

One of the major challenges capable of jeopardizing chiefs from becoming relevant actors in the effective implementation of the decentralization policy is the questionable moral integrity of some chiefs. Some traditional rulers in Cameroon nowadays continue to witness a drop in respect vis-à-vis their subjects. This is because some of them have failed to play the role for which they were meant for, but rather, have used the prerogatives given to them by custom and tradition to soil and down grade themselves. As such, the once respected traditional rulers have become a play toll in the hands of the powers that be. Instances have been noted in Cameroon where chiefs desecrate their thrones, betrayed their people and ridiculed their traditions and customs without any shame all in the name of party politics and the quest for political offices. As a result, it become difficult for such chiefs to serves as the ideal representative for the effective implementation of decentralization policy at the grassroots since they are not in harmony with the people and given that decentralization is about the participation of all local citizens, such a chief is bound to fail in his exercise of authority.

Furthermore, another major challenge is the resistance of central governments to devolve authority and competence to local authorities. Again, knowing the capacity of mobilization and influence of traditional authorities in Cameroon, the central governments and administrations, which are often legitimately weak before the people of diverse ethnic origins in Cameroon, do not want to give up control, power or resources to the lower levels so do not substantially support attempts to decentralise (Olowu 2001). Following Decree No 17/245 of 15th July 1977, traditional rulers in Cameroon were empowered as auxiliaries of the modern government or administration. This was because, until that year (1977), the only legal document concerning chieftaincy in Cameroon especially in British Cameroon was the colonial law No 244 of February 1933. Apart from that there was the need for a new law that would harmonize the chieftaincy policies of the former states of East and West Cameroon. The laws of 15th February 1977 in Cameroon recognized traditional rulers as auxiliaries of the administration. This law equally provided disciplinary sanctions for traditional rulers who did not cooperate with the state. These sanctions vary from deposition of chiefs to the suspension of their remunerations.

In the same Local elites who are not necessarily more responsive to local demands are a major handicap. In almost all chiefdoms in Cameroon, there will always exist as a category of elites either in opposition or in harmony with the chief. In fact meanwhile the elites are holding important political functions at the national level, they also make sure they have a strong grip on the base as a support base in case they lost authority at the national level. That is why such elites usually do everything to be so close to the traditional authority to gain favors. As such ambitious traditional authorities will generally get into conflict with its elite. Thus minimizing their chances of becoming efficient relevant grassroots leaders for decentralization policy.

The truth is that decentralization in Cameroon has neither guaranteed more representativeness and accountability nor more democratic government at the local level. Thus failure arises because the local people are not the direct beneficiaries but a means of legitimizing elite power, mostly through patron-client networks. This legitimization is because Cameroon like most developing countries portrays features of neo-liberalism and elite-dominated democratization. No wonder that in most developing countries, patron-client relations between citizens, political organizations, and the state, and a paternalistic and passive political culture that have traditionally predominated have failed to disappear with the advent of decentralization (A. Nickson, 1995). However, despite these challenges there exist a number of proposed determinants that could guarantee traditional leaders effective implication in the decentralization policy at the grassroots level in Cameroon.

Determinants for an Effective Chieftaincy Contribution in the Decentralization Process in Cameroon.

Von Trotha (1996) argues that the reliance of the colonial and post-colonial states upon chiefs to act as instruments of intermediary administration between those state forms and local people, demonstrates the 'weakness' of the 'organizational power' of those state forms.

It reflects the lack of integration of state and society in many African countries which is expressed as a series of antagonistic dualities: rulers and ruled, capital city and hinterland, urban centers and peasants. In Cameroon administrative chieftaincy as per the 1977 chieftaincy decree as an intermediary order has become a “double gatekeeper” (chiefdoms and the modern state) between the state and the local people, restricting and guiding access of one to the other in matters of state action, clientelist politics, national and local culture, state and local legal orders, the individual and economic matters.

In Cameroon and elsewhere in Africa, chiefs continue to draw their strengths from their local roots: they defend local culture and social order as well as being at the center of local political life. Yet chiefs continue to be subject to the pressures of the state, especially pressures to encourage local people to conform to the state's administrative policies, to accept the regime's politics, and to recognize the state as legitimate (Trotha, 1996). Yet despite all of these pressures and various attempts to write off chieftaincy, chieftaincy is likely to be part of the

process of democratic renewal of African states (Van Nieuwaal, 1987). Neither chiefs nor the state are going to disappear in the near future, but they do need to be transformed together.

For an effective implication of chiefs in the decentralization policy at the grassroots level in Cameroon, the state has to recognize the de facto legal pluralism and to institutionalize the chiefs' independent legal system, except for such cases as communal violence. In this respect Von Trotha (1996) acknowledges that this local justice may 'perpetuate the injustices' of the local order but believes that local autonomy in this matter is to be preferred.

Chiefs in Cameroon not only have to be guardians of tradition but they must also be active agents of the present and future by promoting the well-being of the community. This is what really validates chieftaincy, not mere calls for 'self-folklorization'. Von Trotha (1996) contends that, while chieftaincy selection is based on ascriptive norms as a means of limiting access to office, and it therefore appears that chieftaincy cannot be reconciled with democratization, this is not really so. Chieftaincy depended in the past on competent leadership. Incompetent leaders could be removed. The kind of competencies that chiefs must have is changing: chiefs have to deal with "the requirements of modern economic, administrative and political challenges and tasks".

Chieftaincy must become 'civil chieftaincy.' When chiefs speak of representing 'their people,' they do not mean that they represent them in the sense that one individual may represent another, but rather they refer to representation as the embodiment of sacred traditions. Yet the political and economic changes associated with colonialism, the post-colonial state (e.g., administrative chieftaincy) and the market economy (capitalism) have undermined this claim to representation by chiefs. Instead chiefs must adopt a new basis for conflict resolution and representation. Von Trotha argues that under civil chieftaincy the chief becomes a forum where issues can be debated and resolved and local interests can be articulated, and a defender of local interests in discussions with the central government.

Any way to a future and promising African polity must give chieftaincy a prominent place in the political institutions and the political process, and integrate chieftaincy in a new system of checks and balances which restrains the abuse of power of the national political actors as well as chiefs and their allies. Peter Skalník (1987) argues that democracy in African states needs to be enhanced by incorporating mechanisms that allow the indigenous political institutions and values to be expressed and to have effect within the imported, i.e., colonially introduced, state. Like Peter Geschiere, he considers the sacred aspect of traditional politics.

Conclusion

One of the major development challenges African states faced nowadays are generally linked to the lack of African specificities in policy design and implementation. For instance if some peace processes or conflict resolution have not been sustainable in Africa, it is simply because local specificities were not taken into consideration. Today the structure of state

architecture and functioning in Cameroon is fundamentally based on the western model of state organization with very little consideration on local realities in a country with more than 250 ethnic groups, two main cultural identities (English and French) and two main religions (Christianity and Islam) and at the grassroots level, thousands of traditional authorities who in effect one of the most noticeable features of the socio-cultural heritage of the Cameroon. Throughout history chiefs in Cameroon have been at the centre of the political, socio-economic and cultural life of their respective societies. Although chiefs are referred to by various appellations depending on the ethnic group, the core content and significance of chieftaincy and the functions of chiefs have lots of things in common. Based on all these, it is quite clear that the role of chiefs in the effective implementation of decentralization policy notably at grassroots level is very crucial. Above all, the rational valorization of the chieftaincy institution in Cameroon could potentially consolidate state administration and boost development at grassroots level.

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