

Local Development in Cameroon: Comparative Analysis of the Development Committees of the Bangang Chieftaincy (West) and the Township of Meskine (Far North)

Léonnie Dezeu Tchinda^{1*}, Natali Kossoumna Liba'a²

¹Assistant Lecturer, Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences, University of Maroua, Maroua, Cameroon

²Professor/HDR, Head of Department Geography, Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences, University of Maroua, Maroua, Cameroon

***Corresponding author**

Léonnie Dezeu Tchinda

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Abstract: The rural milieu of Cameroon is lagging in development infrastructures. Local stake holders via local development committees invest in those areas to uplift the living standards of the populations. It is against this backdrop that this paper aims at making a comparative analysis of the actions of development committees in the Bangang Chieftaincy (Bamboutos) since 1977 and in the township of Meskine (Diamare) since 1993, in order to evaluate the level of participation of local stake holders in the development of their land. Primary and secondary data have enabled us to analyze the actions of the development committee of Bangang (including its three subcommittees) with those of the Meskine central committee (including one subcommittee). The evaluation results situate respectively in Bangang and Meskine at 68% against 64% the rate of public actions accomplished by the committees, at 28% against 35% the rate of social actions, and at 4% against 1% the rate of economic actions.

Keywords: local development, development committees, rural milieu, actions, Bangang, Meskine.

INTRODUCTION

Like most African countries, Cameroon has been going through an outstanding development process since the late eighties. This trend has been fostered by the decentralization process. Those trends have been exacerbated by the economic crisis of 1989 which forced the government to relent its commitment vis-a-vis the development of rural world.

Ever since, the endogenous populations have been more involved in decision making processes relating to the development of their land [1]. As a result, various institutions taking care of the rural world emerged, and particularly the revamping of rural development committees. These are association movements bringing together the natives living in and out of the locality, whose objective is to sustain the development of the locality. Initiated in the early 1977 by the government [2], these organizations proliferated in the beginning of the year 1990, mostly promoted by the local populations with the support of the elites in order to construct their area. In West Cameroon, these institutions constitute the real task force in development matters. Their emergence and their vitality in the Bangang chieftaincy have led us to question the existence of similar structures and on their actions in the Far North region of Cameroon, in a bit to analyze and compare the performances of the local stakeholders in a wet tropical mountainous area and dry tropical lowland area. This approach prompted us to ask the following question: do the development committees of the Bangang chieftaincy and the Meskine keep existing today? In other words, how do the local development committees contribute to the sociocultural, economic and political vitality of the society?

Can it be inferred that all the regions despite their localizations are equally equipped to accompany development? Or under what conditions can the development committees better fulfil their missions at the local level?

In this perspective, a comparative analysis of the actions of the development committees in these two localities follows the hypotheses that the development committees are the best means of ensuring rural development nowadays.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To achieve the objective of this research, we used a research methodology that is based on the one hand the analysis of secondary existing data which were provided by the development committees, the reports, and minutes of

meetings. The information collected from the public organizations, research centres and NGOs and also the analysis of research papers and university documents. On the other hand we have carried out field inquiries through exploratory interviews with resource persons, interviews and questionnaires. These instruments enabled us to collect primary data. In this light, we have interviewed 40 residents of Bangang in four different quarters of the chieftaincy, 12 administrative officers and 20 elites. In Meskine, we have interviewed 20 residents disseminated in 2 quarters (Gakle where the SCD is found), five administrative officers and 10 elites. We discussed with them questions related to the structuring, the strategies, the successes and the constraints which DCs face. Furthermore, the observations that we have made for 2 years during weeks of participation to development and general assemblies have enabled us to complement the analysis of the primary data. Contacting resource persons was done using the snow ball method, which consists in collecting information from one person through one or several persons previously met. The data were sorted out and analyzed using a variety of statistical methods including manual sorting and analysis through EXCEL.

These primary and secondary data have enabled us to number 64 SDCs headed by a central development committee. In Meskine, we identified 1 SDC headed by a 1 CDC. However the data obtained in Bangang concern the actions of the CDC and 3 SDCs (out of 16 samples that were studied) based on the magnitude of the work and the date of creation. In Meskine, the results concern actions of the CDC and the SCD. The processing and analysis of the data were mainly done using EXCEL. That has permitted us to evaluate the works of each committee taken as case study and to draw the conclusion (as well as the results) are presented in the following lines.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The birth of DC in Bangang and Meskine

Being part of the Batcham subdivision, Bangang is a chieftaincy made up of 75 quarters [3] and 12 third class chiefdoms spread on a surface area of 90, 5 Km2 with a population of 33 213 inhabitants in 2005. Meskine is a township of 52 quarters, with a population of 21 898 inhabitants (2005 figures) and forms part of the Maroua 1er subdivision (660 Km2).

Thanks to decree n° 77/89 of 24 March 1977 [4], Development committee of the Bangang Chieftaincy name CODEGBANG, was created [5]. Every year, during the week of participatory development, the local populations, the elites, and the natives of the village residing in cities come together. Law n° 90/53 of 02 December 1990 [6] on the Freedom of the association and people gathering has fostered the emergence of the SDCs of Bangang. They follow the pattern of CDC but which are based in the different quarters. Today, Bangang has 64 SDCs regrouping either the quarters or the villages. In Meskine however, the Central development committee (CDC) was borne in 1993 at the time when the SDCs were proliferating in Bangang. Nevertheless the SDC of Gakle that takes in the quarter of Meskine was created in 1977, the same year as that of Bangang. According to the Lawan of this quarter, it was created thanks to the efforts of three persons in order to meet the needs of their populations. This is unlike Bangang where the initiators are more numerous. The figure here below shows the rhythm of the creation of DCs in Bangang and in Meskine.

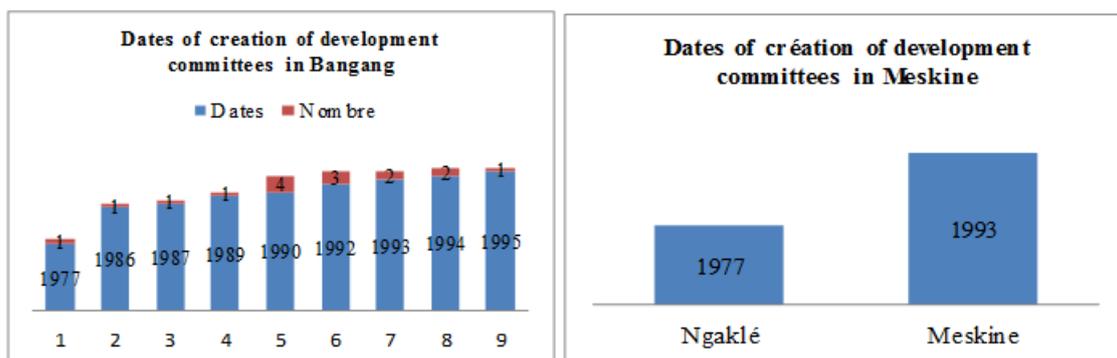


Fig-1 and 2: Evolution of the creation of development committees in Bangang and Meskine

Source : DEZEU L, 2007, Field Studies 2017

According to these bar graphs, the DCs have proliferated in Bangang between 1977 and 1995. The greater number of SDCs was created between 1990 and 1994; this was enhanced by the promulgation of law n° 90/53 of 02 December 1990. The graph on the right shows two DCs created in Meskine, one in 1977 and the other in 1993. It should be noted that the SDCs in Bangang were created after the CDC; this is unlike in Meskine where the existence of the CDC preceded the creation of the SDC. In this second case, it comes as an innovation in a context where people are not used to coming together and making financial contributions. Through these works, the populations who were sensitized solicited the creation of the CDC which now engulfs all the quarters of the township. In Bangang however, the populations are

used to gatherings and financial contributions (tontines). That is the reason why the nascence of the CDC is what provoked the creation of SDC in order to promote faster, effective and concentrated development.

A comparative analysis of the number and dates of creation of the different committees reveals that the populations of Bangang are more dynamic than those of Meskine. In fact, the first DC was created in 1977, the second in 1986 and the others followed in 1990. Today, there are 64 SDCs beside the CDC in the Bangang chieftaincy. In Meskine, nevertheless, there first DC was created in 1977; just like in Bangang, but only one more has been created later on in 1993. At present, there are only two DCs in Meskine: the SDC and the CDC. The fact that there is only 1 DC in Meskine as against 64 in Bangang in 39 years raises some questions on performance. Is the greatness of achievements in any way subordinate to the number of SDCs? Does it change or impact the standard of living of the populations? In the next section, the presentation of the different achievements will permit us to provide an answer to that question.

The characteristics of the DCs in Bangang and in Meskine

The dynamism of the populations of Bangang comes mainly from the youth activities celebrated since the Year 1970 in the divisions under the name of "congress" or rally. This phenomenon has emerged in villages and even more in quarters. It is this atmosphere of reunion and gathering between city and village dwellers that for the most part provoked the creation of a SDC in order to build in an area [7]. This is what explains the multiplication of the SDCs in Bangang although there is a CDC. If the order was to be given by the CDC before a community house is built in a quarter, it would take years or decades. The actions initiated at the local level by the populations of each quarter speak of themselves and create some competition nowadays between the natives of quarters. In Meskine, this dynamism is not less visible because the over centralization of actions. The local populations in quarters do not see the need to create their own SDC because they collectively invest in the CDC.

Structuration and investment strategies of the DCs in Bangang and in Meskine

In the two instances, the main organ of the DC is the general assembly which is held annually to decide on priority projects to be achieved during the year. The executive bureau meets once for some or twice in other cases per year in ordinary sessions. Extraordinary sessions can be convened if need be. Be it in Bangang or in Meskine, most of the executive bureau meets at the eve of the GA to decide on the development of activities and to draft the agenda of the meeting. However, Gakle is exception to this rule as GAs are held biannually. Some SDCs in Bangang meet twice a year. The executive is elected at the absolute majority of votes from both the village and city dwellers.

The investment strategies go through the identification and adoption of projects, then funds raising and finally follow up and realization of the project. In Meskine as well as in Bangang, the decision regarding investments to be made is taken by the executive bureau. It identifies the needs of the populations in each locality. However, it is the GA that adopts to the absolute majority of votes the projects on the basis of the priorities of the populations.

Concerning funds raising, it is done in Meskine in each quarter through the Djaoros (quarter heads) who, through their teams mobilize the populations by canvassing from home to home following instruction from the lamido. In Bangang, funds raising is almost the same in all the DCs. In days of old, DCs used membership cards that allowed every member to participate in work planning. Nowadays the system has changed a great deal as there are now three means of funds raising. They include the GA, the village associations and city dwellers' associations. In both cases, only defaulters or late comers contribute during the GA. This may also apply to invited guests such as mayors, members of sister-associations, NGOs, or any individual or elite who want to be noticed publicly.

Concerning contributions, the amount per member is set by the internal rules and regulations and can be amended depending on the economic circumstances. Apart from the financial contributions, there could be donations in kind (zinc, trucks of sand, wood planks etc.). The table here below summarizes the individual amount, as varied as they may be depending on social classes. They may also vary according to the committee.

The amounts here in table 1 are minimum mandatory amount. Most often, people contribute according to the interest that they have in the village. Sometimes, the elites give more than a million francs CFA. It is worth noting that these amounts are required in the associations and in the quarters of the Bangang Chieftaincy. In Meskine however, there is no obligation. Any individual gives according to their wealth. According to some reports, committed children of good faith sometimes contributed amounts ranging from 50F to 100F. Women sometimes make the same contribution as children. Only the Djaoros contributions are required; each of them has to give 10 000 FCFA. The contributions of the main stake holders of the DCs are presented in the following figures.

Table-1: Required individual contributions

Status	Minimal amount Bangang (in F CFA)	Minimal amount Meskine (in F CFA)
Adult female village dweller (non trader)	500	
Adult male village dweller non trader Female city dweller non trader University students	1000	
City dweller non trader and non-civil servant Student in institutions of higher learning Male Village resident trading	2000	1000
categories C and D civil servant government contract agent categories I to VI petit trader city dweller	5000	
categories A and B civil servant/ non members the elites circle, government contract agent categories VII to XII /non members the elites circle,	10 000	5000
Elites member, Assimilated (business men/ transporters (drivers) non elite members)	50 000	10 000
Djaoros		10 000

Source : DEZEU L, 2007, Field Studies 2017

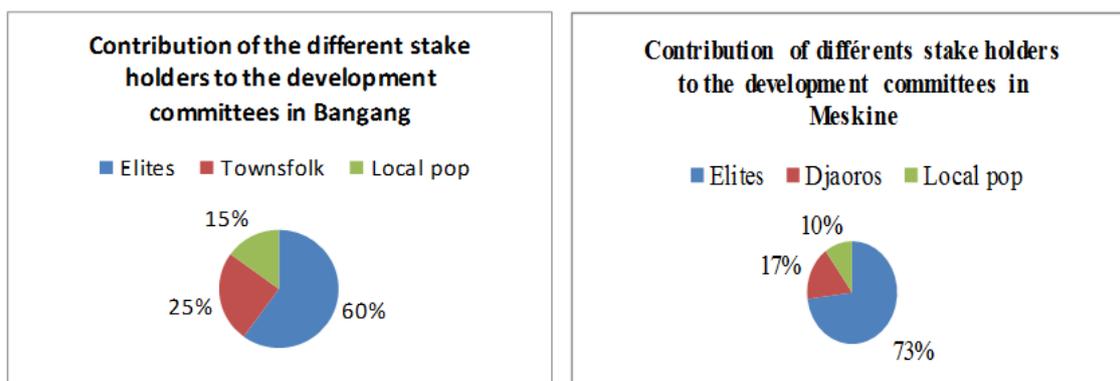


Fig 3 & 4: Contributions of different stake holders to the development committees in Bangang and Meskine

Source : DEZEU L, 2007, Field Studies, 2017

The elites are the first stake holders in the DCs in Bangang. They are followed by the city residents and the local populations. The aids may be in cash (80%), or in kind (15%) or both (5%). In Meskine, the Djaoros come in second positions after the elites. In both cases, the local populations take the third position. Secondary stake holders are made up of mayors and the sister-committees.

The actions of the CDC in Bangang and in Meskine

The actions of the development committees can be placed in three categories: public actions, social actions and actions of economic interest. Where elections are nearing, there can also be political actions through which the candidates to elections who hail from the locality buy people’s conscience in order to incite them to massively participate in voting them.

Quantifiable actions

During this study, the cost of some achievements has been assessed. Some are rather difficult to evaluate. The following tables present the quantifiable achievements in Bangang and in Meskine since the creation of the committees.

Table-2: Types of actions carried out by CODEGBANG [1] and their estimated cost

Public Actions	Social Actions	Economic Actions	Estimated cost (in FCFA)
Water project			32.000.000 including 68.000.000 by the state
	Construction of a community house		11.000.000
Tracking of the main road Batcham-Bafou			6.000.000
Tracking of 7 secondary roads			10.000.000
		Creation of cooperatif deposits	
Creation of health centre in Bangang			15.000.000
Construction 8 classroms, GSS Bangang			16.000.000
	Dressing of entrance to the chief's palace		4.000.000
	Contribution to border conflict resolution Bangang		800.000
Construction 6 classrooms in GHS Bangang			12.000.000
Construction 6 classrooms in GSS Nzindong			8.000.000
Creation of health centre			
Rehabilitation of health centre Balajeutsa			7.500.000
	Creation of fifteen committee for the fight against Aids		
Construction of bridge Tchueto			6.000.000
	Construction grand stand		
		Construction pipe borne water fountain in Batsiet and others	6.000.000
	Creation community telecentre		30 000 000
		Création of a micro finance (MC2)	1 000 000
	Electrification main quarters		
Reforestation of hydraulic basin of Batsiet			
Total Public Actions			111.500.000
Total Social Actions			45.800.000
Total economic Actions			7.000.000
Grand Total			164.300.000

Source : DEZEU L, 2007, Field Studies 2017

¹ Comité de Développement du Groupement Bangang

Table-3: Estimated costs of the various achievements in the central committee development in Meskine (CDM)

Public Actions	Social Actions	Economic Actions	Estimated cost (in FCFA)
	Donation of 700 desks to various schools in Meskine		7 000 000
	Payment of Parents' teachers wages(salaries) via PTA		3 600 000
Construction de 14 classrooms at GHS and GTC Meskine			14 000 000
Construction de 3 classrooms in GTC Meskine			3 000 000
Construction one classroom in each of the 14 primary			14 000 000
	Construction of toilets in 4 schools		500 000
	Construction de 7 open water wells in quarters and in the health centre oof Meskine		7 00 000
	Construction of 5 drills (wells) for water.		15 000 000
	Award of scholarships to meritorious high schools and University [²]		5 000 000
	Création of a community radio [³].		2 000 000
		Création d'une micro finance [⁴]	770 000
	Planting of 2 000 trees thanks to the sahel vert project		
Total Public Actions			41.600.000
Total Social Actions			23.200.000
Total Economic Actions			770.000
Grand Total			65.570.000

Source : Rapport CODEGBANG [9] 2000-2004, DEZEU L, 2007, Field Studies 2017

Relations between the Development Sub-committees and the central development committee

Until 1997 in Bangang, the CDC and the SDC share complementary and subordination relations. In the earlier years, the elites of each quarters were required to contribute for the CDC. In return, the CDC set an amount which they share among the SDCs. However, for some years now, this synergy has been weakened and each group tends to work alone [8]. Moreover, the tendency to group according to the quarters becomes a necessity in the SDCs, causing them to become more autonomous towards the CDC. That notwithstanding, this weakening synergy is not does not stop the CDCs from seeking collaboration from the SDCs. The former sometimes convene meetings with the latter to renew the partnership.

Contrary to what obtains in Bangang, the links between the CDC and the SDC in Meskine are tighter. As a result, the SDC cannot hold its GA without notifying the CDC. Moreover, the presence of the members of the CDC during such meetings guarantees extra funds as they will provide financial assistance and make donations in the name of the CDC. In return, the members of the SDC take part in the meetings of the GAs of the CDC. They can also make

² The sum of 50 000 F CFA for BAC or GCE AL holders and de 10 000 F CFA for pupils

³ Thanks to the Millennium village programme subsidized by the UNESCO. The committee has taken over the management and is responsible for the payment of workers wage through the management committee that was put in place.

⁴ The self-managed peasant funds for saving and credit help farmers, stock breeders and petit traders to save money and obtain credit for the development of their activities.

individual financial contributions or donations in kind on behalf of the SDC. According to reports from our interviewees in those two areas, the relations that exist between the CDCs and the SDCs are as presented in the following graphs.

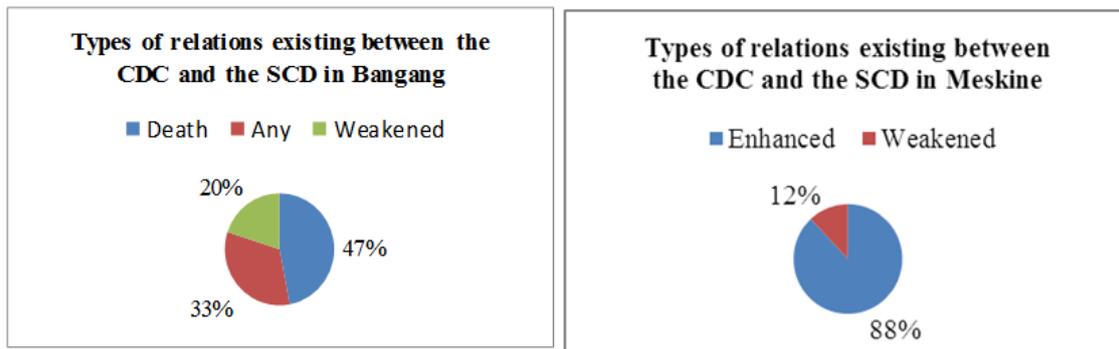


Fig 5 & 6: Types of relations existing between the SCD and the CDC in Bangang and Meskine
Source : DEZEU L, 2007, Field Studies 2017

The number of achievements grows with the number of DCs. This is inferred from the comparison between Bangang and Meskine. There are 64 DCs in Bangang. Given that a DC might carry out one project, one would expect 64 projects in Bangang, unlike Meskine which has got only 1 SDC. This implies that the other quarters are less developed. This is what explains underdevelopment or under-empowerment of some quarters.

The actions that are not financially assessed are those whose costs could not be estimated. It can be noted that the total realizations costs is higher in Bangang than in Meskine. In the first case, it concerns work done in 39 years while in the second case it concerns 23 years. It can be expected that the DC in Meskine will put out the same performance as the CODEGBANG after 39 years. It is also worth noting that actions of public impact outnumber the others and are also more costly. The following figure better illustrates this.

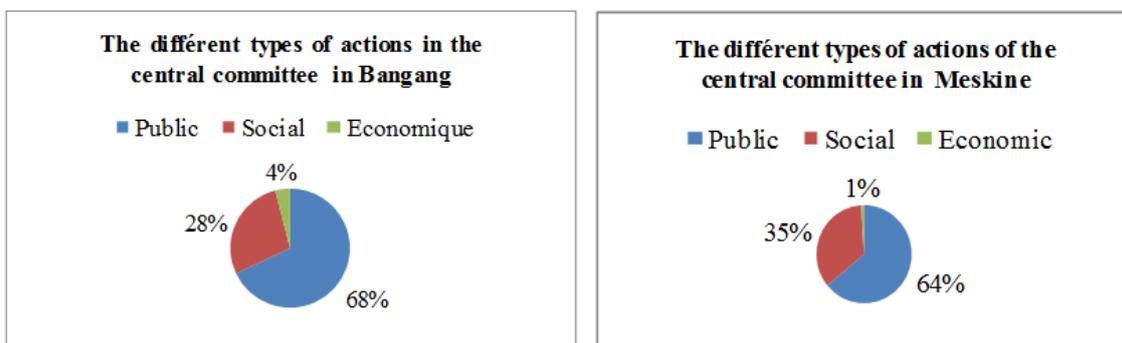


Fig 7 & 8: Rate of the different types of achievements in the central committees in Bangang and Meskine
Source: DEZEU L, 2007, Field Studies 2017

It stands from the two cases that majority of the achievements of the CDC is of public interest. The social actions come in the second position, while economic actions that should help generate income barely exist.

The development committees of Bangang and Meskine have undoubtedly contributed to the welfare of their populations. They are however facing some difficulties that entangle their performance. At the political level, CDCs become too politicized as the organization grows bigger. It also stands out that the gatherings of people yields conflict of leadership, particularly in the CDC. The case of Bangang illustrates this fact. There was a loss of momentum and enthusiasm for a decade following the tragic death of a member, whose responsibility was imputed, according to the populations, to his comrades of the committee who seemed jealous of his initiatives in the organization.

At the functional level, the public achievements of the committee sometimes concur with those of the state. Be it at the level of basic education or health, the public actions of the committee are sometimes confused (mixed up) with those of the State. The creation of a high school or a health centre is incumbent on the State. Nevertheless the negotiations for the creation and the construction of the buildings are often taken care of by the DC. Often, the State only comes in to finish or to continue the works that has been started through the initiative of the DC. Moreover, some individual donations that are expected to be given to the populations by the elites in due times, are sometimes made

available only during the participatory development week in the name of the committee. This confusion appears mostly at the level of the central development committees where the elites are gathered in great number, unlike the SDC where emphasis is laid on the social achievements that would provide direct assistance to the populations without the intervention of the State.

Non quantifiable actions

Apart from concrete actions that can be quantified, we also have non quantifiable works which concern the social domain. At the educational level, negotiations that led to the transformation of the GSS Bangang into GHS, the opening of the second cycle and exam centre, as well as its transformation into a bilingual high school. These also include negotiations for the opening of GSS Nzindong and the posting of teachers in those schools. All these contribute to youth development and curb rural exodus of teenagers who can now terminate their second cycle in the villages without having to go to town.

In the domain of health, the organizations of free consultations and the reduction of the price of drugs during weeks of participatory development enhances access to health care and contribute to the welfare of the populations. The creation, under the impulse of the DCs, of fifteen local committees for the fight against AIDS, the creation of water wells as well as water fountains contributes in providing not only potable water but also health counselling to the populations.

The negotiations that culminated with the transformation of the Intergrated Health Centre of Bangang into a sub divisional health centre are among other feats of the CDC.

At the level of community living in society, the development committee provides counselling for civic and citizenship education in order to ensure harmony in the village. It is becoming rare to see erring animals during the farming period.

Women have stop cultivating the road sides and instead make sure that after cultivation they clean up the part of their farm that borders the road.

In some quarters prizes are even awarded to the compound owners who stand out by cleanliness. Also entente reigns in some quarters thanks to the DC. Some persistent conflicts between families has been solved thanks to the conciliation of the DC. These include the resolution of the border conflicts between Bangang-Bafou, Bangang-Balatchi, and Bangang-Bamock.

In Meskine, many secondary roads have jointly been created by the council. The GSS has been created thanks to the collaboration between the PNDP and the council within the framework of a community project. The committee has also made donations during natural catastrophes, like the floods that occur in 2014.

The actions of the development sub-committees in Bangang and in Meskine

In principle, all the SDCs in Bangang work for their development. There is no DC that has no achievement for the advancement of their area. However, the actions are sometimes different, or the same as long as they reflect the priority needs of their populations. Three case studies show that the Sub-committee of development of Batsépou, Mada and Environs (SCODEBAME), first SDC in the Bangang chieftaincy since 1986, have not got its community hall yet. Instead, since it regroups two quarters, it has arranged a great pitch (grand stand) which serves as parade ground during great festivities of the participatory development week. However, it has built two bridges (Mada et Liagoh) (2 175 000 F CFA), a building of 6 classrooms for the opening of a public school (10 000 000 F CFA). It has rehabilitated and replaced the piping for a water catchment point created in 1980 by the farmers' cooperative (CAPLABAM) (1 565 000 F CFA). From this catchment point, the committee has created many water fountains in two villages and their surroundings (1 500 000 F CFA). Last but not the least, the committee has created a road tract that connect other quarters; it is regularly maintained. The total amount of their achievements stands at 15 240 000 F CFA.

Created in 1992, the Development Committee of Bangang-Bangouo (CODEBAB) has built a community house (7 500 000 F CFA), has created routes to disenclave the area (700 000 F CFA), water wells (1000 000 F CFA), has built an air shed in the market (1000 000 F CFA), and has connected a great part of the area to electricity (not financial estimate available). The total amount of expenditure can be estimated at 10 200 000 F CFA. The Development Committee of Baméguéa that was created around the same period in 1993 has also created road tracts (physical deployment of the populations) and constructed a community house (8 000 000 F CFA).

The urgent needs that stand out from the three examples are the creation of roads and the construction of gathering places. Depending on the geographic situation or even economic and political reasons in a village, the DC

identifies the priority needs of its populations. The actions of the CODEBAB progress rapidly because of the geographic situation. It is not far from the central market. It is therefore nearer to the electricity line, unlike the SCODEBAME which is situated at the confines of the chieftaincy; where investment is not easy.

However, because of disputes between families in a quarter, the committee can be weakened. This hinders the realization of group works or development. This is the case of the CADEBA where squabbles slowed down work progress at the beginning.

Otherwise, at the economic level, the financial means are by far fewer than the needs and constitute an entanglement (hindrance) to the achievements of the DC. This lack of means is more acute in areas where there are less wealthy elites. This is the case of the CODEBA where the achievements were fewer at the inception in 1992. During the past decade however, things have improved tremendously with following the arrival of new elites. In other quarters are found some elites who are not engaged in the DC, especially when they do not have affluence in the society.

In Meskine, the SDC of Gakle takes care of the wages of two parents' teachers per year with a sum of 15000 CFA / month for 9 months. This amounts to 270 000 FCFA, making about 4 050 000 in 15 years. It has constructed 2 wells in two quarters: Djagalé and Hardeo (200 000 F CFA). It takes care of the maintenance every two years for about 200 000 F CFA. It has electrified 2 quarters: Hardeo (700 000 F CFA) and Taneo (330 000 F CFA). It has also purchased a Karal land in the 1980s, it is let out every year for a sum of 20000FCFA. The total amount of achievement stands at 5 960 000 F CFA.

However, at the social level, squabbles and disputes as well as misunderstandings slow down the evolution of the committee whereas solidarity between members enhances great projects and fosters development. In other cases there are dishonest people who collect funds but keep part of it. It is the case of Gakle where an inhabitant charged with funds collection allegedly retained part of it. Furthermore, during the common interest works like the construction of a road, the people whose lands are trespassed express discontent. Their attitude threatens social cohesion.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this analysis, it stands out that be it in Bangang or in Meskine, each locality where a DC exists has been able to set up a collective structure to help the populations. It can also be established that the more a population is dynamic, the higher is the possibility of creating its DC and of making great achievements. This is the conclusion that can be drawn from the comparison between Bangang and Meskine. While in the former there are 65 DCs, in the latter there are only 2. However, considering the number of achievements in the DC of the two localities, there is no more doubt that DCs are carriers of development in rural areas.

What would these localities be like if there were no DCs? It is therefore worth noting the indisputable role of the DCs in the achievement of Cameroon's emergence by 2035. In fact, there is not one DC that has not been successful in Bangang and Meskine. Even though some of them are slow in the completion of their projects, they have been able to set up collective works whose feasibility would have been impossible without the existence of the DCs. If the trend is sustained, many villages will be transformed into cities by 2050. These DCs provide a pattern (model) of endogenous development which, via the elites, mobilize the state and the NGOs to work in the villages of Cameroon. In this light, they play an indisputable role in the process of decentralization in the sense that villages are organizing and working for their development without seeking the assistance of the government. This latter only comes in the aftermath to support local initiatives. But these DCs will have to put aside conflicts of leadership to become more dynamic. The state also has to accompany these organizations because the real problem that slows down the finalization of projects is the lack of financial means. However, we should not start considering them as panaceas to all development problems and fight against poverty in the rural area. The eradication of these evils requires the participation of many institutions including development committees.

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