



Local Authorities and Citizens Participation in Decision-Making within the Bamenda Municipalities

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Abstract: *The vision of the state was to create opportunities for citizens' participation in the interest of decision-making. In spite of the efforts put in place by the state, the reality on the ground is that, there is still very low involvement of citizens in the decision-making process within the Bamenda municipalities. The objective of the study was to determine the extent to which Local Authorities have enhanced citizens' participation in decision-making and the bottlenecks that undermines this process within a specific case study, the Bamenda municipalities. In addition, to determine the strategies used by local authorities to inform and engage citizens' participation in decision-making within the Bamenda municipalities. The study used a mixed concurrent research design with a sample size of 400 respondents selected through stratify random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Data was collected by using questionnaires and interviews. The SPSS Version 21 was used to analyse data and Microsoft Word for text processing. Findings revealed a negative and insignificant citizen involvement in decision-making within the Bamenda municipalities. It also revealed that citizen participation increases when they are involved in decision-making that affects their life and finally that face-to-face meeting is the main strategy used by local authorities to mobilised citizen participation in the decision-making process. The strategy for involving the public was not constant because citizen participates in different activities other than decision-making. The study recommended the administrative and financial autonomy of local authorities with a bottom-top approach to decision-making*

Keywords: *Local Authorities, Citizen Participation and Decision Making*

1. INTRODUCTION

Citizen participation in local governance has been advocated as a way to enhance communication between government and citizen, build public support for local government goal and develop public trust in government (Amose and Morse, 2016). Citizens' participation in the decision-making process is the basis for the functioning and development of a true democratic society, as it encourages social dialogue on the most important issues. Citizens accept the decisions of elected representatives (Local Authorities) and trust them when they are aware of the opportunities available to participate in a public debate on important topics and decisions. The main goal of citizens' participation in the decision-making process is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the work of the public authorities, and to legitimize the decisions made. The representative model or indirect democracies allow citizens to participate in decision-making through elections and after elections by controlling the work of elected representatives. Although decision-making expresses the democratic will of citizens, it cannot be considered an exclusive label of their democratic will. Decision-making alone cannot be considered the sole feature of democratic political systems, while participatory democracy requires a much wider range of the immediate involvement of citizens in the processes of formulation, adoption, implementation and evaluation of decisions. This study gives an overview of the strategies used by local authorities to mobilise citizen participation in decision-making, the practice of citizen participation in decision-making and the challenges faced by local authorities in the Bamenda municipalities.

Arguments for enhanced citizen participation often rest on the merits of the process and the belief that an engaged citizenry is better than a passive citizenry (Renee, Irvin and John Stansbury. 1996). With citizen participation, formulated policies might be more realistically grounded in citizen preferences; the public might become more sympathetic evaluators of the tough decisions that government administrators have to make, and the improved support from the public might create a less divisive, combative populace to govern and regulate. These were the vision of the state to create opportunities for citizens' participation in the interest of decision-making. In spite of the effort put in place by the

state, the reality on the ground is that, there is very low involvement of citizens in the decision-making process within the Bamenda municipalities. The objective of this study therefore, was to determine the extent to which Local Authorities have enhanced citizens' participation in decision-making and the bottlenecks that undermine this process within the Bamenda municipalities.

2. BACKGROUND

The study covers the three municipalities of Bamenda (Bamenda I, II and III) in Mezam division of the North West Region of Cameroon corresponding to seven villages, (Bamendakwe, Nkwen, Ndzah, Mankon, Chomba, Nsongwa and Mbatu). Bamenda is a cosmopolitan city and capital of the North West Region. It is the third largest city in Cameroon after Douala and Yaoundé situated 366km North West of the administrative capital of Cameroon, Yaoundé and about 450 km of Cameroon's economic capital, Douala. Bamenda city is located between latitude 6°5'2''N and latitude 6°6'4''N and longitude 10°0' and 10° 31'E of the Greenwich meridian (Ngoran & Benoit, 2021). The city is situated in the western highlands of Cameroon at an altitude of 1230m-1510m (Master Plan of Bamenda City Council, 2011). A Presidential Decree No. 2007/117 of 24 April 2007 regroup Bamenda city into three sub divisions namely Bamenda I (Bamendankwe), Bamenda II (Mankon, Chomba, Nsongwa and Mbatu) and Bamenda III (Nkwen and Ndzah). This was in alignment to Cameroon's decentralisation law to bring development. Bamenda is bordered to the North by Bafut sub division, to the North West by the Momo division, to the South by the Santa sub division and South West by Bali sub Division. To the West the Tubah Sub division borders it (Ngoran & Benoit, 2021). Subsistent agriculture is the main economic activities practiced within the municipalities. Politically Bamenda was the umbilical cord to the rise of multi-party politics and the anglophone crisis in Cameroon. It also host the head quarter of one of the major opposition political party in Cameroon, the social Democratic Front (SDF).

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Local Authorities can be perceived within the limit of decentralisation that began in 1996 in Cameroon (article 55 of the 18th January 1996 constitution of Cameroon). The visions of the state are that the existence of local authorities should create opportunities for citizens' participation. It is therefore for this reason that, the state has deployed a lot of energy in terms of laws (Law No. 2004/17 of July 2004 on the Orientation of Decentralization 10.2b, Law No. 2004/18 of July 2004 comprising Rules Applicable to Councils, Law No 2019/ 024 of 24 December 2019 Bills to institute the general code of Regional and Local Authorities), huge financial, material and human resources in order to ensure the existence of local authorities in Cameroon. One of the objectives of the existence of Local Authorities within the context of decentralisation is to ensure citizens' participation in the interest of decision-making. During the last 5years, certain aspects related to the participation, empowerment and involvement of the citizens in the decision-making process have raised fierce and heated debate. These issues are even more stringent when we place them in the political, economic and social contexts of a young democratic state such as Cameroon that has a very limited experience in civic engagement in the public sphere. In spite of all the efforts put in place by the state, the reality on the ground is that, there is very low involvement of citizens in decision-making processes that affect them and thus, the much-needed change is far from being obtained within the Bamenda municipalities. Cheka (2019) and Tanyi et al. (2024) equally asserted this problem.

4. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- The study was guided by the following research objective:
- To determine the strategies used by local authorities to inform and engage citizens participation within the Bamenda municipalities.
- To appreciate the extent to which Local Authorities have enhanced citizens' participation in decision-making within the Bamenda Municipalities
- To identify the challenges hindering the smooth functioning of local authorities within the Municipalities of Bamenda.

4.1. Research Questions

- The following research questions guided the findings of this study:
- What are the strategies used by local authorities' to engage citizens' participation in LAs within the Bamenda Municipalities?

- In what ways have local authorities' involved citizens' participation in decision-making process within the Bamenda municipalities?
- What challenges hinders local authorities from ensuring effective citizens' participation?

4.2. Review of related literature

This section provides a clarification of concepts and theoretical review used in the study.

The concept of Local Authorities, sometimes also referred to as municipal authorities, is a term that refers to a rural and urban political subdivision below the national level which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, and which includes authorities in municipalities, cities, villages and others. The term excludes district or regional subdivisions of the national government that are set up solely for national administrative purposes (United Nations, 1997). The United Republic of Tanzania (2004) report describes local authorities as political sub-divisions at the local level exercised by representative councils, established according to law to exercise specific power within defined areas of jurisdiction such as municipal council and city council. Local Authorities is a sub-national, semi-autonomous level government discharging its functions in a specified area within a nation and are closest to the people and therefore responsible for serving the political and material needs of people and communities in a specific local area. Such areas could be a rural setting or an urban setting, a village, a town, a district, a municipal or a suburb in a city, depending on the size.

This study appropriates the definition by URT (2004) that, local authorities are political sub-divisions at the local level exercised by representative councils, established according to law to exercise specific power within defined areas of jurisdiction such as municipal councils and city councils.

The concept of Citizen Participation, according to (Muriu, 2012), refers to how citizens exercise influence and control over the decisions that affect them; (Graventa and Valderrama, 1999; 4), refer to it as 'the intervention of citizens with a determined social interest in public activities'. This can be done directly or indirectly. Direct participation, occurs where citizens-individually or in various forms of self-organization are actively engaged in decision-making processes on matters affecting them. Indirect participation is where citizens express their preferences through their elected and other representatives. Indirect participation is also referred to as political participation as the citizens' role is limited to selecting representatives (ibid, p2). According to the World Bank report (2015), citizen participation is described as a process through which beneficiaries' influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources that affect their lives.

There are basically two ways in which citizens participate in the political system in many countries. Some ways are common, or conventional, and some are rare, or unconventional. Conventional political participation comprises traditional and commonly accepted political behaviour that uses established institutional channels of representative government and includes voting in elections and referendums, volunteering for a political campaign or making a campaign donation, joining an activist group, serving in the public office etc. Unconventional methods of citizen participation include activities that are sometimes considered inappropriate but are not illegal. Examples of Unconventional methods of citizen participation include boycotts, demonstrations and protests. Unconventional activities are often designed to work as an alternative to conventional activities when conventional methods aren't working to achieve the desired goal (Logan, 2017).

The participatory democratic theory was adopted for the realisation of this study. The participatory democratic theory was developed by Jean Jacques Rousseau in the 18th century and later promoted by John Stuart Mill and G.D.H. Cole (MCQuail, 1987). They argued that authority over a people can only be legitimate if it leave those who it govern as free as they were prior to their submitting to that authority. The participatory democratic theory holds that citizens participate individually and directly in decisions that affect their lives, rather than through elected representatives. This theory combined the models of direct and representative democracy. In direct democracy, the people have the authority to deliberate and decide what is good for them while in representative democracy the people choose governing officials to do so for them. While direct democracy was the original concept, its representative version is the most widespread today. The argument about this theory is how changes that will make our own social and political life more democratic will provide opportunities for individuals to participate in decision-making in their everyday lives as well as in the wider political system. The theory is all about democratising democracy. Citizens' participation in this context is the inclusion of the people in the activities of a community. This process directly engages the people in decision-making and considers

its inputs. The extent to which citizen participation should be considered necessary or appropriate is under debate in political philosophy today (Fishkin, 2011).

The most prominent argument for participatory democratic theory is its function for greater democratisation. This argument is about changes that will make social and political life more democratic and will provide opportunities for individuals to participate in decision-making in their everyday lives as well as in the wider political system. This is about democratizing democracy. With participatory democracy, individuals, groups, communities and municipalities can realistically achieve their interests and objectives thus providing the means to a more developed, just and accountable society. Proponents of this theory (Rousseau, Fishkin, Mill, and Cole. Pateman) also hold that, with participatory democracy, individuals or groups can realistically achieve their interests, “providing the means to a more just and rewarding society, not a strategy for preserving the status quo”. Participatory democracy may also have an educational effect

Landemore, Hezene, (2020) have recently proposed several mechanisms to increase citizen participation in democratic systems. These methods intend to increase the agenda-setting and decision power of people by giving citizens more direct ways to contribute to politics. Some of these mechanisms include: Public consultation surveys, and town meetings

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. Research Design

The mixed concurrent research design was adopted for this study. This involved the triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative data collected at the same time. The combination of both approaches was used to study the phenomenon and share a common commitment to understating and improving citizen participation in the development process within the Bamenda municipalities. Both approaches provide for triangulation or cross validation of sources of data in order to gain a more complete understanding of situations under study. The mixed concurrent research design also provide for the achievement of complementary results by using the strength of one method to enhance the other (independence of research methods). The advantages for mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches include participant enrichment, instrument fidelity, treatment integrity, and significance enhancement (Sale et al. 2002).

The mixed concurrent research design was also chosen for this study because the study was carried out in the pit of the Anglophone crisis within the study area. During this period of unrest in the municipalities, one could not predict the nature of life in the municipalities’ with numerous ghost towns and lock down. Therefore, the best thing to do was to collect both quantitative and qualitative data at the same time once the opportunity was given.

5.2. Population of the Study

The Population for this study was drawn from the three municipalities that make up the Bamenda city and the council officials (such as councillors, mayors and council workers occupying posts of responsibility). The population of Bamenda municipalities is estimated at 362586 inhabitants, and is spread all over the city areas (Bamenda I, Bamenda II and Bamenda III municipal area).

Table 1. *Inhabitants of Bamenda municipality per council area*

Locality	Population
Bamenda I	28,359
Bamenda II	184,227
Bamenda III	150,000
Total	362586

Source: 2005 Population and Housing Census

Another specific population considered for this study comprised municipal councillors and mayors in Bamenda Municipalities.

Table 2. *Total Number of Council officials and councillors per council area in Bamenda*

Council area	Councillors	Mayors/deputies	Total
Bamenda I	28	03	31
Bamenda II	28	03	31
Bamenda III	28	03	31
Total	84	09	93

Source: Fieldwork, (2024)

5.3. Sample Size

The sample population for this study was determined from the total population of Bamenda I, II and III on the one hand, and from the total number of municipal councillors and council officials of the three councils on the other hand. In the former, since the total population of Bamenda was estimated at 322889 inhabitants, the sample size with a level of precision of 0.05 was determined to enable us to have a representative population. This sample was statistically determined using the following formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \cdot 2$$

Where: n= Sample size

N= Total population of Bamenda (362586)

e= Level of precision (0.05)

From the above-stated formula, the sample size was established at 399.55 inhabitants and to minimize the sampling error, the sample size was slated at 400. Based on this arithmetic, the sample size was further determined in proportion to the inhabitants in the main localities in Bamenda in the table below.

Table 3. Sample Size of the inhabitants in Bamenda per council area

Localities	Population	Sample size	% of sample size
Bamenda I	28,359	75	18.75%
Bamenda II	184,227	175	43.75%
Bamenda III	150,000	150	37.5%
Total	362586	400	100

Source: Field survey (2024)

From these computations on table 3, it is clear that with a total sample size of 400, the sample size of Bamenda I was 75, that of Bamenda II was 175 and that of Bamenda III was 150. The sample size of the councillors and council officials was also determined following the statistical formula above. This sample size was also determined in proportion to the number of municipal councillors and officials in each of the municipal areas as presented below.

Table 4. Sample size of municipal councillors and officials of Bamenda I, II and III council areas

Council area	Number of Councillors/Council officials	sample size	Percentage of Sample size
Bamenda I	33	20	25%
Bamenda II	33	30	37.7%
Bamenda III	33	30	37.7%
Total	99	80	100.4%

Source: Field survey (2024)

From the calculations on table 4, it is evident that from the total sample size of 80, Bamenda I council was 20, that of Bamenda II were 30, and that of Bamenda III was 30.

5.4. Sampling Technique

The study adopted both stratified random sampling techniques with proportional allocation methods and purposive to obtain information, if the sample is representative, the results would be reliable and Valid (Singh, 1994). This study covered the three council areas within the Bamenda City. The stratified sampling method was adopted for the study because it covers all sectors of the population. Secondly, it was also important because it gave equal opportunity and distributions in the three municipalities since Bamenda is stratified into three municipalities. This means that the local authorities were stratified based on their functional areas. The municipality was divided into three main Strata (Bamenda I, II and III). Each stratum was further divided into sub-strata based on age, sex, profession and level of education. This was to ensure that the sample represent the population under study and also take into consideration the heterogeneous nature of the municipalities. This was drawn from low, medium and high-density communities of each municipality. The participants were from the three municipalities. A random non-probability sampling technique was used to select the audience for the study within each stratum to ensure that there was equal representation and also to avoid bias in selecting the audience. A door-to-door and community-to-community campaign was carried out to

5.5. Data Collection Procedure

The information collected was from both primary and secondary sources. Primary information was collected through questionnaires and interviews. The secondary method was depended largely on data gathered from journals, conference papers, books, council’s reports/minutes, government publications and reports. Data collected was analysed using frequency and tables and interpreted using a 4 points Likert questionnaire scale. To ensure validity before the actual data collection, a pilot study was carried out to check the accuracy of instruments in order to make corrections where necessary. To ensure reliability in this study, the Cronbach alpha test with minimum range of 0.5 was applied. A high level for alpha may mean that the item in the test is highly correlated.

5.6. Data Analysis and Presentation of Result

Table 5. Council area of respondents

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Bamenda I	68	18.9	18.9	18.9
	Bamenda II	142	39.6	39.6	58.5
	Bamenda III	149	41.5	41.5	100.0
	Total	359	100.0	100.0	

Source: field survey (2024)

From the above table, out of the 400 questionnaires administered to the respondents of all the 3 municipalities, 359 representing 89.76% were returned while 41 representing 11.4% were not returned. A total of 359 questionnaires were returned and analysed.

Table 6. Bio Data of respondents

S/No	Bio data	Scale	frequency	Percentage
1	Age	18-30	39	10.9
		31-40	112	31.2
		41-50	141	39.2
		51-above	67	18.7
		Total	359	100
1	Sex of respondents	Male	237	66.0
		Female	122	34.0
		Total	359	100
5	Level of education	No formal education	37	10.3
		FSLC	38	10.6
		GCE O/L	53	14.8
		GCE A/L	65	18.1
		HND	44	12.3
		First Degree	65	18.1
		Postgraduate	51	15.9
		Total	359	100

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Data presented in table 6 shows the bio-data of the respondents in the three municipalities of the Bamenda city under study. The findings reveal that most respondents were male (66.0%) while female constituted only (34.0%). The highest participants were those in the age category of 41-50 years (39.2%), the age category from 31- 40 (31.2%), the next was 18-33 (10, 9%), and 50 and above years (18.7%). The result indicated that the majority of the respondents were within the age bracket of 41-50 years. Similarly, the greater numbers of respondents were those with GCE A/L and First Degree certificates (18.1%) each, followed by postgraduate diplomas (15.9%) and GCE O/L (14.8%) respectively. Non-negligible proportions are those with no formal education and held FSLC and HND.

5.7. Ethical considerations

This research sought to ensure highest consideration of research ethics by first ensuring that the research undertaking was authorized by the necessary research authorities. The research respondents were allowed to voluntarily contribute in the study. They were guaranteed confidentiality in the information they provided and none of the respondents’ well-being was by any chance compromised. Where analysis and critical assessment were made, careful consideration was taken to ensure balanced and objective presentation of facts. The current study was undertaken within the confines of the research

scope and methodology discussed in this chapter. Efforts were made to ensure that findings and recommendations of the study were presented accurately and objectively.

5.8. Part One

5.8.1. LAs as agents for the mobilization of citizens to participate in decision -making and its impact

This section examines the strategies used by LAs and the impact of LAs mobilisation of citizens’ participation in the decision-making process within the municipalities of Bamenda.

5.8.2. Tactics used by local authorities to mobilise citizen participation in decision-making

Several tactics are used by Local authorities within the Bamenda municipalities to encouraged and involve citizens’ participation in decision-making that affect their live. Table 7 below show the various ways employ by local authorities within Bamenda municipalities to mobilise citizens’ participation in the decision-making process within the municipalities.

Table 7. *Strategies used by local authorities to mobilise citizen participation in decision-making.*

S/N	Items	SD	DA	A	SA	X ²	Remark
1	Face to face	05	17	263	74	33.84	Accepted
2	Town criers	35	66	189	69	30.80	Accepted
3	Rallies	08	19	205	127	21.23	Accepted
4	Radio	07	27	232	93	18.82	Accepted
5	Television	03	11	210	136	16.31	Accepted
6	Internet	32	68	176	83	29.99	Accepted
7	Others like churches, village meetings etc.	03	10	237	109	33.84	Accepted

Source: *Field survey (2024)*

Table 7 reveals that out of the seven (7) tactics identified as a means to mobilise citizens to participate in the decision-making by the local authorities, the denizens of Bamenda municipalities accepted that the local authorities are implementing all these tactics. The analysis reveals distinct preferences for various communication methods based on agreement levels and Chi-Square values. Face-to-face interactions garnered a frequency of 263 agreements and only 37 disagreements, resulting in a Chi-Square value of 48.43, indicating a very strong preference. Town Criers received 189 agreements and 111 disagreements, with a Chi-Square of 33.84, suggesting significant acceptance. Rallies had 205 agreeing and 95 disagreeing, leading to a Chi-Square value of 30.80, reflecting respectable support. In contrast, Radio attracted 232 agreements against 68 disagreements, with a Chi-Square of 21.23, indicating moderate agreement but also some variability in opinion. Television showed 210 agreements and 90 disagreements, resulting in a Chi-Square of 18.82, suggesting a similar level of moderate acceptance. The Internet method had the lowest frequency with 176 agreements and 124 disagreements, giving a Chi-Square of 16.31, reflecting less effectiveness and greater disagreement. Lastly, others (including churches and village meetings) achieved 237 agreements and 53 disagreements, resulting in a Chi-Square of 29.99, indicating significant acceptance. Overall, the data underscore that traditional communication methods are more effective than digital platforms, as evidenced by higher agreement levels and corresponding Chi-Square values.

5.8.3. The impact of the mobilization of citizens by LAs for decision-making.

Table 8 below unravel the impact of local authorities mobilisation of citizens’ participation in decision-making within the municipalities of Bamenda.

Table 8. *The impact of the mobilization of citizens by LAs for decision-making*

S/N	Questionnaire items	SDA	DA	A	SA	X ²
1	I am often motivated by local authorities (mayor and councillors) to participate with them to identify the problems faced within our municipality	49	136	80	49	37.67
2	I am often motivated by local authorities (mayor and councillors) to participate with them in the formulation of policies related to problems faced within our municipality	101	134	80	44	12.56
3	I am often motivated by local authorities (mayor and councillors) to assist them in the implementation of policies within our municipality	102	129	102	26	28.45
4	I often motivated by local authorities (mayor and councillors) to evaluate policies implemented within our municipality	108	133	72	46	25.90

Source: *Field survey (2024)*

The analysis of the relationship between local authorities and citizen participation in decision-making reveals varying levels of motivation among citizens to engage with local governance. For the first statement, which assesses motivation to participate in identifying municipal problems, the frequencies show that 49 respondents strongly disagreed, 136 disagreed, 125 agreed, and 49 strongly agreed. The Chi-Square value of 74.55 indicates a significant deviation from expected frequencies, suggesting that citizens feel strongly motivated to engage with local authorities in identifying municipal problems. This high level of motivation reflects a positive relationship between local authorities and citizen participation, indicating that citizens recognize the importance of their input in local governance.

In the second statement regarding participation in policy formulation, the frequencies indicate that 101 respondents strongly disagreed, 134 disagreed, 80 agreed, and 44 strongly agreed. The Chi-Square value of 37.67 suggests a moderate level of motivation among citizens to engage in policy formulation. This indicates that while there is some willingness to participate, it is not as strong as the motivation to identify problems. The third statement, which addresses assisting in policy implementation, shows 102 strongly disagreeing, 129 disagreeing, 102 agreeing, and 26 strongly agreeing, with a Chi-Square value of 12.56 indicating lower motivation. Finally, for the fourth statement about evaluating policies, the frequencies reveal 108 strongly disagreeing, 133 disagreeing, 72 agreeing, and 46 strongly agreeing, with a Chi-Square value of 28.45 reflecting moderate interest. Overall, while there is a foundation of motivation for citizen participation, particularly in identifying problems, local authorities must enhance their efforts to involve citizens more actively in policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation processes to create a more collaborative governance environment.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1. The Findings of the Study on Research Question 1 as Presented on Table 7: What Strategies do Local Authorities' Use to Inform and Engage Citizens' Participation within the Bamenda Municipalities.

The study findings on the strategies /tactics used by local authorities to engage citizens' participation within the Bamenda municipalities are many and vary in the different communities. Local authorities engage citizens using the following strategies political campaigns, online media, TV and radio debates, round-table negotiations with decision-makers, and petitions. Face-face meetings, announcements in churches.etc with face –face meetings being the most dominant means used. Interview findings equally established that citizen involvement is not given a high priority because some knows nothing about the advantages of such an important activity. However, the involvement was seen to be there through meetings as a major means of this involvement in decision-making. One respondent stated, "Involvement is option it is not a must that we get involved because we all have different opinions and ideas...how is that possible if we All share what we think is good for us?"

6.2. The Findings of the Study on Research Question 2 as Presented on Table 8: In what Ways has Local Authorities' Involved Citizens' Participation in Decision-Making Process within the Bamenda Municipalities?

The results on local authorities' mobilisation of citizens participation in decision-making indicates that local authorities engagement of citizens in decision-making process in municipalities in Bamenda has negative and insignificance influence. This result is statistically insignificant since the p-value of 0.527 is less than 5%. This is because the citizens are rarely consulted before taking decisions that affect them directly in their various communities and municipalities. This indicates why there are many abandoned projects within the municipalities. When citizens have no say in the general policy debate and in everyday decisions, they are more likely to object the decisions taken and, more generally, lost trust in their elected representatives.

Participation by all groups of civil society in decision-making at all levels of government is one of the prerequisites for a functioning democratic society and for fostering democratic security and development. It allows for open dialogue on critical issues, supporting better decisions by the authorities and contributing to strengthen governance. Citizens' participation complements and supports representative democracy. Citizens who feel that they have a say in the general policy debate and in everyday decisions, are more likely to accept the decisions taken and, more generally, to trust their elected representatives. It is therefore crucial that individuals, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society are involved in the conduct of public affairs and feel empowered to do so.

Jasanoff (1989) assert that if Local Authorities manage effectively to engage collectively citizen in the decision-making process, it can offer an opportunity to reflect on the blurring lines between social, political and economic context as technology advances at an unparalleled and unpoliced rate. Indeed the process of engaging citizens, rather than seeking a panacea, offers an opportunity to articulate the critical citizen concerns in order for policy makers to design an anti-fragile system. Johnson et al., state that citizen involvement in “decision making lies at the heart of managerial behaviour in all organizations” including local government authorities. However, the lack of citizen involvement has been a root cause of failure in development programs in both rural and urban population. ‘Citizen Participation in decision-making is at the very heart of the idea of democracy.’ Effective democracy depends on citizens having a say and being heard. A commitment to enhanced citizen participation lies at the heart of the 2018 Council of Europe (CoE) Recommendation on the participation of citizens in local public life. The aim is to see consultation and participation embedded in the culture of all member states.

Citizens’ participation has an intrinsic value, that is, it is good that people are actively involved in decision making in their communities. Being a full citizen means having a say in decisions that one is affected by. Good governance is not just a matter of delivering good outcomes. The way they are achieved is at least as important. Public authorities at all levels should seek citizens’ active endorsement rather than tacit acquiescence to their policies and programmes.

6.3. Part Two

6.3.1. The challenges faced by LAs as agents for the mobilization of citizens to participate in decision-making. Within the framework of the decentralisation process in Cameroon to improve citizen participation and local development, LAs in the exercise of their mission dedicated to local development and improvement of the living environment and condition of their inhabitants’, LAs face challenges such as:

Table 9. *Challenges faced by LAs in mobilising citizens’ participation in development in Bamenda municipalities.*

		SDA	DA	A	SA	Missing	Total
Lack of autonomy by local authorities	Freq	14	37	142	166	0	359
	percent	3.9	10.3	39.6	46.2	0	100
Inadequate clearly defined role for citizens in the law	Freq	16	38	204	101	0	359
	percent	4.5	10.6	56.8	28.1	0	100
Inadequate funding by local authorities	Freq	7	33	167	152	5	359
	percent	1.9	9.2	46.5	42.3	1.4	100
Poor leadership by local authorities	Freq	12	33	171	143	0	359
	percent	3.3	9.2	47.6	39.8	0	100
Political insecurity	Freq	11	44	194	110	0	359
	percent	3.1	12.3	54	30.6	0	100
Lack of development oriented culture by the citizens	Freq	27	74	200	58	0	359
	percent	7.5	20.6	55.7	16.2	0	100
Inadequate skilled by local authorities	Freq	11	43	212	93	0	359
	percent	3.1	12	59.1	25.9	0	100

Source: *Field Survey (2024)*

Table 9 presents the challenges and/or barriers hindering the performance of local authorities within the Bamenda municipalities from the stakeholders’ viewpoints. These challenges include: lack of autonomy, inadequate funding, political insecurity, inadequate skills and professionalism, lack of development-oriented culture and inadequate clearly defined rules governing citizens’ participation. Data collected on the opinion of respondents on the factors hindering local authorities’ performance within the municipalities of Bamenda categorised under internal and external factors confirmed that the major challenges faced by LAs are

6.4. Lack of autonomy

Form table 9 above findings establish that 3.9% of respondents strongly disagree, 10.3% disagreed, 39.6% agreed and 46.2% strongly agreed that lack of autonomy for local authorities is a major factor hindering LAs from effectively making decisions that affects them. Therefore, it is observe that most of the respondents agree that lack of autonomy is a hindrance to the functioning of local authorities in the municipalities of Bamenda. Findings from interview state that, lack of autonomy emanates from

administrative bottleneck and influence. In an interview with some local authorities, they attest that the central authorities' intervention in municipal affairs has contributed in slowing down the decision-making process because approval has to be made by a central authority (DOs, SDOs and governors) before they are allowed to implement certain decision taken. Following the slow administrative procedures, some decisions taken by LAs are bound to fail.

6.5. Inadequate funding by local authorities

The data on table 9 above revealed that 4.5% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 10.6% disagreed, 56.8% agreed and 28.1% strongly agreed that local authorities within the Bamenda municipalities are faced with the challenge of inadequate funds to function effectively which has affected their performance. In Cameroon, local authorities have little financial autonomy because they have limited leeway's to finances. These municipalities depend on state subvention which usually delay. Over dependent on the central government, support by local authorities has contributed in slowing down the decision-making process within the municipalities as government support usually delays and slow to transfer.

6.6. Poor leadership

From table 9 above findings revealed that 3.3% strongly disagreed, 9.2% agreed, 47.6% agreed and 39.8% strongly agreed that poor leadership within the Bamenda municipalities affects the functioning and performance of local authorities from efficiently carrying out their duties as stipulated by the law. Interview findings from some community members on why they don't take part in the decision-making process within their community reveal that poor leadership and management are some of the causes. To some individuals, poor leadership and decision-making emanates from pressure and influenced exerted on the local authorities by some elites in high position of power. In order to attain their selfish desires, they influence the choice of elected officials (Mayors) while they (elites) take or make all necessary decision affecting the people with no consideration of the reality on the ground.

6.7. Inadequate skills

From Table 9 above, findings established that 25.9% of respondents were strongly agreed, 59.1% of respondents were agreed, 3.1% of respondents were disagreed and 12% of respondents were strongly disagreed. This implies that 85% of respondents agreed and 15% of respondents disagreed on inadequate skills of local authorities as a challenging factor to their performance.

6.7.1. Low level of citizen participation in project implementation, monitoring and evaluation

Interview findings equally reveal that, citizens do not participate in projects implementation. This was because, citizens have no mechanism through which they can evaluate and follow up projects. This account for the reasons why there are so many abandoned infrastructural projects and services that meet the effective needs of the population. This issue, which emphasises the participation of the population in the management of the public affairs, is one of the responsibilities of the LAs to consider the needs and opinion of any physical or legal person (articles 40(1) and 416(2)).

6.7.2. Inadequate clearly defined role for citizens in the law

Inadequate clearly defined role for citizens in the law was seen as a hindrance to local authorities' performance. From the response rate on table 9, out of the 359 respondents, 28.1% of respondents strongly agreed, 56.85 of respondents agreed, 4.5% disagreed and 10.6% of respondents strongly disagreed that inadequate clearly defined role for citizen in the law affect citizens' involvement in local authorities. This indicates that 84.9% agreed while 15.1% disagreed. The law of local and regional authorities is blur on the part played by citizens in local authorities to foster development within a municipality. The law has not clearly indicated how citizens are to involve in local authorities in order to foster local development.

6.8. Political insecurities

The result from data collected on table 9 indicate that 30.6 respondents strongly agreed, 54% respondents were agreed, 3.1% disagreed and 12.3% strongly disagreed that political insecurity is a hindrance to local authorities within the Bamenda municipalities. Therefore, the research observe that most of the respondents agreed with the accession that political insecurity is a hindrance to local authorities within the Bamenda Municipalities. Moreover, insecurity caused by the Anglophone crisis

has forced some councils and councillors to relocate (e.g., Bamenda II council) was forced to relocate from Mbemfibi to Ntambag due to insecurity cause by the Anglophone crisis.

7. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the impact of local authorities mobilisation of citizen participation in Bamenda, Cameroon, reveals a complex interplay between governance structures and public engagement. While there is evident motivation among citizens to participate in identifying municipal problems, their involvement diminishes when it comes to policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. This trend highlights a crucial gap between potential and actual engagement, suggesting that while citizens are willing to voice concerns, their integration into the decision-making process remains limited. The participatory democratic theory, which advocates for direct citizen involvement in governance, aligns with the aspirations of many in Bamenda. However, the practical application faces challenges such as a lack of trust in local authorities, differing political ideologies, and limited accountability. These factors contribute to hesitancy among citizens to engage beyond traditional roles, influencing the overall dynamism of local governance. The empirical data suggests that while there is a positive relationship between local authorities and citizen participation, particularly in problem identification, the mechanisms for further involvement need strengthening. The moderate levels of engagement in policy formulation and implementation indicate a need for local governance structures to be more inclusive and responsive to citizen input.

8. RECOMMENDATION

8.1. To the municipalities within Bamenda

Situational analysis should be conducted by local authorities leaders to solicit citizens' opinions to identify key priority challenges and the needed solutions. This will enhance impactful planning of municipal budgeting processes and decision-making. This will promote bottom-up decision-making by local councils.

8.2. To the state

Citizen participation in decision-making should not be limited to one modality. The scope and method of participation should be commensurate to the issue at stake. Since citizens' participation in decision-making is not a 'one size fits all' solution, successful citizens' participation cannot be achieved with a standard methodology to be applied for all decision-making processes and towards all stakeholders. For this reason; A top down approach (where policies descend from decision makers to citizens), based on the principles of deliberative democracy and representation; and the bottom up approach, expression of a participatory democracy, and implying a direct engagement of individuals in political decisions and policies are required for an effective citizens participation and local authorities in decision making.

8.3. To the Local Authorities

Undertake civic education to sensitize citizens about the constitutional roles, rights, and responsibilities in promoting good governance, accountability, transparency, and service delivery right from grassroots.

8.4. To the citizens

Citizen should take part in the decisions-making processes that affect them because failure to participate is inviting others to decide for you to follow.

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