



Challenges Faced in Empowering Citizens of Mezam Division through Micro Projects: The Selected Opinion of Citizens

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Abstract: *The study is based on the challenges faced in empowering citizens in Mezam Division through micro projects: the selected opinion of citizens. The ultimate goal of empowerment is to ensure that citizens fully participate in political decision-making processes that concern their future with a view to achieving the gains and control over resources, thereby becoming agents of their own development. The multiplier effect is that it leads to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women and develop a global partnership for development (MDGs 1, 2, 3 and 8 respectively). This has been facilitated with the use of micro grants by the Member of Parliament in Mezam Centre. The study achieves this by examining some perceptions of citizens on the challenges faced in the management of micro grants in Mezam Centre. The research instruments are a set of questionnaires administered to the beneficiaries of micro grants and structured interviews to the Member of Parliament in Mezam Centre. The sampling methods included the random and stratified random sampling methods. The tools of analysis included frequency distribution tables, graph, chi square and thematic methods. The study hypothesis was tested and the major findings are that, though citizens are empowered through micro projects, there are some challenges in the operations. The researcher suggested some positive measures and strategies that will meticulously articulate and enhance the efficacy of empowering the citizens such as the continual usage of micro grants committee in order to improve on the management of micro projects. Hence the government should establish and reinforced mechanisms such as auditing unit that will help to reduce the rate of embezzlement of parliamentary micro grants by Members of Parliament and micro grants committees.*

Keywords: *Challenges, micro projects, citizens, micro grants, Mezam Divison, Member of Parliament.*

INTRODUCTION

Since the middle of the 19th century, and with the creation of the National Assembly in Cameroon, there has been a growing realisation of development through increasing participation of Members of Parliament which has gone a long way to reduce poverty. This achievement is guided by the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) such as goals one, two, three, and eight of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and women empowerment and developing a global partnership for development respectively. After independence, the country's policies focused on providing basic needs and improving on the capacity and productivity of the citizens as a basis of self-sustaining economic

growth. Members of Parliament are required to improve on the effectiveness of development of citizens all over Cameroon. They set out ways of better adapting appropriate instruments of development cooperation in the management of micro projects to the task of empowering the citizens and improving on the living conditions of the citizens using micro grants from the National Assembly.

Each project moves through a predictable life cycle of four phases with each phase calling for different skills from the project manager. The phases of a project's life cycle are conceiving and defining the project, planning the project, implementing the plan, completing and evaluating the project (Haynes, 1996: 4). During a project's life cycle, management focuses on three basic parameters: quality, time and cost. A successfully managed project is one that is completed at the specific level of quality on or before the deadline and within a specified budget. During the planning phase of the project, the parameters must be specified in details to form the basis for control of the implementation phase. These include quality, cost, time, specification budget and schedule (Haynes, 1996:8). Increasingly, businesses, governments and non profit organizations are consciously organising their activities as projects (Frame, 1999:1).

The management of micro project is a challenging one as the basic needs of citizens keep increasing on a daily basis. By the late 1990s, project management had become a hot topic for scholarly research. It was seen as a key to survival and success in today's chaotic business environment (Frame, 1999:5). Projects management is a dominant way of getting things done in all kinds of businesses because it gives companies the ability to put staff and resources where they are needed; it brings about the flexibility to change direction quickly and the means to monitor costs and schedules more closely (Frame, 1999: 1). It is becoming compelling these days, to shift the management of projects from individuals to people's representatives to enable them become beneficial to the society as a whole. Such people's representatives promote equity in the benefits to the different constituencies and ensure that projects are exposed to public scrutiny. They often seek to mediate decisions in response to a wide variety of pressures and put together a coalition of inside and outside groups to survive (Stillman 11, 1992: 285-287).

In the same way, the legislative arm of government is assigned the responsibility of managing micro projects as required by Article 1 of the Standing Orders of the National Assembly. It has a membership of one hundred and eighty (180) elected from all political parties in Cameroon by secret balloting and direct universal suffrage for a five-year term of office (Article 15(1) (2) of the 2008 revised Constitution of 1996). The members of the National Assembly enjoy administrative and financial autonomy placed under the authority of the Bureau of the National Assembly (Article 75 of Law N° 2002/005 of 2 December 2002 of the Standing Orders). The budget of the National Assembly is divided into two parts: recurrent expenditure and capital expenditure. After the Committee of Finance and the Budget has voted the budget of the National Assembly, it is included in the general state budget approved by a plenary sitting through debates and votes (Article 76 of the Standing Orders of the National Assembly). When that has been done, the budget is promulgated by the President of the Republic and a presidential decree is signed allocating the sum of eight million Francs CFA as micro grants to each Member of Parliament to manage micro projects on a yearly basis (Circular No. 97/012 of 02 September 1997).

All over Cameroon, projects are managed at the level of different constituencies with the aim of improving on the social, economic, political as well as the cultural environment of the citizens. Once a project has been undertaken, there is the need to estimate what kind of changes in the economy the project will lead to and also consider what these changes are worth to the country by implicitly comparing them with other changes that might have taken place instead (Little et al., 1976:141). The process of empowering citizens is a worldwide phenomenon that has been implemented since it was conceived; either by government, government officials or private individuals to enhance on the living conditions of the underprivileged citizens within the society. Among these examples of government officials who have implemented this concept are Members of Parliament with the use of micro grants in Mezam Centre. Though they have been other Members of Parliament in Mezam

Division who had use micro grants to embark on different activities, the Member of Parliament who took over office from 2007-2020 focused on empowering the citizens from 2015-2020. Mezam Division is one of the areas in which micro projects have been managed that can be traced as far back to the 1990's. In Mezam centre which is made up of Bamenda I, Bamenda II, Bamenda III and Bali Constituencies, micro grants for the year 2018 were allocated by the Member of Parliament for physical construction and renovations. Micro grants for 2019 were allocated for youths' empowerment and 2020 or women empowerment with two million distributed to each subdivision yearly. Empowering the citizens of Mezam Centre through micro projects has a significant impact on the lives of the citizens as:

“too often, in access and in quantity, services fail poor people. But the fact that there are strong examples where services do work means government and citizens can do better. How? By putting poor people at the centre of service provision, by enabling them to monitor and discipline service providers, by amplifying their voice in policy making, and by strengthening the incentives for providers to serve the poor.” (World Development Report, World Bank, 2004).

The idea of empowerment was grounded in the social and economic struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, and took root in the 1970s during the reassessment of those earlier attempts at social transformation. During the decade of the 1980s empowerment became a catch-word, and the popularity of the term has shown no signs of waning in the early years of the current decade. The concept of empowering citizens can also be associated with the work of Mahatma Gandhi with the inspiration of rural movement for self-reliance throughout India, the works of Robert Chambers and those of the orthodox British economist E.F. Schumacher that also demonstrate the empowerment of citizens through direct action at the grassroots.

An example of the Gandhian tradition is the Association of Serva Seva Farms (ASSEF), which typifies a version of the 'direct action approach'. However, the ASSEF story also brings out clearly the problems with generalising from a small number of success stories to a model for development in a broad sense. Today, the frequency and ease with which people use the concepts "empower" and 'empowerment' is matched only by the lack of precision in the meanings they attach to them. For the past two decades, social scientists and practitioners at Cornell University have been making great strides in the contribution to a better understanding of the concept of empowerment, and to participate in its application to individuals, groups, and community development (Cochran, 1985; Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989). Therefore, the focus of this study is to examine the challenges faced in the process of empowering the citizens through micro projects with the use of micro grants in Mezam Centre from 2017- 2020.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Since the promulgation of Law No. 91/20 of 16 December 1991, its Article 5 paragraph 4 lays down the conditions for electing Members of Parliament to the National Assembly in Cameroon so as to avoid concentration of Law Makers in one zone of the country. The National Assembly is expected to have three ordinary sessions in the month of March, June and November for not more than thirty days as stipulated by Article 9(2) of the Standing Order of the National Assembly. Members of Parliament during these sessions are expected to defend the interests of their electorates in all domains ranging from socio-economic to political and cultural aspects. Micro grants are given to Members of Parliament to be used in developmental projects in their various constituencies irrespective of political party, tribe and age.

Circular No. 97/012 of 2nd September 1997 that governs the award of micro grants to Members of Parliament as promulgated by the President of the Republic for the realisation of micro projects, allocates separate budgets to Members of Parliament for the management of micro projects as micro grants. The Provision of Ordinance No. 72/12 of 26 August 1972 determines the immunities of Members of Parliament in Cameroon which are of financial and social scheme. The Questor's service No. 2008/017/AN/SQ of the National Assembly defines micro projects as physical investment such as constructions and repairs of classrooms of any type of school, constructions and

repairs of health Centres, public buildings, equipping schools with materials, the provision of equipment to sanitation Centres, the construction of or the repairs of roads, rural electrification, the building of wells or taps, and the building of bridges, among others.

Primarily, due to the lack of an auditing unit to check the activities of Members of Parliament as concerns the execution of micro projects justified by the fact that there is high rate of embezzlement of micro grants marked by uncompleted and poorly managed projects and the award of contracts to incompetent contractors on the basis of party affiliation, nepotism and religious bigotry, would one expect them to meet the objectives of micro grants? In view of this, the following research question captures the problem of the study.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Based on the statement of problem above, a research question was formulated to guide the study. The research question is to assess if there are some challenges faced in the process of empowering citizens in Mezam Centre through micro projects. The specific objective is to assess some challenges faced in the process of empowering citizens in Mezam Centre through micro projects.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

The working hypothesis for the study states that:

H₀: there are no challenges faced in the process of empowering citizens of Mezam Centre through micro projects management.

H₁: There are some challenges faced in the process of empowering citizens in Mezam Centre through micro projects

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory of Conscientisation by Paulo Freire shall be used as the analytical framework of the study. The model provided the basis of subsequent empowerment paradigms called popular education, which had its origins in Latin America, Freire (1970; 1973; 1978). Here the emphasis is on the educational process (especially literacy) as a way of raising the critical consciousness of poor people through group interaction, with social action to improve life circumstances as an ultimate goal. Paulo Freire worked among poor adults in the North East of Brazil and developed a method of teaching literacy, which combined learning to read and write with a critical examination of one's social situation. Freire's techniques for dialogical education amount to a methodology for conscientisation. It is a process of learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take actions against the oppressive elements of reality. The theory of conscientisation is also a process through which marginalized groups could move from a naïve to a critical consciousness, thereby creating the conditions for the transformation of society in accordance with social justice. The expectation was that, the realization of the injustices of their situation would lead such students to go beyond simply learning to read and to take initiatives towards transforming the society, which previously denied them social and educational opportunity.

His *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1972:15-20), sets out clearly his revolutionary ideas on the liberating potential of education, as long as it is a 'dialogical and problem posing' education. He places the human search for freedom and justice in the context of oppression. He argues that to be fully human implies being active and reflective: the fact that people may be passive and unthinkingly accepting their situation is a result of their being oppressed.

The oppressed have 'internalised' the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines (Freire, 1972:23) which is being 'fearful of freedom', expressing 'fatalistic attitudes' and 'self-depreciation'. It also suggests that instead of working to overcome the contradictions that give rise to relationships of oppression, the only possibility of improvement is seen as becoming 'sub-oppressors',

"Their vision of the new man is individualistic; because of their identification with the oppressor, they have no consciousness of themselves as persons or members of an oppressed. He argues that only education of a revolutionary type can be considered a

source of liberation. He uses the term 'banking' to typify the traditional type of education where 'instead of communicating, the teacher uses communiqués and "makes deposits", which the student perceives his or her reality, such 'banking' education mirrors the oppressive relations of that reality itself. He proposes as an alternative a type of 'dialogical' and problem-posing education.

Furthermore, 'Problem-posing' education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of men as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation" (Freire, 1972:56).

"The correct method lies in dialogue. The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own conscientisation" (Freire, 1972:42).

Education, according to Freire, is fundamentally tied to this question, serving either to reinforce learners' sense of lack of potential for acting – being objects – or to 'liberate' them by increasing their understanding of the possibilities of transformation – becoming subjects (Freire, 1978). There is no escape, therefore, for educators: they must choose which of these dynamics to foster. There is no choice but to act. Freire makes it clear that the apparent choice not to act is, in the ethical perspective he takes, actually a decision to act in a way that continues the status quo and thus dehumanizes all people that perpetuates injustice, and that assures the present unjust situation will continue into perpetuity. These processes are not only liberating or domesticating in relation to individual consciousness, but also to the material conditions of society, since the oppression of social groups, or alternatively liberation from oppression, depends on their critical consciousness. Education, therefore, becomes a fundamentally political act. If people are not encouraged to be critical, they will accept injustices and not work together to overthrow oppression and transform society.

SOME LIMITATIONS OF THE THEORY

In spite of the facts aforementioned that can help to transform the society into a better place with citizens empowered, two comments have been made on the relevance of Freire's thinking to modern ideology of empowerment:

- First, Freire's language and whole view of the world is clearly much more radical than that implied by the working in practice. Nevertheless, the idea of working in dialogue with the poor to analyse their actual experiences and to do this in terms of oppression is clearly very powerful in many circumstances. It is the state that often appears as a source of oppression either when it is maintaining order on behalf of dominant interests within the country or when it is obliged to cut on public services and clear the way for increased export-oriented production.
- Second, Freire failed to use the word empowerment in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He had insisted that his own comprehension of 'empowerment' was "Not individual, not community, not merely social empowerment". Which is 'much more than an individual' or psychological event. It points to a process by the dominated class who seek their own freedom from domination (Freire and Shor, 1987).

In spite of the above roadblocks, this theory has been of great importance to this study because empowerment is an ongoing process rather than a product. There is no final goal. One does not arrive at a stage of being empowered in some absolute sense. People are empowered, or disempowered, relative to others or, importantly, relative to themselves at a previous time.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges to empowerment

Although there are cases where committees appear to succeed in their aim of empowering the poor, there are cases of failure to achieve the widespread social transformation brought about directly through such methods. Different challenges apply in two general cases and stem from processes in the three "arenas", local community, state and society and the committees (Wuyts *et al*, 1990: 138).

a) Challenges of the local Communities

A naïve view of community is often adopted by the ‘tools for self-reliance’ approach. This had been the case with the village cereal bank in Burkina Faso. In practice, the idea of a group of equals who can be empowered together is as flawed as the notion of a household consisting of ‘men and women, young and old, all contributing and drawing from a “common pot”’. Not everyone living in a village location can be included as a community member. Sometimes, those who are included will certainly be living in complex and unequal relations with each other. It is therefore, probable that in practice, community organizations represent the interest of better-off and more powerful individuals and groups better than they represent interests of the poorest members of the community. (Rappaport, 1987: 32)

Participatory action research (PAR) often meets different challenges. To succeed, the approach implies working with groups with similar experiences, in similar positions of powerlessness. This could mean working specifically with poorer sections of a rural community, even though they will tend to be under-represented in community organizations and it could entail disrupting unequal social relations. The most obvious example is the case of gender relations, but this argument could also apply to ethnic or cast relations. A project carried out in Thailand revealed that men gained in self-confidence and organizational skills through rumouring village large projects such as communal fishpond. In the same way, women groups with common interests were brought together in Bangladeshi to discuss the causes of poverty, stating with their own position and work out ways of acting together. The main problems brought out by the groups were reported as: the dowry system, lack of education and women having to work in secret (Wuyts *et al*, 1990: 139).

b) Challenges of State and society

In a political sense, the version of empowerment as “tools for self-reliance” gives the term in a rather weak meaning. Schumacher’s example of showing a person how to make their own tackle might increase that person’s capacities in a technical sense, but would do nothing to help them gain access to fishing rights. For example, if the state and /or power local interests represents in the state held these rights, little could be done through “gifts of knowledge”. For example, the Oxfam project in Burkina Faso was able to influence the state’s strategy towards village cereal banks after the change in government. However, this depended on a basically positive attitude on the part of the state towards the type of development. Such attitude was also influenced by the fact that there was no question of challenge to local or national power structure on the basis of such projects. However, an oppositional stance may help to maintain the committee’s identity and value base, where as working more directly with government might appear to offer more scope for putting ambitious projects into practice (Holloway, 1989,; Annis 1987; Durno, in Holloway, 1989).

c) The Challenges of committees

Whitemore *et al* (1988: 87-90), notes that at a simple level, if empowerment were to be replicated in enough local projects to constitute a general model for development, there would have to be a process for recruiting, deploying, training and maintaining the commitment of committees’ activists to work in all the local projects. Even if despite everything there existed a good supply of motivated activities, there was also a well- documented tendency in value-driven committees towards degeneration. Korten (1989) notes a tendency for committees to move from a base of ‘voluntarism’ in which the work is taken on in the field that relate directly to the values for which the committee was set up to become ‘public service contractors’ performing services on behalf of the states or donor agencies in a variety of fields.

Contradictions and conflicts also abound in accountability. Empowerment theory emphasizes accountability towards the grassroots. But this conflicts with the need to account to the government for how the funds are used. Under such conditions, how are the interests of those it is working to empower to be safeguarded. It will be of great importance for this research to examine these challenges within the ambit of Mezam Centre and see how they have impeded the proper functioning of micro grants activities by the Steering Committees in the subdivision Mezam.

Challenges of empowering citizens of Mezam Centre through micro projects

Some challenges were encountered by the Steering Committee either with their councillors or/and village representatives and some with the government.

Challenges of the Steering Committees, Councillors or/ and Village Representatives

When the researcher interviewed the chairpersons of the various Steering Committees about some challenges encountered in the award of micro grants; both complained over the issue that, in spite of the fact that they were some smooth selection of files, there was disunity among the committee members as they didn't want to co-operate. Due to greed and evil intentions, some councillors didn't submit the applications of some applicants received from the council constituencies. Also, some committee members wanted some applications received especially from love ones, family members or friends to be given special considerations.

Besides with the delays in providing micro grants by the Member of Parliament from the National Assembly, Steering Committees found it difficult to pre-finance the sensitization activities, transportation and summoning of committee sessions.

Furthermore, the chairperson of Bamenda 111 subdivision lamented over the non-execution of projects of the first phase. He said one hundred pipes were given for water extension to the Fulani community in Ndzah. These pipes were not yet used and the area has been given out for the building of Catholic University.

Challenges of the Steering Committee and the Government

These are the most challenging problems encountered by the Steering Committee in the activities of empowering citizens in Mezam Centre.

They included the following;

a) Inadequate finance

The chairpersons and the citizens of the four subdivisions in Mezam Centre complained on the issue of inadequate finance from the Cameroon government as micro grants. It was realized that, micro grants are too small to handle complete sponsors of projects selected for management within these subdivisions. Besides, the population is too much for that amount.

b) Party Bias

Bias on party affiliation is on two fold. Firstly, some beneficiaries complained on too much political bias attached on the selection of micro projects for management by the Steering Committees. This is because; much preference was given to applicants who are mainly from the Social Democratic Front due to the fact that, the Member of Parliament and majority of the committee members are from that party. On the other hand, there was bias in the composition of the Steering Committee. It was realized that, most of the members of the Steering Committee came from the Social Democratic Party with one or two persons from Cameroon's People Democratic Party.

c) Lack of managerial skills

Some beneficiaries lamented that, once micro grants are given to citizens, the Steering Committee usually failed to do a follow-up of the proper utilization of the grant. This has always rendered some grants to end up in off-licences or in the market buying dresses and shoes. Some citizens who even endeavoured to use the grant for the purpose intended for ended up buying wrong equipment that weren't needed for the business.

d) Misappropriation of funds

The researcher found out during the research program from some beneficiaries that, the Steering Committees attached more preference and hence allocated more grants on running cost which are expenditures, payment of Steering Committee members, media coverage, logistics such as entertainment, animation among others. This usually make the micro grants insufficient for the

activities it was intended to do added to the fact that, the money is at first sight very small to cover all the applications submitted by citizens.

e) Wrong choices of contractors to execute selected micro projects

When the researcher interviewed the chairpersons of the Steering Committees on the conditions put in place in selecting contractors to execute approved micro projects, they said they gave more advantages to contractors from the site of the project and that external contractors can only come into play when it has been realised that there is none found in the area of execution. This has also created a big problem to the proper selection of contractors for the execution of micro projects. This has rendered some projects to be badly executed with some left uncompleted. As if this is not enough, more preference is given to contractors of the Social Democratic Front to execute projects approved by the Steering Committees in the various subdivisions of Mezam Centre. On a general scale, contractors are chosen to execute micro projects from a party affiliation point of view and from the residential area and not on competence.

f) Nepotism

In general, it was realised from the views of some beneficiaries that, the Steering Committees in Mezam Centre selected and approved applications of citizens closely related to them. Even though the chairpersons and citizens from these four subdivisions complained that micro grants are insufficient, it is not evenly distributed by the members of the Steering Committee to all applicants. This is because, among all the files that were submitted for micro grants for these past three years that micro grants has been executed, all the names of the relatives of the Steering Committee members submitted were among.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the various methods that were employed in the research. Both secondary and primary sources were used. Secondary sources included published materials from libraries, articles and manuals from the National Assembly on related issues. Data collection was done using a mixed methods of research approach including survey by closed-ended questionnaires (Likert Scale questions) and structured interview guides. The questionnaires were administered to citizens and structured interview to the Member of Parliament. A total of one hundred questionnaires were administered. Some conclusions were drawn from the analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section focuses on data presentation and analysis. It also represents the results of data analyze and their discussing. Data were collected, organized and analyzed in tables and charts. The table I summarizes the data collected. Data was collected from two categories of persons. Questionnaires were administered to some selected citizens while structured interview was administered to the Member of Parliament. Findings depicts the beneficiaries' perceptions on the challenges of empowerment through micro projects management in Mezam Centre.

Table 1: Observed Frequencies on the challenges of empowering citizens in Mezam Centre through micro projects

Frequencies	Opinions				
	SA	A	D	SD	UN
Observed	35	31	14	11	9

Source: Field Survey, 2020

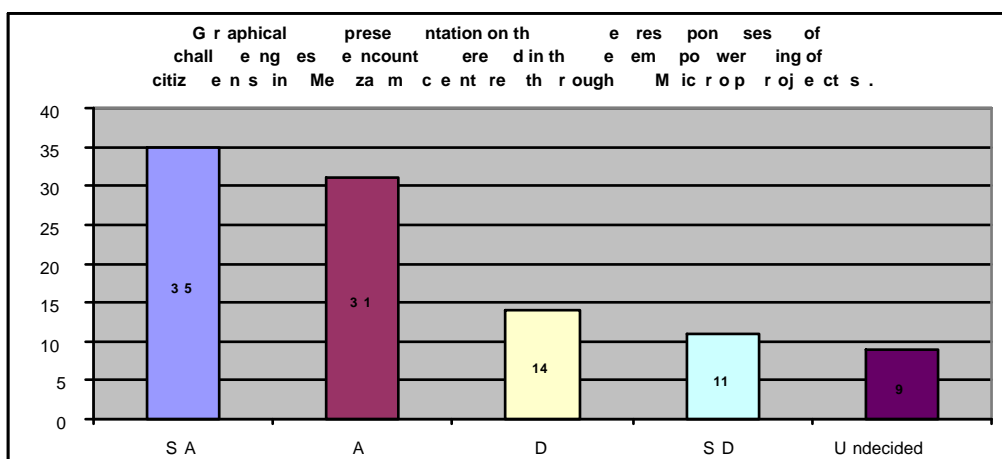


Table 2: Observed and expected frequencies on the challenges of empowering citizens in Mezam Centre through micro projects

Frequencies	Opinions				
	SA	A	D	SD	UN
Observed	35	31	14	11	9
Expected	20	20	20	20	20

Source: Field Survey, 2020

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$$

$$\left(\frac{35-20}{20}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{31-20}{20}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{14-20}{20}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{11-20}{20}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{9-20}{20}\right)^2 = \left(\frac{225}{20}\right) + \left(\frac{121}{20}\right) + \left(\frac{36}{20}\right) + \left(\frac{81}{20}\right) + \left(\frac{121}{20}\right)$$

df = Number of categories-1

$$5-1=4$$

Level of significance (α) = 0.05

Table $X^2=9.488$

Calculated $x^2= 29.2$

H_0 : There are no challenges faced in the process of empowering citizens in Mezam Centre through micro projects.

H_1 : There are some challenges faced in the process of empowering citizens in Mezam Centre through micro projects.

Result: Calculated x^2 (29.2) is greater than table x^2 (9.488)

Decision: The decision is to accept the alternate hypothesis since the calculated X^2 is greater than table x^2 i.e. $29.2 > 9.488$. We accept the H_1 and reject H_0

Conclusion: There is enough evidence to accept the claim that the challenges encountered in the process of empowering citizens in Mezam Centre have an effect on the empowerment process. Thus, the parliamentarian and the chairpersons of the Steering Committees need to work very hard to overcome these challenges to achieve optimum results in the empowerment of citizens for the development of Mezam Centre.

Challenges encountered in the process of empowering citizens of Mezam Centre

Theme	Grounding	Sampled Quotations
Inadequate Finance	7	“Limited finance”
Party Bias	8	“Selection of beneficiaries mostly from a particular party”
Lack of Managerial Skills	9	“Lack of follow-up on execution” “Inexperience”
Misappropriation of funds	6	“Embezzlement of public funds” “Corruption”
Wrong choices of contractors to execute selected projects	5	“Many of the contractors lack experience” “Lack of technical know-how” “Lack of managerial skills”
Nepotism	8	“Bias in the selection of beneficiaries”

Source: Field survey, 2020

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, several challenges are encountered in the process of empowering the citizens of Mezam Centre through micro projects as seen above. It is clear that many writers both in Cameroon, international organization like the United Nations Organization and foreign nationalities have buttressed and gone a long way to sensitize Cameroonians and the international community through published works, conferences and seminars on the need to help the citizens have personal control over their lives though the people in spite of the challenges encountered. Interviews in this study echoed this concern for control as they described their struggles. This research data strongly suggests that personal control is more than just coping. In fact, people who achieved the greatest degree of control in their lives were those who refused to accept their situations and instead kept questioning and searching for options. People had dreams and acted on them. In terms of empowerment then, personal control can be seen as an active process of engagement in the social world. Secondly, the empowerment process has a relationship between empowerment and self-efficacy. While people in this study attributed much of their empowerment to external resources and people support, they also attributed much of their changes to themselves. For example, some people talked about how they had always felt assertive, but that it took a certain kind of support to bring out their assertiveness.

People's belief in their own capabilities and unique personal characteristics helped to foster confidence in their ability to take initiative in changing their lives. This ability to take at least some of the credit for their empowerment process contributed to increased self-esteem that may not have been otherwise possible. Interestingly, knowing and relying on others for support did not detract from people's ability to take responsibility for their future. In this sense, interdependence can be seen as an important part of the empowerment process.

Thirdly, this study confirms the importance of describing empowerment in ecological terms. None of the participants became empowered on their own. Rather, social context and community life were critical to understanding the changes that individuals experienced over time. For example, participation for study participants meant involvement in community organizations, self-help groups, and other aspects of community life. In this sense, community empowerment refers to community settings which welcome people and thus contribute to their personal empowerment. For instance, the Member of Parliament in Mezam Centre has taken the bold step to empower his citizens through micro projects with the use of micro grants while lobbying on their behalf in the National Assembly. This has been done by assisting the citizens to do farm preparations and planting. Micro grants from the Member of Parliament have also been used to empower women, youths, orphans, vulnerable children and interested public with appropriate knowledge and life styles for better livelihood strategies in spite of the challenges. It has also been used to promote the institutional capacity of women and youths to interact on a long-term basis with development actors.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY OPTIONS

Increase on amount of Micro Grants

The government of Cameroon can play an important role in poverty alleviation in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations Organizations on goal one based on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. In this case, the Cameroon government should increase the amount of micro grants allocated to Members of Parliament. This is because as the population increases, so too the needs of the people increase.

Setting up of an auditing unit

To ensure that there is proper management of micro grants all over Cameroon and especially in Mezam centre and at the same time limiting some negative impacts on the citizens, the committee members in charge of micro projects in Mezam centre should ensure that the grants allocated to each citizen are judiciously used by making a follow-up of the utilization of the grants by beneficiaries. Besides, the Member of Parliament should always audit the micro grants committee to ensure that micro grants are properly used in empowering the citizens. In addition to the above, the government should set up mechanism(s) that will reduce the rate of embezzlement of parliamentary micro grants such as the setting up of an auditing unit yearly to collect statistics of; how much money the parliamentarian spends per village or constituency and to ensure that micro grants are used for the right purpose and not kept into private pockets.

Encourage Dialogue Between citizens and government

The government should develop ways to engage in regular dialogue to listen to concerns and issues identified by citizens, and to make these methods of dialogue known to them through a full range of methods all over Cameroon including methods such as written consultations, opinion surveys, focus groups, user panels, meetings and various internet-based approaches.

To Micro Grants Committee and Member of Parliament.

The micro grant committees should reduce running cost expenses and allocate micro grants for the purpose it is intended for. They should also identify and maintain close contact with councilors and/or village representatives and actively seek opportunities to share policy ideas with them.

The committee members with the problem of greediness and disunity aforementioned in the challenges above; should keep aside their bias and do a free and fair selection of micro projects. The micro grants committee members should choose contractors to execute micro projects on a free and fair environment and not based on party affiliation and nepotism. They should check the accuracy of contractors in the case of infrastructure projects and carry out environmental assessments. When that is done, they should prepare progress reports based on field visitors to the Member of Parliament. Finally, to ensure proper operations and maintenance of public facilities renovated or reconstructed, an external assessment of works projects should be carried out by an audit mechanism from the National Assembly and members of micro grant committee where relevant.

The Member of Parliament should always meet with members of committee and find out what challenges they face in discharging their management and administrative duties. This will engender their trust and lay the foundation for strong partnership.

The Member of Parliament should keep the parliament abreast with the interest of his constituents as well as keep the constituents abreast of parliamentary development activities. For this to be possible, he should organize meetings in which he can consult the citizens of their problems and seek for possible solutions.

To the Cameroon Government

The government of Cameroon can play an important role in poverty alleviation in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations Organizations on goal one based on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. In this case, the Cameroon government should increase the

amount of micro grants allocated to Members of Parliament. This is because as the population increases, so too the needs of the people increases. The president of the National Assembly should carefully study and audit the activities of Members of Parliament so that he can share experiences of good practices of micro projects among members of parliament in parliament so that bad situations can be better managed.

Enhance Collaboration Between Government and NGO

There should be collaboration between the Cameroon government and NGOs as it will enhance government capacity in terms of good relationship with NGOs which can be very helpful to local governments, particularly in small municipalities. NGOs can complement government activities in several areas and supplement public funds as they raise additional funds from donors. NGOs can also be a source of innovation for the government as they bring new ideas for the implementation of public policies and can provide information to the government on topics in which they specialize, the provision of social services, or on the needs of the community as they tend to be in touch with the locality and their problems on a daily basis.

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