

# Decentralization and Local Development in the Adamawa Region, Northern Cameroon: A SWOT Analysis of the Implementation Process

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## Abstract

The State of Cameroon has opted for a decentralization policy since its constitution of January 18, 1996. Yet the implementation of this policy has been very slow, until the upsurge of the Anglophone crisis in 2016. The implementation of decentralization therefore started to have its real shape in 2019 with the General Code of Regional and Local Authorities (RLAs). Yet, an observation of its implementation process demonstrates challenges both on the government side and on the RLAs side. The case study of the Adamawa region has as objective, from a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunity and threats) approach, to examine the main challenges of the implementation of decentralization in a local area. For, all regions of Cameroon are not faced with the same challenges in this process. This main objective is operationalized thanks to two sub-objectives. The first one has to do with identifying the internal challenges to the implementation of decentralization, and the second one is concerned with analyzing the implementation process from a longitudinal comparative approach with the process of some countries with a historic advance in decentralization as a policy. The methodological approach here is qualitative. From a documentary research with about 40 documents examined, and individual semi-structured interviews done with about 15 key informants and direct observations done in 5 municipalities of the Adamawa region, the main finding of this research is that there is a unidirectional approach of decentralization over leaning on government efforts, according to which the latter is the initiator and the actor and the regional and local authorities are the beneficiaries at the internal level. The longitudinal comparative approach at the international level demonstrates that the Adamawa region, as a regional and local set, has a delay compared to local communities of the United State of America, England, Indonesia in their early stage of decen-

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tralization, and doesn't capitalize its human, material, natural and diplomatic resources to improve its autonomy and management. Considering the fact that the general decentralization allocation is around 7% of state revenue transferred to RLAs, far beneath the 15% of what is previewed by the General Code of RLAs on the one hand, and that some deconcentrated administration authorities are sluggish in transferring other competencies, this approach has to be revised not only in the Adamawa region, but in all the other regions of Cameroon. If decentralization has to be effective and productive as a policy in the next 10 years. Regional and local authorities are not just beneficiaries, but most consider themselves more as actors of this implementation process and undertake initiatives for its effectiveness.

### **Keywords**

Decentralization, Regional and Local Authorities, Local Development, Adamawa Region, Northern-Cameroon

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## **1. Research Background**

According to the political history of Cameroon, this country has had many forms of State from its independence in the year 1960 to 1996. The challenge has always been how to make Eastern Cameroon, a former French colony, to live together with Southern Cameroon, a former English colony. After the independence on the first of January 1960, the Southern Cameroon decided to join the State of Cameroon on October 1, 1961, both forming a unitary centralized State. This country experienced federalism from 1972 to 1996, when constitutionally, the leaders of the country decided to make it, unitary and decentralized State. According to Law No. 96-6 of 18 January 1996 to amend the Constitution of 2 June 1972, The Republic of Cameroon shall be a decentralized unitary State. It shall be one and indivisible, secular, democratic and dedicated to social service. It shall recognize and protect traditional values that conform to democratic principles, human rights and the law. It shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law.

The leaders of Cameroon from that period till now are convinced that this form of State is the best for Cameroon, if Cameroonians have to achieve a national destiny and get to prosperity as a nation. This conviction is so strong that after the upsurge of the Anglophone crisis in 2016, part of the Anglophone population argued for secession, whereas an important part of the population, including some Francophones thought that going back to federalism, even with a shape different from the two State federalism of the period 1972-1996 could be a better alternative for stability and social integration. The reply of the Head of State of Cameroon to this was not conspicuous. According to him, there is no possible argument concerning the form of the State. For, decentralization is the best option for Cameroon.

This decision can be defended successfully because, theoretically the political

sociology literature claims that when popular demands for decentralization have enough support because they represent a wide cleavage, a regionalized party system emerges (De Winter & Tursan, 1998) and decentralization tends to be enhanced (Amat et al., 2009). Countries with entrenched ethnic conflict, like Cameroon which has more than 250 ethnic groups and has been threatened by secession for many decades, can implement a more decentralized democracy at the first stage to mitigate the risk of secession (Amat et al., 2009). Yet, it can be observed that the political will to implement decentralization has never been convincing regarding its implementation process. From 1996 to 2016, when the sociopolitical crisis came up in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon, just a little had been done to implement decentralization. The process actually became operational in 2019 with the publication of the General Code of Regional and Local Authorities (GCRLAs).

Some Cameroonian scholars thought that there was a lack of genuine political will for implementing decentralization (Tani, Abangma, & Ambe, 2012; Fombad, 2019; Kaspas, 2023) and a lack of coordination between political and sectoral decentralization entities (Ofoulhast-Othamot, 2018). It therefore remains to properly see how it helps the poor to get out of precarity. A prospective approach demonstrates that a proper implementation of decentralization would be sustainable development fostering in Cameroon (Abit Ofeh, Meh Bin, & Beng Che, 2020; Kimengsi & Gwan, 2017; Mimboe, 2021; Tchouassi & Dzou, 2020; Nguh Jam, 2019; Chia, Saturnin, & Nkeneh, 2020; Ngek Monteh, 2021; Akoh, 2018).

Lexicographically, decentralization means both reversing deconcentration of administration at a single center and conferring powers to local governments (Smith, 2023). It is therefore a political phenomenon involving both administration and government. According to Ngima Mawoung (2015), the concept of decentralization consists in the breaking down of heavy government machinery into smaller administrative units at the local level. The existing body of literature specifies three major dimensions of decentralization: political, administrative, and economic (Morozov, 2016). In Cameroon, decentralization consists in a devolution by the State of special powers and appropriate resources to local authorities. It constitutes the basic driving force for promotion of development, democracy and good governance at the local level (General Code of Regional and Local Authorities, 2019). This is in line with what Smith (2023) will coin as the territorial distribution of power, concerning the extent to which power and authority are dispersed through the geographical hierarchy of the State. Just that since 2019, this distribution of power is sluggish making some political actors and scholars to be skeptical of an effective decentralization in Cameroon soon. Hence the question: what lingers the implementation of decentralization in Cameroon? The main objective of this research is to examine the process of implementation of decentralization in Cameroon. Empirically, it won't be efficient to do it at the national level, given the variety of contextual realities from one region to another out of the ten regions of Cameroon. So the case study of the Adamawa region is an

opportunity to examine this process from a political socio-anthropology perspective.

It should be noticed that few researchers have currently been interested in analyzing decentralization from the angle of its process as a policy. A set of researchers have been interested in taxation and political economy (Gadenne & Singhal, 2014; Wang et al., 2021) and public administration (Leonidivna Gavkalova, 2018; Mudalige, 2019; Kaze Tindo & Mejuju Mefre, 2020). Most research on decentralization in Cameroon has been done (Mbelle Mekolle, 2018; Adama, 2020; Alama, 2020; Ofeh & Thalut, 2021; Ngoran & Mougoue, 2021; Nange & Ozturen, 2022) in various sectors like education, natural resources, economics, politics, administration, yet an overview of what is available online does not show a lot of research questioning the implementation process. This research considers decentralization as a policy and tackles it from the process angle from a SWOT analysis based in the case study of the Adamawa region in Northern Cameroon.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Research Design

This research is based on qualitative research methods. Three techniques have been used to collect data and the qualitative data collected have been analyzed thanks to a qualitative analysis of qualitative data. Concerning the data collecting techniques, documentary research, direct observations and individual interviews have been employed. The documentary research has helped to provide us with data for the conceptual and theoretical perspective of the research. About 40 documents related to decentralization both at the national and international level have been exploited. This documentary research has permitted us to better circumscribe the concept of decentralization and its link to local development, to conceive the interview guides that have been used for the data collecting and to discuss the results of this research. This documentary data has been completed by field direct observation in the municipalities. A team of 10 surveyors has been sent to the five municipalities concerned by the study with an observation grid and an interview guide. They observed specific items relating to decentralization, the management of human resources in municipalities, the infrastructures, the territorial attractiveness, the decentralized cooperation and the intercommunality. This was systematically done in the five municipalities of the study. The direct observations were completed by 15 individual interviews with mayors or their assistants, human resource managers, municipal councilors and some simple municipal staff.

### 2.2. Sampling Details

Concerning the sampling details, the research was done in the Adamawa region, Northern Cameroon. The Vina Division of the Adamawa region was chosen for the field survey. The reason is that the Vina, in which the capital city of the Ada-

mawa region is found (the town of Ngaoundere), concentrates all the populations of the Adamawa and has the peculiarity of having municipalities with both political parties in power and of the opposition, and has a lot of resources that can be found in other Divisions. The Vina Division, as the political and administrative center of the Adamawa region, is equally the most developed locality, hence permitting us to study the regional economic input into decentralization from the highest potential of the region. The qualitative research approach is conducive in this case to collect transferable data to other Divisions of the Adamawa.

In the Vina Division, five municipalities have been chosen according to a reasoned choice approach. They are the Subdivision of Ngaoundere urban council, Ngaoundere 1<sup>st</sup>, Ngaoundere 2<sup>nd</sup>, Ngaoundere 3<sup>rd</sup> and the municipality of Nganha. In these municipalities, 15 key informants have been chosen. The profiles included Mayors or their assistants, municipal councilors or general secretaries of the councils and any other experienced staff. Each interview lasted for about 45 minutes to 1 hour.

### **2.3. Data Analysis Plan**

After collecting data from the municipalities, they have been transcribed by the team of 10 surveyors. These analyses were done manually from the transcribed data. The codification process permitted us from an inductive approach to make a synthesis of the emerging items. The latter were categorized according to the SWOT approach perspective and analyzed in order to see their interaction with the implementation process of decentralization in the Adamawa region. This analytical process helped us to have the plan of presentation of the results of this article. It starts with a presentation of the Adamawa potentials for decentralization. Then it makes a SWOT analysis of the decentralization implementation process, before ending up with a discussion relating to the implementation trajectory of this process from the case of the Adamawa region.

### **2.4. Ethical Consideration**

Concerning the ethical consideration, informants were asked for their agreement before the interview and all those who took part in the interview agreed for it. They equally agreed that the information they provided could be used for academic and research purposes. Yet, we ensured them of the fact that their identity is not unfolded when doing a public presentation of the results of the research. That is why names of key informants are not used in verbatims. Concerning the publication process, there is no conflict of interest relating to the publication of this article.

## **3. Results**

### **3.1. The General Political Situation in Cameroon and Decentralization**

The general political situation of Cameroon is currently one of the most uncer-

tain since many decades. If it can be rightly said that this country has known political crisis in the past like the Bakassi threat issue in the years 90s and the early 2000 recently and the unsuccessful coup d'Etat in 1984 earlier among others, the last decade is probably one of its own, when the country passes through it almost global insecurity threat. The year 2013 and 2014 mark the moment the Boko Haram threat became a serious reality in the Northern region of this country, whereas the Anglophone crisis threatened the western side of the country with secession. At the same time, the Eastern side of Cameroon lived serious insecurity with refugees from the Central African Republic's civil war. The regions that weren't directly affected by the crisis had to welcome thousands of internal displaced persons and equally experienced insecurity. In 2018, the presidential elections extrapolated the internal divisions with tribalism. It became more than never imperative to find a solution to this instability for a country that has had the slogan of an island of peace for many years. One of the solutions for many sociopolitical actors was the change the current form of the State from a decentralized to a federal entity.

The public authorities still trusted decentralization as the political model Cameroon needed. Several legal instruments were promulgated notably law No. 2016/007 of 12 July 2016 on the Penal Code and law No. 2019/024 of 24 December 2019 to institute the general code of regional and local authorities. These instruments aimed to prompt decentralization and settled the multiculturalism ideology, in which the country leaders perceived an important asset for social integration. In terms of local governance, the first powers were transferred to the councils by the central government in 2010. In accordance with the principle of progressiveness, in 2018, 63 powers were transferred by 21 ministries. With regard to offences against public assets, the mechanism was enhanced with the creation of the Special Criminal Court (SCC) by law No. 2011/028 of 14 December 2011, which has been operational since 2012 (*National Development Strategy, 2030*).

Governance, decentralization and strategic management of the State, are one of the bases for structural transformation of the Cameroonian economy, development of human capital and improvement of the employment situation. This pillar addresses: decentralization and local development; strengthening the rule of law and security of persons and property; improvement of the State's public service; economic and financial governance; regional development. It also includes issues related to bilingualism, multiculturalism and citizenship that are central to the third dimension of Vision 2035, namely "unity in diversity".

According to *National Development Strategy (2030)*, the main orientation is to complete and deepen the decentralization process and strengthen local governance to make RLAs poles of growth and development at regional and local level.

To this end, the authorities undertake to: establish special status for the North-West and South-West Regions in accordance with the resolutions of the Major National Dialogue (MND); strengthen effective empowerment of other regions and councils; transfer in full to RLAs the resources related to the com-

petences devolved to them; supervise the process of setting up a local administration; encourage RLAs to make the most of inter-municipality, decentralized cooperation, territorial diplomacy and various forms of partnership offered by the scope of local development. More specifically, the government had the ambition of holding regional elections and set up regional executives; carrying out a thorough reform of the modalities for exercising supervision to lighten its impact on the functioning of RLAs and refocus its activities on missions not transferred from the State; substantially increase the resources transferred to RLAs; reforming local taxation to diversify and improve its performance, on the one hand, and consolidate the mobilization and modalities of effective transfer of proceeds from the said taxation to RLAs, on the other hand; reviewing the mechanism for making funds available to RLAs; and ensuring better equalization in the transfer of resources to RLAs, in order to take better account of local disparities. From all indication, decentralization appears to be the pillar for local development according to Cameroon's strategy.

### **3.2. The Adamawa Region Potential for Decentralization**

The Cameroon is a country in Central Africa. It is bordered by Nigeria to the west; Chad to the northeast; the Central African Republic to the east; and Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and the Republic of the Congo to the south. Cameroon's coastline lies on the Bight of Bonny, part of the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean. This geographic position makes it a transit place for many countries which do not have access to a sea port. Chad and the Central African Republic depend on Cameroon transit, and the Adamawa region is a strategic locality for all travelers going to Chad. The country is often referred to as "Africa in miniature" for its geological and cultural diversity. Natural features include beaches, deserts, mountains, rainforests, and savannas. The highest point is Mount Cameroon in the southwest, and the largest cities are Douala, Yaoundé, and Garoua. The Adamawa region is rich with a lot of minerals like gold, which are not properly exploited because of a lack of measures for legal exploitation.

Moreover, this region is a meeting point for several groups of people, making it an interesting potential touristic site. Its socio-demographic characteristics include a predominantly young population, with a high proportion of young adults. Ngaoundere, which is its capital city, is also an economically important center in the region, with strong commercial and agricultural activity. These socio-demographic characteristics contribute to the wealth and diversity of the Adamawa Region. Several ethnic groups are represented there, notably the Fulbés (or Peuls), the Gbaya, the Mbororo, the Dourou, the Dii, the Moundang, the Fali, as well as other minority groups. Each ethnic group has its own culture, traditions and language. The most commonly used languages are Fulfulde (or Peul), Gbaya, Mbororo, Dourou, Dii and Moundang. However, it is also common to hear French, which is the official language of Cameroon. The population of Ngaoundere practices various religions. Islam is widely widespread, especially

among Fulbé communities, while Christianity (Catholicism, Protestantism and Pentecostalism) is also practiced by part of the population. It also exists in animist practices and other traditional beliefs. Ngaoundere has educational infrastructure, ranging from primary schools to institutions of higher education. The city is home to the University of Ngaoundéré, which is one of the main higher education institutions in the country. However, access to education may vary depending on available resources and socio-economic constraints. The municipality of Ngaoundere has health infrastructure including hospitals, health centers and clinics. However, access to health services can be limited in certain rural areas and for certain marginalized populations.

### **3.2.1. The Ngaoundere Urban Council**

The Ngaoundere Urban Council was created by Presidential Decree No. 2007/115 of 23 April 2007 following the breakup of the former rural commune of Ngaoundere. But its history is closely linked to that of the city of Ngaoundere which was established as District between 1910 and 1918 by Order of December 24, 1935, then elevated to Chief town of the Department in 1972 by Decree No. 72/349 of July 22, 1972 and by Decree No. 83/392 of August 22, 1983 (Extract from PCD 2013). It is an important economic center in the region of Adamawa. Agriculture, livestock and commerce are the main economic activities of the city and the whole region. The region is famous for its cattle ranches, notably herds of cows and sheep. It is an important transport hub, connecting the northern and eastern regions of Cameroon. The city has a railway station which connects it to other major cities in the country, as well as neighboring countries such as Chad and Nigeria. It also has a regional airport which facilitates air travel. This town is home to the University of Ngaoundere, which is one of the main higher education institutions in Cameroon. The Adamawa region offers natural landscapes magnificent, notably the Bouba Ndjida national park, known for its wild-life diversity, including elephants, lions and buffalo.

### **3.2.2. The Ngan-Ha Municipality**

Ngan-ha is a municipality in Cameroon located in the Adamawa region and the Vina Division With an area of 2625 km<sup>2</sup> divided into 54 villages and a density of 14 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>. It is limited to the North by Mbe, to the South-East by Belel, to the North-East by Rey Bouba, to the South by Nyambaka, to the South-West by Ngaoundere 2<sup>nd</sup> and to the North-West by Ngaoundere 3<sup>rd</sup>. The municipality of Ngan-ha has an estimated population of 45,000 inhabitants with three dominant ethnic groups: the Mboums, the Dii, the Fulani with other ethnic groups such as the Baya, the Toupouris and the Laka.

### **3.2.3. Ngaoundere 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>**

The Subdivisions of Ngaoundere were officially created on April 24, 2007 by presidential decree n° 2007/017 which was dedicated to the break-up of urban municipalities and rural. These are found in the Town of Ngaoundere for the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup>, and the municipality of Ngaoundere 3<sup>rd</sup> is limited to the north by the

Subdivision of Mbé to the south by the Subdivision of Ngaoundere 2 to the East by the Subdivision of Ngan-ha and to the West by that of Martap. The University of Ngaoundere is located at Dang, in the municipality of Ngaoundere 3<sup>rd</sup>.

#### 4. The SWOT Analysis of the Decentralization Process

This section presents the results of the analysis of transcribed interviews and direct observation of the field survey for this research. It starts with a synthetic table of the SWOT analysis and the analysis of some key factors to development in the context of decentralization (see **Table 1**).

##### 4.1. The SWOT Synthesis of the Implementation of Decentralization in the Adamawa Region

**Table 1.** SWOT synthesis.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good collaboration with the supervisory authority, the Ministry of Decentralization and Local Development;</li> <li>• The existence of collaboration with other municipalities;</li> <li>• The transfer of competencies from certain ministries such as the Ministry of Water and Energy, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Public Works, ...</li> <li>• Receipt of subsidies from FEICOM (the municipal bank), GIZ, PNDP, the State...</li> <li>• The creation of activities such as the market (sheds, shops), education and training centers, drilling in the locality as well as in urban centers;</li> <li>• Involvement of populations in budget votes (participatory decentralization);</li> <li>• The participation of the mayor in person in the manual works organized to encourage the community;</li> <li>• The participation of people regularly paying taxes despite their low financial income;</li> <li>• Presence of some touristic sites;</li> <li>• Presence of several natural resources Livestock.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The inability of the urban community to really function as it should due to lack of resources;</li> <li>• Some ministries are not moving regarding the transfer of skills in the municipality while 15% of the state budget should be transferred to the Regional and local Authorities;</li> <li>• There is also a lack of necessary materials and equipment at the municipal level;</li> <li>• Absence of internal regulations;</li> <li>• Insufficient training and retraining of administrative staff;</li> <li>• Lack of local engineers;</li> <li>• Basing itself on the income of farmers as well as that of breeders (payment of taxes) due to the lack of major activity in the Adamawa zone;</li> <li>• Politics interferes with the implementation of decentralization;</li> <li>• Lack of Municipal Development Plans in all sub-divisional municipalities (MDPs have not been updated since 2013, 2014);</li> <li>• Insufficient communication between advisors and the population;</li> <li>• Low perception of the role of the advisor in municipal and local governance;</li> <li>• Low location of tax collection;</li> <li>• Insufficient financial resources;</li> <li>• Municipalities are not completely free in relation to what the code provides for decentralization;</li> <li>• Lack of partners within the framework of intercommunality;</li> <li>• The insufficiency of attractive means to attract investors to the locality;</li> <li>• The population is not sufficiently educated on the issues of decentralization;</li> <li>• Lack of long-term visions for the development of international relations.</li> </ul>

## Continued

**Opportunities**

- Being from the same political faction of the ruling party is an asset to some municipalities because there is the chance of having more achievable projects, and a liability to other municipalities because it becomes an impediment to administrative flow and hinders access to projects;
- The presence of NGOs and international collaboration with the European Union, GIZ, etc. remains a major asset;
- The possibility of exploiting tourist resources as well as the quarries which towns abound in.

**Threats**

- The existence of decentralization on paper and texts only and not on the ground: because the decentralized authorities hesitate to accept the effective transfer of competencies to the local level;
- Competition between some subdivisions like Ngaoundere 1st, 2nd and 3rd, weighs on the population, hence the domination of politics over decentralization;
- Rejection of important projects due to politics;
- The low transfer from the state budget which is barely 2 to 5% instead of 15%;
- Lack of dialogue between the authorities and the population;
- Weak planning of the strategic development plan;
- Ignorance of the notion of territorial attractiveness.

## 4.2. The Incomplete Transfer of Competencies

Beside the institutional perspective of the implementation of decentralization which lingers to be effective, one of the main challenges of decentralization in Cameroon now is the incompleteness of competencies transfer from the State to Local authorities. On the financial plan, according to Decree No. 2023/405 of September 6, 2023, to lay down the distribution of the Common Decentralization Fund for the 2023 financial year, the amount of revenue allocated to the Common Decentralization Fund for the 2023 financial year stands at CFAF 252 568,936,000 (two hundred and fifty two billion five hundred and sixty-eight million nine hundred and thirty-six thousand), as per the estimates of the 2023 finance law. It shall be broken down as follows: General Operating Allocation: CFAF 137,240 638,000 (one hundred and thirty-seven billion two hundred and forty million six hundred and thirty-eight thousand). This amount is less than half of what is expected to be transferred according to the General Code of Regional and Local Authorities. According to our informants, generally, this allocation does not entirely reach the RLAs. That is what an informant expresses here:

*“there are many things to correct, for example the state budget, funds are transferred on the papers but the CTDs receive nothing, there are empty promises, no implementation on the ground, the minimum packages for example which we give to the teachers before the start of the school year does not arrive, the teacher is obliged to go and buy the 100f chalk himself to write on the board.” (Key informant 2, The Ngaoundere Urban council, interview of January 15, 2024).*

The challenge here lies at the level of the governance of these funds. The administrative system, besides being heavy, not permitting the entire allocation to reach the RLAs, is equally often influenced by the political game. Depending on the interest of the politicians and the actors of the political party in power, resources can delay reaching a municipality managed by a political party of the

opposition. If decentralization in Cameroon is a policy not to be argued as a form of State, its appropriation by politicians is interesting to see how a “two-step flow<sup>1</sup>” decentralization is operationalized. The lack of proper transfer of funds to municipalities makes decentralization a separating factor between RLAs and the population instead of being a participation factor.

*“there is also the treasury which does not pay salaries. You see there are things that are not completely handed over to the CTDs, but if they do not pay back, the municipalities will not be able to help the populations, we recruit hospital staff, teachers, professors and it is the municipality that must pay” (Key informant 2, The Ngaoundere Urban council, Interview of January 15, 2024).*

On the administrative plan, Regional and Local Authorities have gotten some autonomy as regarding the Staff for example. The Municipal police have been created in order to vamp their ability to control their territory. Yet, this police has to work in collaboration with the national police, and at times, both relationships are conflictual, narrowing the ability of the municipal police. It has to be noted that Regional and Local Authorities have a serious problem with insufficient staff, talk less of qualified staff. A lot of local resources are still managed by the central State, be it in the aspect of mining, wood logging, land tenure, and so on...

According to the GCRLAs, some sections of education and health sectors are to be managed by the RLAs in their various areas of competencies. In the Adamawa Region, the least that has been done in the domain of education makes Mayors to have conflicts with teachers unions. They avoid expanding their responsibilities unless they become a liability to the population. It is what is expressed by this key informant: *“For example, the Ministry of Health, we are asked to recruit staff but they do not pay and the municipality cannot spend its entire budget. Each budget needs its fund” (Key informant 5, The Ngan-ha municipality, Interview of January 17, 2024).*

A cross analysis of the data collected by all key informants demonstrates that the transfer of competencies in the Adamawa Region can be effective for about 40 to 45 % in urban councils and less in rural councils. In some municipalities, the effective financial transfer rate can be estimated at 2%. That is what this key informant from the Ngaoundere urban council expresses here:

*when I say 40% to 45%, Because there are transfers of competencies from certain ministries which transmit certain powers to local authorities. I take for example, the example of basic education, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the ministry of water and energy, public works, and a little also livestock. There is that good and with the arrival of the uhhhhh... Regional councilors there are other ministries, there is also the Ministry of health, but there are other ministries that don't even move. And when you*

<sup>1</sup>This is borrowed from the “two step flow” of communication by Paul Lazarsfeld. In the aspect of decentralization, it has to do with the level of Governmental decrees and documentation for its implementation and the level of its implementation by technical, administrative and political actors.

*see in the decentralization code, you will see that 15% of the state budget must be transferred to the RLAs. except currently we are not even at 2%, it is the transfer only that the ministries are trying to do for example the ministry of public works we tell you that well, we give all the municipalities 27 million to arrange, maintain certain roads good when the mayors try to lobby and who says lobby says politics (Key informant 1, The Ngaoundere Urban council, interview of January 15, 2024).*

### **4.3. The Appropriation of the Decentralization for Local Development concept by the Municipalities**

One of the main challenges of the implementation of decentralization in the Adamawa Region is equally the appropriation of this policy by municipal actors. Out of the 15 key informants that have had interviews with the survey team, less than five of them had a clearer idea of what decentralization is all about, talk less of its implementation process. Because of the lack of knowledge of this policy and its impact on local development, the daily interactions and dynamics amongst actors in municipalities, makes politics a priority before this policy. This is perceived in the project management of the Ngaoundere urban council. This key informant expresses the politics driven process in this verbatim:

*so if you are not from the leading political chapel, out of 10 files maybe you will benefit from 2. They will try to see what are the percentages and the impact in relation to population. You must not be given a project that will have a positive impact on the population because during the campaign you will use that against the central body. This is why there is a blockade. So there is this transfer of account, decentralization according to the texts. It has been there since 2011, I remember the 1st seminar with Marafa was in Garoua to launch the generation, he called it his 4th generation of decentralization. It was 2011. In everything we have done as a project or program perhaps we are at 0.5% so that on the text but on the ground really, it's still, it's dragging its feet it's dragging, but if decentralization is effective (Key informant 1, The Ngaoundere Urban council, Interview of January 15, 2024).*

From the side of the population, participation is still something far from being integrated in the mentalities of the populations. Many projects fail because of lack of participation. It is what this key informant says here:

*try to attend, you will especially see the assembly of the month of March, when we vote on the administrative account, that means the execution of the budget for the year M-1... you will follow for example some credit canceled for lack of implementation, you are going to see hundreds of millions because we were not able to execute on youth employment. This line is canceled by more than 80% of all the local authorities of Adamawa. Except the Divisional officer requires before proposing the budgets the line employment of games: hygiene and health the line there must be consistent otherwise he does not take the budget good the mayors are politicians there*

*are also the Youth Presidents in the neighborhoods since we vote their representatives are often in the room when they hear urban community youth employment 50 million, they are there hooooo... they applaud unfortunately during the vote on the administrative account they will not be there to understand that out of the 50 million there are 49 million who are canceled for lack of use (Key informant 1, The Ngaoundere Urban council, Interview of January 15, 2024).*

From this appropriation perspective, it is obvious that both RLAs and the population do not afford much to own decentralization as a policy for local development. All falls on the State and the latter does it according to its priorities. Interesting dimensions to consider in order to boost decentralization for local development in the Adamawa Region are territorial attractiveness, decentralized cooperation and intercommunality.

#### **4.4. The Construction of Territorial Attractiveness by the Municipalities**

The Territorial attractiveness refers to the capacity of a territory to attract and retain populations, businesses, investments and tourists. It is based on different factors such as quality of life, infrastructure, cultural offerings, economic opportunities, the environment, etc. The objective of territorial attractiveness is to strengthen the competitiveness and dynamism of a territory by making it more attractive and promoting its economic and social development. Thus, the urban community of Ngaoundere as a space of territorial attractiveness has “Bois de Mardoc”. In order to facilitate territorial attractiveness, the Mayor of the Ngaoundere 3<sup>rd</sup> council wanted social housing to be created to be able to accommodate foreigners when they come for activities such as university games, let's take the example of the municipal housing estate of more than 20 surrounding rooms which is under construction at the Dang market. We also note the development of Dang Lake in the future to attract tourists.

##### **A territorial attractiveness initiative: the Wood of Mardoc**



The woods of Mardoc is a space that the urban council has saved and maintained, they have created meeting rooms, conference rooms, party rooms for weddings or birthdays, there is the hospital which has several changes of Accommodation, restaurants and others are a wonderful space that brings in a lot of money in terms of municipal revenue. The urban community within the framework of the Mardoc woods has collaborated with the European Union and soon they will proceed to the improvement and supervision of this environment: the creation of swimming pools, football fields, the arrangement of rooms and others. There is also a Boukarou created on a road there but due to lack of resources and security problems the project was abandoned.

There is evidence when it comes to territorial attractiveness, the municipalities are not aware of its power to help them develop their investment sector and boost their local development. Apart from the Wood of Mardoc, in all the municipalities sampled here, none has constructed a specific territorial attractiveness structure. All the attractive structures found in their territories have been constructed by the State of Cameroon. Decentralization is perceived by municipal actors as a one-way provision from the State to the municipalities, considered as the main benefactors.

To our point of view, there is no way to talk about proper decentralization if municipalities cannot develop strategies to have proper means for their projects. This key informant reveals that to any project that a municipality has to organize from the Government funding, there is a political act to complete its financing. If the municipality is managed by a political party of the opposition, then the project has fewer chances to be funded. This key informant expresses it:

*So as long as the municipality is on this side of the opposition, there will be no exploitation of boxitis. If the population wants to benefit, if Adamaoua wants to benefit, then change color. If you don't change there will be no exploitation. And that... we have, we have, he told me that before... The Bauxite Malam, bauxite of Malam came later but they started the exploitation While the Bauxite of Minim-martap which is the one of the richest deposits in the world is still there, it's because of politics, to tell you that it's politics that governs (Key informant 5, The Municipality of Ngaoundere 1st, Interview of January 16, 2024).*

This informant talks about the exploitation of Bauxites by the municipality of Martap in the Adamawa region. From his experience, from Martap to the municipality of Ngaoundere 1<sup>st</sup>, it is obvious the political orientation has an influence on the commitment of the actors to the decentralization process.

#### **4.5. The Development of a Decentralized Cooperation and Inter-Municipality in Some Municipalities of the Adamawa Region**

In the urban council, decentralized cooperation appears to be a central element because it allows the RLAs to boost their values on the international level, with-

out the help of the State, all mayors have a diplomatic office and are responsible for displaying the strengths of the municipality on the international scene and call on other urban councils to twinning. The urban council is not doing badly in this system because it has signed a cooperation with a municipality in Germany which is responsible for delivering the devices in January 2024, a municipality in Belgium which intends to intervene in a university environment also in January 2024, municipalities in Turkey, Israel, France etc.

Decentralized cooperation brings about local development because it permits mayors to learn from the good practices of other municipalities abroad and allows the municipal executive to experience a better self-development and develop a competitive mindset. Before decentralization, a mayor would just have few opportunities to interact with others, whereas the decentralized cooperation permits him to even interact with councils of other countries as it is testified by this key informant:

*“Decentralized cooperation is good because tell yourself today that before you went to see the mayors who are on site but now the mayors are called to travel and collaborate with other municipalities every year. Even currently the mayor has just made 3 international tours, the mayor of Ngaoundéré 2 is in South Korea, so these are things, the mayor has just returned from the Ivory Coast, from Cotonou, I have just come from returning from Turkey, I go to Turkey every year, we work with other town halls, other town halls, in different cities” (Key informant 1, Ngaoundere Urban council, Interview of January 15, 2024).*

This collaboration is advantageous because it promotes the community in the State games and helps it win prizes because the mayor and his team are required to work, dialogue with the population, arrange the roads, promote hygiene and sanitation within the locality.

Within the framework of municipal unions, the municipality of NGAN-HA was able to benefit from project financing and which allowed the improvement of the living conditions of the population and I cited the example directly of the rehabilitation of roads more than 200 millions, the construction and equipment of storage stores and all this within the framework of municipal unions. Together with the municipal unions they have carried out several projects such as the fairground space which is being developed in the municipality of Ngaoundere 2<sup>nd</sup>. Whose situation of decentralized cooperation within the municipality is fluid because it gives positive results according to the general sector.

The municipality of NGAN-HA is a member of the union of communes of the Vina department. First of all, it is the commune of Ngan-ha which has held the presidency for more than five years, because we are talking about inter-municipality here, it is in a global way when you are in the same department it is the union when you leave the department we talk about i inter-municipality but when we already see in the title like that it is in a global way, of which we must already understand the municipality of NGAN-HA is a member of the un-

ions of municipalities of the department of Vina. The municipality of NGAN-HA maintains good relations with other municipalities until it even wins projects.

Concerning the inter-communality, the urban community of Ngaoundere brings together 3 sub-divisional municipalities but there is no real collaboration between the latter which demonstrate that the interest of the population is at the center of local development, we end up with the municipalities which do not sign of twinning to arrange roads, build infrastructure or develop the attractiveness of the territory but which each remains in its own political chapel and in the end, the population who pays for the broken skins. The notion of inter-municipality is not well understood in the Adamawa region because only Ngaoundere 3rd was able to sign the twinning with a municipality to the south for the wood problem but apart from that the municipalities make no effort to be noticed or work with the others.

## 5. Discussion

For decentralization to be a reliable concept in formulating future social arrangements and related technologies, it should come with high standards of specificity. It also cannot substitute for anticipating centralization with appropriate mechanisms of accountability (Schneider, 2019). In the context of Cameroon, some people think that federalism could be a better pattern than decentralization, because it would be more precise and reliable. A recent discussion on this is done by Owona Nguini and Mballa Elanga (2023) and Libii Li Ngue Ngue (2021), respectively a high standard scholar and political scientist for the first and a political actor and parliamentarian for the second. They think that compared to decentralization, communitary federalism is an important option to consider in order to solve the social and sociopolitical crisis Cameroon currently goes through. The challenge of using community as a determinant factor of federalism is the upsurge of the communocratic populism<sup>2</sup>, which is more dangerous for social cohesion in this country.

Despite these arguments, political actors in power do not see any opportunity for a better social stability in this alternative. Hence, there is a kind of operational mixed up between the two concepts as far as their implementation is concerned. Both equally create the fear for the loss of some powers by some actors who prefer the centralized State, the deconcentration policy.

An interesting question of interest is how decentralization in developing countries today compares with the historical experience of the United States and Europe. An examination of the United States, using data from the US Census Bureau shows that the US tax to GDP ratio in the early 1900s was less than 10%,

<sup>2</sup>It consists in using the community factor for political positioning, even when excluding other communities. This is a mode of power management and the construction of a charismatic political profile based on tribal belonging. Communocratic populism is currently the most used instrument during all electoral periods in Cameroon since the advent of democracy and pluri-partism in the 1990s.

lower than most developing countries today (Maddison, 2008). However, the observed patterns of decentralization were entirely different, plotting the share of subnational revenues in total public revenues in the United States. In 1902, subnational revenues (consisting almost entirely of local revenues) were over 60% of total public revenues. This ratio is higher than that for all developing countries observed in the GFS and is far higher than that of Cameroon.

For the case of the Adamawa region, it is not even possible to give a clear account of the contribution rate of RLAs in the decentralization implementation process. This is due to lack of knowledge on the process itself on the one hand and lack of a proactiveness mindset on the other hand. Even if the country moves to federalism, so long as the RLAs are always over expecting from the Government, because the provisional mindset that has been developed by the will of politicians to turn any situation to their political advantage, local development will still be a far unachievable reality in some rural milieu of Cameroon, most in the Adamawa region.

The second notable feature of historical decentralization in the United States is that there was close alignment between provision and fiscal decentralization: virtually all local spending was financed locally through property taxes (US Census Bureau, 2010; Gadenne & Singhal, 2014), which plots the share of intergovernmental grants in total state and local revenues. The fiscal gap was below 10% until the 1930s and the enactment of the first federal social insurance programs. This historically high level of locally financed local provision is not unique to the United States. Patterns of decentralization in the United Kingdom are similar overall, plotting the share of subnational revenues in total revenues, and show the share of intergovernmental grants in total subnational revenues, in 10-year averages for the United Kingdom using data from Mitchell (1988). The United Kingdom was always more centralized than the United States, but subnational revenues still represented more than 40% of total revenues until the 1920s, and the fiscal gap was small, less than 20%, until the 1930s. Although comprehensive historical statistics on decentralization for other countries are limited (Wallis & Oates, 1988), evidence discussed in Pommerehne (1977) shows that France, Switzerland, Germany, and Canada all had substantially more decentralized provision in 1900 than most developing countries have today.

The emergence of decentralization throughout the world has provoked questions about whether decentralization has played several important roles in fostering accountable and responsible governance. As the concept of governance expanded, so did thinking about the rationale, objectives, and forms of decentralization. Decentralization now encompasses not only the transfer of power, authority, and responsibility within the government, but also the sharing of authority and resources for shaping public policy within society. One of the important reasons that drive the Indonesian government to deliver a democratic decentralization is political motivation. This relates to the growing intention to local development throughout the country posed the need for political and ad-

ministrative arrangement to meet the country's diversity (Hidayat, 2017). For the case of Cameroon as a whole and the Adamawa region in particular, the development of policies at the local level is still over depending on the central State efforts either through the Ministry of economy... or specific development programs like the National Participative Development Program (PNDP). From the research done on decentralization before us, the energy put in decentralizing the administrative, financial and the transfer the management of resources is questionable. There is a need for RLAs to emancipate themselves from the unidirectional approach from State to RLAs to a bi-directional approach for a better autonomization of RLAs and the communities.

Decentralization in Cameroon, just like in Indonesia, can be used as an acknowledgment of ethnic diversity (pluralism) to create unity and harmony, to form social harmony and equal development with the framework of protecting national stability (Yakub, Ghani, & Anwar, 2018). For Indonesia, after the large-scale expenditure decentralization of 2001, districts with relatively lower levels of public infrastructure started to invest significantly more in health and physical infrastructure, although not in education infrastructure. At the same time, there has been a tightening of the budget constraint in districts where the democratically elected government heads took over already before gaining fiscal powers (Gonschorek, 2021; Kis-Katos & Sjahrir, 2017). The point is not for Cameroon to adopt this process, but there is a possibility to inspire from this and develop a better two-way autonomization process and make decentralization a real asset to local development.

## 6. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to make a SWOT analysis of the implementation of decentralization in the Adamawa region (Northern Cameroon). Five municipalities have been sampled to that effect: The Ngaoundere urban council, the municipalities of Ngaoundere 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, and the municipality of Ngan-ha which is a rural municipality. 15 interviews have been done with mayors and staff members of those municipalities. We obtained a general result from our research on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the implementation of decentralization indicating that much still needs to be done for the Adamawa region to achieve effective decentralization. If the transfer of powers and competencies from the central State lingers, municipalities can anticipate by vamping their territorial attractiveness, decentralized cooperation and inter-communality. This would be more effective if there is a real participative approach and a desire to optimize the rational use of natural resources. The case of some developed and developing countries that have been discussed here demonstrates that the implementation of a decentralization process is only possible if the regional and local authorities blend their effort of autonomization to the dynamic of transfer of competencies and powers initiated by the central State. It is equally important to notice that decentralization will never be effective in some

localities of Cameroun, unless the regional and local authorities get their freedom from the grip of deconcentration. Finally, what is important to notice at the end of this article is that, in the context of Cameroon, even though it could be important to discuss which form of State, between federalism and decentralization, could be more conducive for the local development of some regions, decentralization remains an opportunity for local development in a context of ethnic and sociocultural diversity. Yet, the regional and local authorities of the Adamawa region, and of many other regions of Cameroon consider it as a one-way action of implementation from the State to RLAs. Just a very few of them have gotten an automatization mindset. The lack of appropriation of decentralization as a two-way action, both from the State to RLAs and from RLAs to the State, results in the undervaluing of the asset of decentralization and hinders local development in the Adamawa region. In order to prompt decentralization in Cameroon, beside the competencies which are progressively being transferred, it is important for RLAs to get a mindset shift from passive implementors to active, autonomous and strategic actors. If the vector of the decentralization implementation process becomes bi-directional, RLAs will optimize the use of their resources and become a better help to the State. This could be possible thanks to a professionalization of RLAs' workers and their freedom from the deconcentration system.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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