
Local Government and Sustainable Development in Santa Municipality, Cameroon:1968-2020

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Abstract

The study examines the evolution of local governance in Cameroon using the Santa Municipality of the North west Region of Cameroon as a topical example. The focus is on the manner in which it has been adopted, as well as its effectiveness in local developmental-service delivery through infrastructure provision and the implications towards sustainable development. Focusing on the objectives of local governance in Cameroon, the paper argues that local government has not been able to provide the basic requirements of the masses in the municipalities such as; public lighting, refuse collection, water supply, construction and rehabilitation of municipal roads, installation of roads signs, town planning services, and building of markets among others. The provision of these basic needs has largely been inadequate and inefficient due to locally lacking preconditions for successful decentralization and the prevailing institutional constraints against it. Findings depicts that the local government institutions were and remains instrumental in identifying and executing development projects. However, during the execution phase of the projects, the process in some cases is too slow that the terms of different mayors need to elapse before certain projects are completed. If local governance must be a positive instrument of sustainable development in Santa and Cameroon as a whole, its current form and character must be redressed through adequate social inclusion, fiscal-administrative-political devolution. Put differently, the need for devolved political-administrative powers and resources to the local authorities without the interference of state driven agents, to attract international unsustainable foreign funding in urgently necessary.

Key Words: *Local Government, Municipality, Sustainable Development, Santa*

Introduction

The independence of most African states in the 1960s, led to the establishment of strong and centralized governments as a measure to meet the development challenges.¹ The development virtues of the centralized system of governance identified by the pioneer heads of states in Africa turned out to be more of a myth than reality as decades went by. This was so because most of the newly independent states in Africa gradually became dysfunctional mainly as a result of over centralization of power and authoritarian rule. The emergence of autocratic regimes and the failure of the centralized states in Africa and other developing areas of the world rekindled the interest in decentralization and revitalization of local government in the African continent and elsewhere. This led to greater attention given to the role of local government in development.² It is useful to note that local government policies and programs have a significant influence on the definition and achievement of sustainable development in the communities where they operate. The achievements are based on the integration of well-defined sustainability criteria into all programs and activities related to the environment and infrastructure provisioning.

In Cameroon, the drive in taking government closer to the people began since the precolonial era as Cameroonian states and kingdoms had institutions that regulated and devolved power from the center to the peripheries. Traditional regulatory institutions made sure decision making was not bestowed on a single person or one arm of the governance apparatus. When the colonizers came, they understood that it would be a farce if they tried to usurp the traditional governance institutions of the power they possessed prior to colonialism. The colonial administration instituted by the Germans recognized that any effective administrative model that was to win the allegiance of the governed needed to incorporate traditional authorities as auxiliaries. After the defeat and expulsion of the Germans from Cameroon in 1916, attempts to establish a joint administration over the territory weren't successful, thus the erstwhile German protectorate of Kamerun was partitioned by the British and French and governed under the auspices of the League of Nations as Mandated territories.

The British and French upon assumption of their administrative stints in Cameroon were obliged by the League of Nations to equip the people with necessary skills of administration as it was envisaged that at some point they

¹Bobuin John Gemandze, *Issues in Local Government: Theories, Principles and Practice* (Buea: Trinity ventures, 2009), 27.

²Aloysius Nyuymengka Ngalim, "Local Government, Infrastructure Provision and Sustainable Development in Fako Municipalities of Cameroon's South West Region, 1866-2010". *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, Vol. 16, No. (5), 2014, 6.

would be granted self rule. With this in mind, the British and French established a system of governance whereby, influential traditional authorities (who were friendly to them) were at the helm of governance, especially at the local level. This model of governance continued to thrive in post-independent reunified Cameroon. In the federated state of West Cameroon (former British Southern Cameroons), local governance was bestowed on the Native Authorities system that was initiated by the British Colonial Administration. A Native Authority (N.A) consisted of a chief and notables who identified and report the development needs of their communities to the central administration.³

The appellation Local Authorities was adopted to replace Native Authorities in the 1940s by the British colonial authorities. The introduction of the Local Authority Ordinance CAP 140 of the 1948 edition of the laws of the Federation of Nigeria was the most important piece of legislation associated with local government in British Southern Cameroons (B.S.C) until the reforms of 5th December, 1974 on local government were implemented.⁴ In order to address the question of development, it is relevant first of all to understand the operation of the Cameroon planning system in line with the decentralization reforms.⁵ In Cameroon, local authorities were and remain essential actors in the process of defining and articulating sustainable developmental initiatives at the community level. In doing so, they present a road map on how these development goals could be approached and achieved. Their projects of interest includes; the provision of basic utilities such as public lighting, refuse collection, water supply, construction and rehabilitation of municipal roads, installation of roads signs, town planning services, and building of markets among others. The thrust of this work is to evaluate the extent to which local government entities in Cameroon has achieved their objectives and how this has contributed to achievement of development and sustainable development.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

In scholarship, different scholars attach different meanings to specific terminologies to suit the context, scope and ambit of their studies. Thus, the conceptualization of terms becomes very relevant in a study like this to mitigate misconception and misinterpretation of terminologies. In this study, the main conceptual clarifications are concerned with; Government, local government, development and sustainable development.

³Victor Julius Ngoh, *History of Cameroon Since 1800* (Limbe: Presbook, 1996), 171.

⁴Victor Julius Ngoh, *History of Cameroon Since 1800* (Limbe: Presbook, 1996)

⁵Godwin Onu and Cornelius Lambi, (eds), *Readings in International Economic Relations: The Unfolding Dynamics* (Bamenda: NAB Ventures, 2011), 59.

Local Government

Local government has been defined as an administrative body for a small geographic area, such as a city, town, county, or state.⁶ A local government will typically only have control over their specific geographical region, and cannot pass or enforce laws that will affect a wider area. Local governments can elect officials, enact taxes, and do many other things that a national government would do, just on a smaller scale.⁷

Local government is a form of public administration which, in a majority of contexts, exists as the lowest tier of administration within a given state.⁸ The term is used to contrast with offices at state level, which are referred to as the central government, national government, or (where appropriate) federal government and also to supranational government which deals with governing institutions between states.⁹ Local governments generally act within powers delegated to them by legislation or directives of the higher level of government. In federal states, local government generally comprises the third (or sometimes fourth) tier of government, whereas in unitary states, local government usually occupies the second or third tier of government, often with greater powers than higher-level administrative divisions.¹⁰

The question of municipal autonomy has been of interest to scholars of history as well as the social sciences. The debate here is whether the local arms of government possess the powers and independence (granted to them by law) to initiate and execute sustainable development projects. The institutions of local government vary greatly between countries, and even where similar arrangements exist, the terminology often varies. Common names for local government entities include state, province, region, department, county, prefecture, district, city, township, town, borough, parish, municipality, shire, village, and local service district.¹¹

Development and Sustainable Development

⁶Institute for Development Studies (IDS), *Eastern Africa Rural Development Experience: Strategies in Local Government and Local Level Development*, (Nairobi: IDS Publications, 1987), 17.

⁷Law No. 2004/017 of 22nd July, 2004 on the Orientation of Decentralization.

⁸Olowu Dele et al, *Local Government in Africa: The challenges of Democratic Decentralization*, (Boulder Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 6.

⁹Ndenecho Emmanuel Neba, *Decentralization and Rural Development Planning in Cameroon*, (Bamenda: Unique Printers, 2011), 19.

¹⁰Ibid

¹¹United Nations Organization, *Classification of Administrative Units*, (New York: UN Publications, 2006), 36.

According to Claude Ake, development is the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choices and values.¹² It is conceived as a multi-dimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and the eradication of poverty.¹³ It must represent the whole gamut of change by which an entire social system, tuned to the diverse basic needs and desires of individual and groups within that system, moves away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory towards a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually better.¹⁴ According to Hoff Kride, development depends on being able to create a never-ending supply of new opportunities in the future.¹⁵ This logically leads us to the issue of and need for sustainable development.

The concept of sustainable development is highly contested because of its trans-disciplinary traits and applicability. Different fields of study take this advantage by defining and appraising sustainable development from a multi-variant dimension. Therefore, there may be different sets of criteria and indicators used to depict sustainable development. In spite of the theoretical interweaves that obfuscate the concept; there is a common denominator among scholars about sustainability. Generally speaking, the Brundtland defines sustainable development as “development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Sustainable development embodies a belief that people should be able to change and improve their lives in accordance with decisive factors which takes account of the needs of others and which protects the planet and future generations.

More specifically, sustainable development requires each generation to bequeath to its successor at least as large a productive base as it inherited from its predecessor.¹⁶ In other words, sustainable development is concerned with the quality of life, the range and distribution of resources and benefits, the interaction between environment and development, and provision for the future. In effect, it seeks to reconcile the socio-economic aspirations of society with the ability of the natural environment and its resources to accommodate those aspirations; to ensure that development is within the carrying capacity of the environment. This

¹²Ake Claude, *Democracy and Development in Africa* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2001), 4.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴Todaro, M. P & Smith, S.C, *Economic Development* (New Delhi: Pearson Education, 2004), 98.

¹⁵ Hoff Klide, “Paths of Institutional Development: A View from Economic History”, *The World Bank Research Observer*, Vol. 18, NO.2, 2003.

¹⁶Dasgupta P., and Maler K.G. “Net National Product, Wealth, and Social Well-Being”, *Environment and Development Economics*, 5, 2000. 69-93

need to strike an appropriate balance between development and conservation is at the heart of sustainable development.¹⁷ With regard to the foregoing, development in the context of this study shall constitute; new opportunities emanating from economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and the eradication of poverty.

Implementation of Sustainable Development Projects in Santa 1968-2020

In the Santa municipality of the North West Region of Cameroon, infrastructure provision was and is an essential part of the process of defining and articulating sustainable development considerations at the local level and identifying how they can be approached and achieved. This include local infrastructure such as water, construction of municipal road networks, road signs, drains, sewers, refuse collection and household disposal equipment, public lighting, development gardens, open spaces, markets, Council building housing services and so on. Between 1968 and 2020, tables 1 to 6 attempt to detail infrastructure provision in Santa by the council. Following are some of the key infrastructures.

a) Provision of Pipe Borne Water

The performance of the council in the provision of pipe borne water from 1968-2020 fluctuated as the system of governance evolved. From 1968 to 1972 when the federal constitution was still in place, the council faced difficulties in providing basic amenities like clean and uncontaminated water supply. The difficulties arose from the fact that the federated state of West Cameroon was economically nonviable to fund all its agencies. It relied heavily on subventions from the federal government, to generate the needed revenue to fund the provision of such basic utilities. The subventions were most often inadequate and councils were among the least government agencies that were considered for revenue allocation.

In addition, the Santa municipality was underdeveloped and very few activities that could fetch the council income through taxation. This explains why some Santa elites felt that the transition from the federal to the unitary state would bring better fortunes in regards to the performance of the Santa Council. However, during the duration of the unitary state the expected benefits that were projected to accrue to the council remained illusive as the economic crisis engendered budget trimming policies that affected the council negatively. In the phase of this economic hardship and the re-introduction of multi-party democracy, councils were looked as a body that the over-centralized government could use to create opportunities at the grassroots that would lessen the over-reliance on the

¹⁷“Local Authorities and Sustainable Development”, *Guidelines on Local Agenda*, 21, 1995.
<http://www.botanicgardens.ie/gspc/pdfs/agenda21.pdf>. Accessed on 14th March 2014.

government for jobs. This coupled with concerns some Anglophones were raising against the unitary state coerced the government to embark on a decentralization scheme that to some extent improved the revenue and performance of the Santa Council.

Decentralization brought a new lease of life in the activities and performance of the Santa Council. Though, the perennial challenge of inadequate finances never went away, the council's budget improved as more powers and responsibilities were gradually but steadily being devolved to them. As of 2020, all communities within the Santa municipality had access to portable drinking water. The council in a bid to minimize the problem of inadequate water supply in the municipality constructed a catchment at Lake Awing which supplied water to most of the villages in the Santa municipality.¹⁸

Table 1: Provision and Maintenance of Water Points in Santa Municipality

Community	Provision and Maintenance of Water Infrastructure				
	1968-1978	1978-1988	1988-1998	1998-2008	2008-2020
Awing	19	12	-	-	31
Akum	15	-	-	21	07
Mbei	08	08	11	-	-
Alatening	-	-	8	02	19
Mbu	-	-	-	10	14
Baligham	-	10	16	-	12
Pinyin	20	6	17	29	31
Njong	15	-	-		18
Baba II	-	-	3	-	6
Santa	20	20	25	26	33
Total	97	56	77	88	174

Source: Santa Council: Annual Development Reports

The statistics presented on table one shows that, since the creation of the Santa Council, it has been very active in the provision of pipe borne water in the municipality. Over its extended period of existence, the council oversaw the construction and maintenance of 484 taps and/or bore holes in spite of persistent financial woes. Prior to the creation (and even during the early years) of the council, the municipality faced permanent water shortages. The few springs and streams found in the area were far off and some of them dried up during the dry

¹⁸Interview with, Clement Wankie Atanga, 65 years old, former mayor of the Santa Council, Santa, 17th February, 2019

season. The performance of the council in resolving this issue was decisive in ameliorating the deplorable situation. Awing witnessed a revolution in its water supply with the construction of over 124 taps by the council between 1968 and 2020. The creation of these many taps in the area was mainly because of its large population size.¹⁹

b) Provision of Public Toilets

It may sound odd if one were to think that most household and even public spaces in Santa lacked proper toilet facilities. However, that was the case prior to and during the existence of the Santa Council. The council which has a mandate to provide social amenities to the populace did its best to see that the situation was ameliorated. First of all, the council began by setting up a sanitation department. Workers of this department moved all over the municipality inspecting the toilet facilities of each household. Those households that lacked adequate facilities were fined and co-opted to construct up to standard toilet facilities.²⁰ Secondly, the council began a campaign of constructing public toilets facilities within the municipality. The campaign was first begun in public spaces like schools, health centers, and markets. For purpose of convenience and also to ensure that the poor were not left out of the picture, the project was extended to the neighborhoods that were in need of such facility.²¹ The plate below shows toilets constructed by the Santa Council.

Plate 1: Public Toilets at the Santa Main Market, 2013



Source: Field Photograph Elvis Nchinda, June 2020

¹⁹Interview with, Jonathan Atangcho Fozo, 55 years old, 2nd Deputy Mayor of Santa Council, Baligham, 15th February, 2019

²⁰Interview with, Daniel Keitawah, 54 years old, Secretary General of Santa Council, 12th February, 2020

²¹Ibid

On the proceeding table, statics on the number of toilets that were constructed by the council between 1968 and 2020 have been presented.

Table 2: Provision of Public Toilets by Santa Council, 1968- 2020

Community	Number of Toilets Constructed				
	1968-1978	1978-1988	1988-1998	1998-2008	2008 -2020
Awing	4	-	1	-	3
Akum	2	3	4	-	2
Mbei	2	-	-	1	2
Alatening	-	-	-	2	2
Mbu	2	-	3	2	-
Baligham	5	-	2	1	-
Pinyin	4	2	-	1	-
Njong	2	-	1	-	3
Baba II	-	-	-	2	2
Santa	3	4	-	1	2
Total	24	9	10	10	16

Source: Santa Council: Annual Development Reports

Though figures on the number of toilets constructed cannot be considered as the sole variable when determining the social welfare and well being of the Santa populace, if one were to go by the statistics on the table, then the logical conclusion would be that the council did a remarkable job. Constructing 69 public toilets within a particular municipality isn't a mean job. This is an achievement even the government would have loved to have within its annals. The construction of these toilets proved that the council was bent on meeting the needs of the masses. Communities like; Pinyin, Awing, Baligham and Akum where the absence of adequate toilet facilities posed a major challenge, had some relief with the council's scheme that oversaw the construction of multiple public toilets in these areas.²² The construction of these toilets were a welcomed development. However, most of the indigenes were resentful of the fees (50 frs) that was paid before they were granted access to some of these toilets.²³

c) Construction and Maintenance of Classrooms

One of the many challenges that faced the education sector in Cameroon was and remains inadequate infrastructure. Most schools (especially in the rural areas)

²²Interview with, Simon Achidi Achu, 83 years old, Senator from Santa, Santa, 12th February, 2018

²³Interview with, Jean Tallah, 68 years old, Businessman, Santa, 14th February, 2019

don't have the adequate number of classrooms needed for them to operate smoothly. In the few cases where one or two permanent structures were put up, they were surrounded by old and depreciated structures. This made the government to cede its administration of basic education to councils –for the purpose of proper management.²⁴ Since this revolution took place, the Santa Council constructed a number of classrooms for primary and secondary schools within the municipality.

In addition, the council renovated old dilapidated structures to make them fit for learning purposes. This incentive was not limited only to learning structures. It was extended to other domains of learning like; recruiting efficient teachers, donation of school kits/didactic materials, and awarding of scholarships.²⁵

Thanks to the effort of the council, there is at least a public school in each of the main populated villages in the Santa Municipality. As of 2020, every child within the municipality had access to education. However, some parents could afford to educate their children only at the primary level, after which boys were sometimes sent to learn a trade while girls were more often than not given out for marriage.²⁶ The council was at the forefront to eradicate this practice. In a bid to encourage parents to educate their children beyond primary school level, the council lunched a scholarship scheme that was awarded to meritorious secondary school students as from 2002. Innocent Ngwaya attested that he completed secondary school thanks to the scholarship given him by the Santa Council. As of 2020, over 95 pupils and students of the municipality had benefited from the scholarship. Below are examples of schools constructed by the Santa Council.

Plate 2: Classrooms Constructed by the Santa Council at Government School (GS) Njong, 2010



²⁴Interview with, Simon Achidi Achu, 83 years old, Senator from Santa, Santa, 12th February, 2018

²⁵Ibid

²⁶Interview with, Joseph Tandahgo, 55 years old, farmer, Akum, 19th January, 2019

Source: Field Photograph: Elvis Nchinda, June 2020

Table 3: Provision of Classrooms by Santa Council, 1992-2020

Community	Number of Classrooms Constructed	
	1992-2008	2009-2020
Awing	6	8
Akum	3	6
Mbei	2	-
Alatening	6	2
Mbu	3	5
Baligham	8	4
Pinyin	8	5
Njong	3	5
Baba II	-	5
Santa	5	8
Total	44	48

Source: Santa Council: Annual Development Reports

The future of any community is guaranteed by the quality of education that is given to its youths. The efforts of the Santa Council in the domain of education cannot be overlooked. The figures presented on the table reveals that the council was very involved in educating the youths. Even though it was difficult to obtain data on the number of students who benefited from its scholarship scheme, one can conclude just from looking at the number of classrooms constructed that the beneficiaries would have been many. This goes a long way to justify the fact that the council did a remarkable job in promoting education among the youths of the municipality. In spite of these strides made by the council, the rate of school drop outs (for different reasons) as of 2020 was huge. It will be in the best interest of the council in particular and the Santa Municipality at large to see that these figures reduce in the coming decades.

d) Provision of Health Care Services

In this domain, the council provided health centers with the support of the central government in Pinyin, Awing, and Baligham villages. The council since its creation maintained and constantly rehabilitated the Santa District Hospital and the Santa Integrated Health Centre. The health post at Pinyin (one of the villages)

which was almost out of use was renovated so that the people do not travel long distances to seek for health services for minor ailments. A laboratory was also constructed at the Awing Health Centre in 2010. The council equally threw its full weight behind immunization campaigns against diseases like; measles, malaria, tuberculosis, yellow fever and polio. During these immunization campaigns the council worked in collaboration with chiefs. On the day of the vaccinations, the chiefs often passed an announcement which informed everyone to stay at home while waiting for the health workers. Occasional seminars were organized by the council in collaboration with the health officials to sensitize the masses on Human Immune Deficiency Virus, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) as well as family planning.²⁷

That notwithstanding, it is important to note that not all the villages in this municipality had health centers as of 2020. Those who lived in places like; Baba II, Njong and Mbei where there was the near absence of health facilities had to travel long distances to seek medical care. From another front, the population was more than the health facilities. This exerted pressure on the health facilities and the result was that the quality of services they rendered reduced drastically. Though, some few promising and relatively efficient private health centers like; the Presbyterian Health Centers (in Pinyin and Awing) and the Catholic Hospital in Akum operated in the area, the health providers were inadequate compared to the ever-growing population of the municipality. Below are examples of schools constructed by the council.

Plate 3: The Santa District Hospital after Renovation by the Council



Source: Field Photograph: Elvis Nchinda, June 2020

e) Improvement of the Sanitation of the Area

²⁷Interview with, Daniel Keitawah, 54 years old, SG of Santa Council, Santa, 12th February, 2020

From 1968 to 1996, the Santa council did not pay much attention to sanitation in the municipality. This was mainly because of the vast nature of the municipality and the availability of unoccupied land which permitted the population to easily empty their thrash. Increasingly, urbanization and rapid population growth led to the construction of new settlements in the towns and villages of this municipality. By the year 2000, the streets and other public places like markets were full of thrash. The Santa Council responded and initiated a reform which stated that all first Thursdays of the month were reserved for town cleaning. The exercise usually began from 8am and lasted until 12noon. To facilitate the process, the council bought a truck in the year 2000 and employed folks of Santa to carry thrash from all areas of the municipality to a designated place called *Sangi*. Another area was opened in Ntari in 2008 for the same purpose.²⁸This improved the hitherto precarious sanitation situation.

d) Promotion of Culture

According to J.P. Lederach, culture is the shared knowledge and schemes created by a set of people for perceiving, interpreting, expressing, and responding to the social realities around them.²⁹In this light local government entities like councils remain the best media through which the government can use to preserve the cultural identity of the country. To this effect, each village in the Santa Municipality has an annual cultural festival. These festivals mostly came up in August for villages like Njong, Akum and Mbei. While those of Pinyin, Awing, and Baba II were organized either in November or December. During this festive period, the council played a significant role.

The council in most cases supplied the chairs and tables for the ceremony, and equally promoted culture through the festivals by awarding prizes to talented dance groups, craftsmen, sporters, and musicians.³⁰ Amaboh Rolland and Longfor Valery were winners in the 2020 festival in the traditional music and craftsmanship respectively. The council provided 25 per cent of the finances required during the construction of the Awing Cultural Hall in 2010.³¹ The cultural leaders (Fons) are vital to the council because they identified projects in their locality pertaining to the need of the people and channel them to the council for scrutiny. In some

²⁸Ibid Interview with, Daniel Keitawah, 54 years old, SG of Santa Council, Santa, 12th February, 2020

²⁹J.P. Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 9.

³⁰Interview with, Michael Mbah Shupong, 52 years old, Director CDENO, North West Region, New Layout Santa, 15th January, 2020

³¹Ibid

instances, they use their influence to levy their subjects to pay for the accomplishment of such a project.

f) Provision and Maintenance of Roads

Land transport, being the only means of transport in the Santa Municipality, is highly influenced by nature. The road network that is grossly inadequate makes movement difficult. This is caused by the muddy nature of the untarred roads in the rainy season. In some cases there are only footpaths linking one village to another. However, the Santa Council has since its creation in 1968, constructed and rehabilitated numerous roads in the municipality. The plate below shows roads constructed by the council in the municipality.

Plate 4: Maintenance of Pinyin Road, 2020



Source: Field Photograph Elvis Nchinda, February 2020

Table 4 below presents statistics on the provision and maintenance of roads from 1990 to 2020 by the Santa Council.

Table 4: Construction and Rehabilitation of Roads by the Santa Council

Community	Number of Roads Constructed/Rehabilitated			
	1990-1998	1998-2006	2006-2013	2013-2020
Awing	2(14km)	2 (14km)	2 (14km)	3 (22km)
Akum	-	-	-	-
Mbei	1 (9km)	1 (9km)	2 (13km)	2 (13km)
Alatening	1 (7km)	1 (7km)	1 (7km)	1 (7km)
Mbu	-	2 (11.5km)	2 (11.5km)	1 (4.5km)
Baligham	1 (17km)	1 (17km)	1 (17km)	2 (23km)
Pinyin	2 (38km)	2 (38km)	2 (38km)	2 (38km)

Njong	-	1 (6km)	1 (6km)	1 (6km)
Baba II	1 (7km)	1 (7km)	1 (7km)	1 (7km)
anta	4 (11km)	4 (11km)	4 (15km)	6 (15km)
Total	11 (103km)	13 (120.5km)	16 (126.5km)	19 (135.5km)

Source: Santa Council: Annual Development Reports

Table 4 indicates that Santa village and Awing benefited the most in the provision and rehabilitation of roads by the Santa Council from 1990 to 2020. Of the 59 (485.5km) roads that were either constructed or rehabilitated during this period, 16 (52km) were in Santa and 9 (64km) in Awing. This maximum attention that Santa and Awing received in the domain of road infrastructure was as a result of the poor road network in these areas. Equally, the economic potentials of these areas (which were major food producers) made it necessary for the council to channel its attention towards the road infrastructure. In addition, it is important to note that since the creation of the Santa Council in 1968, 5 out of the 6 Mayors who headed the council either came from Awing or Pinyin.³² Thus, the concentration of council projects in these two communities should not be too surprising.

The table also reveals that the council has been at the fore front of developmental endeavours especially in the domain of road infrastructure. Over a twenty five years period, the council succeeded in either constructing or rehabilitating a total of 59 (485.5km) roads. Though this figure might be deceptive if one considers that most villages in the municipality lack maximum accessibility (especially during the rainy season), the efforts of the council towards improving the road network cannot be down played.

g) Construction of Market Stalls

The absence of industries where youths can seek employment in the Santa Municipality has made trade a very lucrative sector. The majority of those who inhabit the area engaged in one form of trade or the other. The major trade items are farm products, farming inputs and general domestic supplies. The Santa Council in a bid to promote this sector constructed and rehabilitated markets in different parts of the municipality.

Apart from constructing small markets in villages of the municipality like Baligham, Akum and Pinyin, the council equally devoted much attention towards the main market which is located in Santa town. The market was enlarged and the slaughter house refurbished. The construction of a new meat slap, and model stalls

³²Interview with, Frida Newah Tembung, 61 years old, trader, Santa, 15th January, 2019

were still in progress as of 2020.³³ This market held twice a week and attracted people from far and wide, who came to either, buy or sell. In spite of the efforts made by the council in constructing and rehabilitating markets in the municipality, it is important to note that only Santa, Akum and Awing had markets with permanent structures. Most of the markets in the other communities had just temporal structures and in some cases were open aired. This made it difficult for trade to occur conveniently. Each village had a specific day of the week which it market held. Of all the markets in the municipality, only the Santa town market held on a daily basis. (see plate 10 below)

Plate 5: Santa Council Market Stalls Akum Main Market



Source: Santa Council: Annual Development Reports

Table 5: Provision/Rehabilitation of Market Stalls by Santa Council, 1968-2020

Community	Provision/Rehabilitation of Market Stalls				
	1968 -1990	1990 -2000	2000 - 2008	2008 – 2014	2014- 2020
Awing	34	15	21	19	41
Akum	-	38	12	12	19
Mbei	-	-	-	45	10
Alatening	-	25	14	14	-
Mbu	-	12	25	-	-
Baligham	47	14	60	13	14
Pinyin	102	2	67	17	7

³³Interview with, Clement Wankie Atanga, 65 years old, former mayor of Santa Council, Santa, 17th February, 2017

Njong	45	-	60	85	10
Baba II	-	-	-	40	-
Santa	94	110	-	90	11
Total	322	216	259	335	112

Source: Santa Council: Annual Development Reports

From the table above, it is clear that the council constructed or rehabilitated a total of 1,244 stalls in the different markets within the municipality. The construction and rehabilitation of these markets was beneficial to both the council on the one hand and the masses on the other. At the level of the council, the markets were vital for the generation of revenue. Those who used the markets paid market tolls to council officials. Most of the constructed and rehabilitated stalls were equally rented to traders. To the masses on the other hand, the markets were important because it facilitated the purchase and sale of commodities without much stress. The presence of a market in most of the major villages meant that people did not need to travel long distances to sell their products.

However, like earlier mentioned, most of the markets had just temporal structures. Though, the council did its best to construct and rehabilitate some of the dilapidating structures, the general conditions of most of the markets in the municipality were below standard. In this light, there is need for a renewed interest in modernizing this sector, since the livelihood of many depends on it.

g) Provision of Employment

At inception, the corporate goal of most local government entities was to better the lives of the inhabitants of the areas where they operated. This was to be achieved either by providing direct employment to some of the folks in the area or by creating better conditions for private investors who could offer them jobs. Like the famous American president Thomas Jefferson noted “if you can’t make them see the light, make them feel the heat”. The Santa Council since its creation tried to fulfil this long-standing goal of incorporating as many people as possible into the system. The council provides two types of employment opportunities. These are short term and long-term job opportunities.

Long term job offers were given to those who worked for the council on a permanent basis, while temporal or short-term jobs were given to students on vacation to earn money that helped them to pursue their academic career. In addition, short term jobs were offered on contract basis to those willing to work on council projects.³⁴ Moreover, those who occupied political positions often lose

³⁴Interview with, Clement Wankie Atanga, 65 years old, former mayor of the Santa Council, Santa, 17th February, 2019

their jobs when their mandate ended (or in some cases when they were voted out of office). This implies that while the team of a new Mayor gets employed, those of his predecessor are relieved of their duties.

Challenges of Local Governments as Sustainable Development Partners in Cameroon

The intention of creating councils was to improve on the social, economic and cultural life of those they governed. To accomplish this, the government made available the needed resources to the councils. The councils in an effort to achieve these broad goals undertook a number of projects. In this section, the pitfalls of the local government as sustainable development agents are discussed. The section equally examines some of the challenges faced by local government in their endeavour to achieve sustainable development in Cameroon.

According to supporters, sympathisers and representatives of the Santa Council, the council recorded remarkable successes in relation to the resources available to it. Most of the achievements they highlighted were infrastructural. Some of these involved; construction and maintenance of Markets, construction and maintenance of public toilets, construction and maintenance of class rooms, construction and maintenance of health centres, maintenance of the Santa District Hospital, construction of culverts and bridges among others. The most notable development that took place according to Elvis Zeh was the provision of pipe-borne water to all the major villages of the municipality.³⁵This reduced the inconveniences of walking long distances to fetch water.

It is important to understand that party affiliations influenced the way individuals perceived the efforts of the council. To militants of the ruling party CPDM, the council accomplished its mission while those of opposition parties argue that the council should have done more. In this section of the study the pitfalls of the Santa Council as a sustainable development partner is examined. These pitfalls would be discussed from an economic, socio-cultural and political standpoint.

Critics argue that the efforts of the council were too mean compared to the reality on the ground. According to them, most of the roads which the council acclaimed much praise to have rehabilitated were impassable during the rainy season. The roads were muddy and at times, contracts to rehabilitate them were handed to unscrupulous individuals based on party allegiance. The contractors did little work and huge sums were drained from the municipal coffers to fund the projects.

³⁵Interview with, Elvis ZehNehe, 75 years old, Retired Engineer of the Santa Council, Njong, 15th June, 2021

Also, some of these roads were found only in the large villages where most of the council officials came from.³⁶ Most areas in the hinterland were inaccessible as a result of inadequate road network.

From another perspective, the market stalls (constructed and maintained by the council) were inadequate and most of the markets in the municipality were in a precarious situation. Apart from a few markets (like those of Akum and Santa) that had permanent structures, a majority of the other markets were open aired with temporal structures.³⁷

Even the farmers complained that the highbred seeds that were offered did not reach everybody. In most cases the seeds were shared during Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement (CPDM) rallies. As such those who belonged to other political parties (and did not attend such rallies) were not given the seeds.³⁸

In the domain of employment, the council was a key employer in the area. Individuals (both educated and uneducated) were employed by the council to carryout different task. People were employed to work as; cleaners, municipal police, market masters/mistresses, drivers, park officials among others.³⁹ However, it is important to note that these jobs were hardly permanent. As soon as elections were organized and there was a change in the regime, the incoming officials often laid off those employed by their predecessors.⁴⁰ The situation was even worse if the new regime comprised of officials from a rival political party. Thus, retirement benefits on the part of the employees were not guaranteed.⁴¹

According to the information gathered from the inhabitants of Santa, the council recorded some achievements in the social domain but these were below expectation. Resources intended for the social transformation of the municipality were mismanaged and stolen by some unscrupulous officials. These individuals were not sanctioned for their excesses. Furthermore, the municipality did not receive the kind of attention it deserved from the Santa Council. This was because the council officials were not answerable to the people, but rather to the state. For instance, if the representatives were not working according to the wishes of the people, it was very difficult for the people to confront them. The government that would have held them accountable for their excesses failed to do so. Partisan

³⁶Interview with, Michael MbahShupong, 52 years old, Director CDENO, North West Region, New Layout Santa, 15th June, 2021

³⁷Interview with, Michael MbahShupong, 52 years old, Director CDENO, North West Region, New Layout Santa, 15th January, 2017

³⁸Interview with, Jean Tallah, 68 years old, Farmer, Ntarrah, 25th June, 2029

³⁹Interview with, Clement Atanga Wankie, 65 years old, Former Mayor of the Santa Council, Santa, 25th June, 2019

⁴⁰Interview with, David Nchia, 71 years old, Former secretary to the D.O of Santa, Baba II, 26th June, 2019

⁴¹Ibid

politics influenced the council so much that, party interest was put ahead of the wishes of the people.⁴²In spite of numerous calls (by the people) on the council to add more public taps, construct more toilets, build more schools and health centres, the council remained silent and maintained that they had done more than enough.⁴³

With regards to the environment, the people frowned at the piles of garbage that was visible in most neighbourhoods in and around Santa. The Santa council placed trash cans in some neighbourhoods, but these cans were few and in most cases overfilled with rubbish. Those in charge of emptying the cans were inefficient and this compromised the sanitation situation of the municipality.⁴⁴

The municipality equally had a poor drainage system and the council did very little to improve it. Standing waters were common during the rainy season. Surface runoffs overflowed the shallow gutters and invaded the streets, impeding traffic. The drainage in some instances was blocked by rubbish. This led to overflow of the uncontrolled and polluted runoffs into homes.⁴⁵ This had an adverse effect on the environment and posed a health threat to the masses.

In the domain of education, the council's performance was below expectation. Several schools in the municipality were neglected and this created an unfavourable atmosphere for learning.⁴⁶The council's effort was not enough due to the large population of the area. Isolated rural settings with poor road networks hardly benefited from some of the educational projects that were initiated by the council.

Health wise, the council was at the forefront of modernising the health sector. However, access to the health facilities was difficult for some communities. This was because the health centres were few and far between. Given the poor road network of the area, those who lived far off from the main villages (where these health facilities were located) had difficulties accessing them.

The issue of devolution of power within the council was a myth rather than a reality. It was hoped that the council would do more to meet the aspirations of the local people. But partisan politics stalled all possibilities of the council to act as an institution with integrity and neutrality. Development projects were granted according to the party loyalties of the various communities. Those areas that

⁴²Interview with, David Nchia, 71 years old, Former secretary to the D.O of Santa, Baba II, 26th June, 2019

⁴³Ibid

⁴⁴Interview with, Godfred Mekongcho Nchinda, 84 years old, Quarter head, Ntarrah, 21st June, 2021

⁴⁵Ibid

⁴⁶Interview with, Daniel Keitawah, 54 years old, Secretary General of Santa Council, Santa New Layout, 25th June, 2020

sympathised with opposition parties hardly witnessed any meaningful developmental projects. With regards to empowering the local people (especially in decision making), one can conclude that the people were instead disempowered.⁴⁷ This is because their role in decision making and participation in project execution was insignificant. With the metamorphosis of governance and the much talk about decentralization, the people were contented with the status quo. The ruling party (CPDM) during campaigns often promised that the people would be engaged more in the management of their resources, but as of 2013, this remained only a campaign promise. Empowerment which is a catalyst for sustainable development was still far-fetched. Thus, most projects were identified and executed from the top rather than from the bottom. The result of this was incomplete projects, no priority to projects, and no genuine representation of the local masses in the Santa council.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The study investigates local governance and sustainable development through infrastructure provision in the Santa Municipality of the North West Region of Cameroon. In order to better understand this phenomenon, a historical overview of local government in Cameroon following the decentralization reforms are examined. The Constitution sets out the main objectives of the local government system: providing democratic and accountable government, ensuring the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner, promoting social and economic development, promoting a safe and healthy environment, and encouraging the involvement of communities and community organizations in local government. The Laws on local government highlighted the need for local government to focus on realizing developmental outcomes, such as the provision of household infrastructure and services; the creation of liveable, integrated cities, towns and rural areas; the promotion of local economic development; community empowerment and redistribution. The results of the study reveal that many municipalities were making progress despite major obstacles relating to finance, human resources and limited autonomy. There were positive stories in the local government sector, ranging from municipalities that performed generally well to those that managed to fulfill their responsibilities in specific areas such as basic service delivery, poverty alleviation and infrastructure development. However, assessing these achievements in relation to the population and the needs of the people, it can be concluded that the achievements and performance of the local government were inadequate and inefficient due to less autonomy and the absence

⁴⁷Interview with, Clement Atanga Wankie, 65 years old, Former Mayor of the Santa Council, Santa, 25th June, 2019

⁴⁸Ibid

of empowerment. There were other related minor factors which contributed to the problem in Santa such as mismanagement, corruption, multiparty rivalry, tribalism, and nepotism. The major problem identified from the data was the persistent state grip on councils. A lack of clarity about the powers and functions of local government impeded progress in service delivery across a range of municipalities. In many cases, it has led to municipalities being saddled with a burden of “unfunded mandates” in areas such as housing, market stalls, education, libraries, roads, water treatment, sanitation and other infrastructure

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