

## **Appraisal of the participatory and decentralized approach to rural community development in Cameroon**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the core concepts and principles that underpin the participatory and decentralized approach to rural development using the Grassfield Participatory and Decentralized Rural Development Project (GP-DERUDEP) in Cameroon as a case study. It describes how the local development fund (LDF) was used within GP-DERUDEP to shift resources and responsibilities for investment planning, contracting and implementation at the level of rural communities thus strengthening service provision, community and economic development. The paper posits that a critical appraisal of the mechanisms and structures of decentralization within the context of poverty alleviation strategies can provide clues in facing the challenges encountered in implementing projects in resource poor economies. The paper illustrates a framework that links social capital and community development to economic development outcomes. Data were obtained through project evaluations, field observations and focus group discussions with project stakeholders. The project provides an innovative approach to engage the state and local stakeholders in collective strategic decision-making in rural development. Project achievements are visible in socio-economic infrastructure and social capital but challenges persist in implementing decentralization policies due to entrenched top-down values and dependence on foreign donors to fund and sustain rural development programme in Cameroon.

**Keywords:** community development, decentralization, participation, grassfield project, local development fund.

### **Resumé**

Prenant pour étude de cas le projet dit "Grassfield Participatory and Decentralized Rural Development Project (GP-DERUDEP)" (projet de développement rural, participatif et décentralisé dans la région du Nord-Ouest du Cameroun), le présent article examine les concepts et principes fondamentaux de l'approche participative et décentralisée du développement rural. Il décrit comment le fonds de développement rural a été utilisé dans le cadre du GP-DERUDEP pour engager les ressources et responsabilités en faveur du plan d'investissement, de la contractualisation et la mise en oeuvre au niveau des communautés rurales, renforçant ainsi l'offre des services et le développement communautaire et économique des communautés rurales. L'étude suggère qu'une évaluation critique des mécanismes et structures de décentralisation dans le contexte des stratégies de réduction de la pauvreté peut servir d'indices pour relever les défis vis-à-vis de la mise en oeuvre des projets dans les pays pauvres. A travers son modèle, l'étude montre le lien entre le capital social, développement communautaire et les résultats du développement économique. Les données ont été obtenues à travers les évaluations des projets, les observations sur le terrain ainsi que les entretiens avec les groupes cibles et les acteurs du projet. Le projet propose une approche innovatrice pour impliquer l'Etat et les acteurs locaux dans la prise de décisions stratégiques collectives en matière de développement rural. Les résultats montrent que les succès sont visibles au niveau des infrastructures socio-économiques et du capital social, mais que les défis persistent dans la mise en oeuvre des politiques de décentralisation à cause des valeurs directives enracinées et la dépendance envers les bailleurs de fonds étrangers pour financer et soutenir les projets de développement rural au Cameroun.

**Mot-clés:** développement communautaire, décentralisation, participation, grassfield project, fonds de développement rural.

## Introduction

Poverty, a social and economic stigma that affects individuals and human groups, big and small remains a formidable challenge in rural development in Cameroon and other countries. “When individuals lack the basic necessities to lead a happy life or when whole groups of people within a social stratum neither have adequate incomes nor enjoy social amenities that make life fulfilling, they are poor” (Nji, 2004). A household is considered poor when a pre-determined and well-defined level of welfare such as the poverty line or threshold is not attained in a given situation or country (Amin, 2008; White, 1998).

Attacks on poverty have included a variety of innovative programmes by governments and international development agencies. In recent years, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank introduced Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) in African countries (World Bank, 1994). But some critics have argued that SAP has increased rural poverty in many cases, provoking a new emphasis on decentralization and participatory development to reduce poverty (Amin, 2008; ADB, 2002; Baye & Fambon, 2001).

Decentralization and participatory development means the transfer of the responsibility for planning, decision-making, or administrative authority from central government to its field organizations (Odeleye-Lagbedu, 1997; Rondinelli *et al.*, 1984). Four major forms of decentralization have been identified based primarily on the extent to which the authority to plan, to decide and manage projects is transferred from the central government to organizations in the periphery, and the amount of autonomy the ‘decentralized organizations’ achieve in carrying out their tasks (Rondinelli *et al.*, 1984). These are: *i) deconcentration of institutions, ii) delegation to semi-autonomous or parastatal agencies, iii) transfer of*

*functions from public to non-governmental institutions and, iv) devolution of powers.* There are equally four dimensions of decentralization: 1) Political decentralization: which covers three broad aspects: a) the organization of free and fair elections, b) accountability of the executive to the public, and c) the empowerment of local governments. 2) Economic decentralization: has to do with support to the private sector and reduction of state dominance with a view to promoting and sustaining competition in the economy. 3) Administrative decentralization: focuses on capacity building and strengthening of local level administration and management. Financial decentralization: focuses on giving power to local governments to raise and use taxes as well as to transfer resources from the centre to autonomous agencies. The ultimate goal of such a strategy is to enable local governments share the privilege of running financial institutions with the central governments. Thus, decentralization as an anti-poverty strategy seeks to shift away the traditional, centrally-managed, supply-driven and expert-controlled emphasis towards more demand-driven, beneficiary-focused participatory approaches that put local stakeholders *cum* beneficiaries *par excellence*, at the core of the development process (Richards & Dalbey, 2006; Heck, 2003; Parker, 1995; Nji, 1981).

One reason decentralization has attracted so much attention is that it is a cross-cutting process and concept that relates to such important development concerns as micro economic stability, poverty alleviation, investment in infrastructure and the provision of social services (Lindemann, 2005).

## The Cameroon Experience with Decentralization and Participatory Development

The persistent economic crisis in Cameroon since the mid 1980s (Amin, 2008; ADB, 2002), led to

the promotion of poverty reduction programmes such as the National Participatory Development Programme (NPDP) which aims at: i) assigning responsibility for development to the rural communities and local stakeholders; ii) improving access to basic services, food security and the incomes of local communities; and iii) improving local governance.

This paper presents a case study of the Grassfield Participatory and Decentralized Rural Development Project (GP-DERUDEP) implemented as an anti-poverty programme in Cameroon between 2004 and 2010 within the context of Cameroon's Poverty Reduction Strategy. Created as one of the mechanisms to implement the policy of decentralization in the rural areas of the North West Region of Cameroon, GP-DERUDEP had as objectives: "to increase the incomes of small-scale farmers in the North West Region through increased agricultural output by the sixth year, promote food security, and improve the socio-economic environment of the rural population" (MINADER, 2009; Ministry of Planning and Regional Development, 2006; North West Development Authority, 2006). The expected outcomes of the project were grouped into three components including: agricultural development; capacity building; and rural infrastructure. A loan agreement of CFAF 15,726 million was ratified in 2004 between the Cameroon Government and the African Development Bank, which provided 85% of the funds while the Government contributed 10%, and the local communities, 5% (ADB, 2008; 2002). Designed initially as a response to the economic crisis of 1987, GP-DERUDEP emphasized funneling funds to communities quickly through a decentralized funding mechanism, the Local Development Fund (LDF). Through this strategy, the government defined the channels through which resources will be employed to improve living

conditions, using the Millennium Development Goals as a yard stick.

### **The Local Development Fund**

The Local Development Fund (LDF) was an innovative mechanism designed to facilitate access to financial assistance by rural communities for project funding "to improve the rural living conditions and the management capacity of the North West Region (GP-DERUDEP, 2007). The fund was utilized for the construction of social infrastructure such as water supplies, health facilities, classrooms, farm buildings and other inputs using an approach that ensures good governance and sustainability. Rural community development in the North-West Region takes place at two levels: the Village and the Council or Municipality. At the village level, development activities are carried out through Village Development Associations (VDA) or Area Development Associations (ADA), which are Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) established for promoting community development. In cases where a number of villages are organized into a development agency, the development tasks of the communities are performed by an Area Development Association. Generally, VDAs and ADAs are registered organizations under Law No. 90/053 of 19 December 1990 on Civil Liberties and Freedom of Association (Presidency of the Republic, 2008; 2000; 1990).

The LDF was managed at three levels: the Village Community, the Council, and the Divisional levels (GP-DERUDEP, 2007). Funds from the ADB were paid into the account of the Autonomous Sinking Fund (ASF) in Yaoundé, which is the first entry point of LDF funding into the national banking system. The ASF made disbursements to LDF Divisional Management Committee accounts in approved financial institutions of each Division, and also Village Development Bank

Accounts opened at approved financial institutions by elected representatives of VDAs or ADAs for depositing development funds contributed by the population. At the Divisional level, all funds from the Autonomous Sinking Fund are put into the bank account of the LDF Divisional Management Committee. The signatories to the account are the elected chairpersons of the LDF Divisional Management Committees and the Coordinator of GP-DERUDEP. Sub-accounts are operated within the LDF Management Account at the Divisional level for each Municipality with responsibility to open appropriate management and accounting records for each LDF beneficiary community under their jurisdiction. Such records constitute internal book-keeping accounts managed by the accountant in each Municipality and the book-keeper in beneficiary communities. The LDF Divisional Management Committee makes payments to contractors and communities directly with funds disbursed by the ASF (Akoa, 2008; GP-DERUDEP, 2007).

Copies of the bank transfers to the LDF Divisional Management Committees were sent to GP-DERUDEP's management for monitoring of the over-all LDF process. The release of all project funds was done subject to prior authorization by the appropriate project officials. After carrying out needs assessments and relevant studies for LDF approved projects in each Division, an annual budget for the projects was established and approved by the LDF Divisional Management Committees. Disbursements were then made by these committees to the Municipalities as needed and in accordance with the procedures outlined in the LDF Manual of Procedures. Various infrastructure projects were carried out on contract basis with the participation of the beneficiaries estimated at 30% of the total cost (GP-DERUDEP, 2007). The implementation of these infrastructures was accompanied by

awareness-raising campaigns and capacity building to facilitate proper management and maintenance by the beneficiary communities.

The failure to sustainably reduce poverty caused some scientists (Lipton, 1977; Lele, 1975) to argue for a shift in the development paradigm. They also concluded that the failure of most rural development projects was linked to lack of, or poor participation of beneficiaries in the development projects. "Participation", is that "descriptive term denoting the involvement of a significant number of persons in situations or actions which enhance their well-being" (Uphoff *et al.*, 1977). Uphoff *et al.* (1977) states that there are four dimensions to participation: 1) what kind of participation? 2) who is participating? and 3) how participation takes place; and 4) the context of participation. Succinctly put, a development policy that hones participation is "aimed at improving the well-being and self-realization of people, since the ultimate target of rural development is people, ... not infrastructure, ... not factories, ... not better education or housing or even better communities" (Nji (2004; Amungwa, 2014; Shepherd, 1998; Odeleye-Lagbedu, 1997).

Thus, veritable participation takes four forms: participation in: a) decision-making; b) implementation; c) benefits, and d) evaluation (Uphoff *et al.*, 1977). Those expected to participate are the poor or those for whom the project was designed (Littrell & Littrell, 2006; Nji, 2004; 1981). The structures put in place to facilitate participation of beneficiaries, the mechanisms to encourage involvement, ownership and sustainability as well as the governance of the activities addresses the issues relating to how participation really took place in GP-DERUDEP.

**GP-DERUDEP as a local development model of change**

Theories of development generally emphasize the processes of change and others emphasize the outcomes or impact of change (Hunter, 1969; Appleton, 1970). As a process, the change that leads to community development involves “increasing the ability of people to act collectively”; and as an outcome, it involves “taking collective action for improvement in the physical, environmental, cultural, political, economic... realms in a community” (Pittman & Pittman, 2009). Other development scientists argue that change must come from within the society itself building on its value system, culture, institutions and leadership pattern (Nji, 1981; Hunter, 1969).

The project’s expected outcomes included achieving long-term capacity-building and collaborative efforts to strengthen civil society by prioritizing the development actions of beneficiary communities (IACD, 2005; Taylor, 2005). The building of skills was considered an important factor that facilitates community development in creating or increasing the stock of social capital (Pittman *et al.*, 2009). Capacity building produces social capital which in turn

produces the outcome of community development (Pittman & Pittman, 2009). Social capital relates to the formal and informal social relationships or resources from which various opportunities and benefits can be drawn by people in their livelihood pursuits (Kay, 2005). Social capital is developed through investment interactions that increase people’s ability to work together; membership in groups in which relationships are governed by accepted rules and norms; trust and co-operation, as well as transaction costs that help in the development of informal safety nets amongst the poor. The critical benefits of social capital are access to information, influence and support from other people (Pittman *et al.*, 2009). It contributes to economic development, “the process of creating wealth through the mobilization of human, financial and natural resources to generate marketable goods and services”. This leads to the production of assets for improving the quality of life and business climate, by creating a “development ready” community that attracts and retains businesses and facilitates successful economic development (Pittman *et al.*, 2009) through job creation, income generation and rural development (Nji, 1981). This leads to improved standards of living as depicted in figure 1.

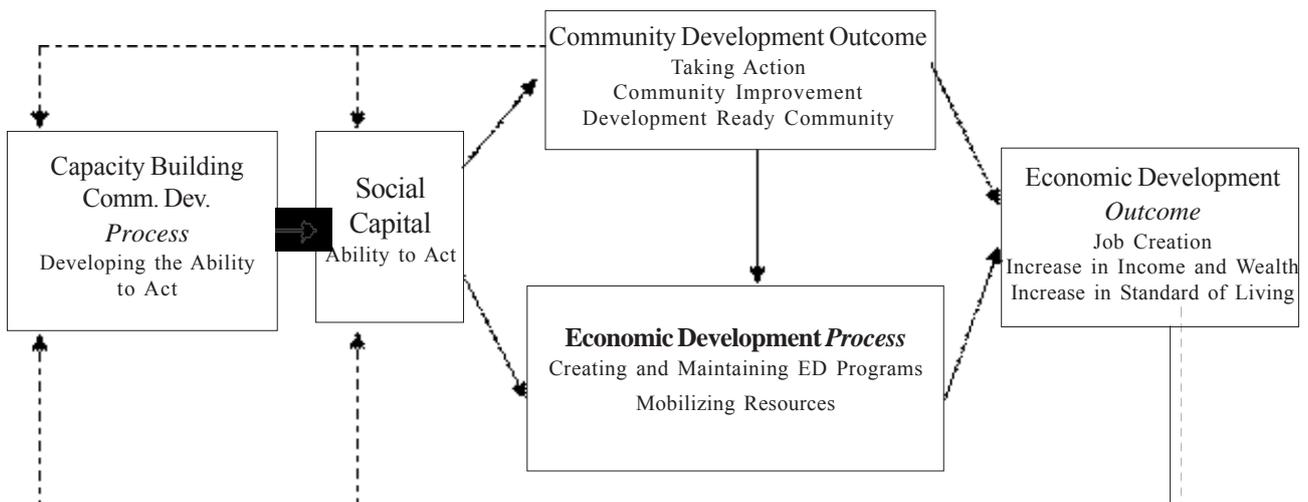


Figure 1. Community and economic development chain. (Source: Philips & Pittman, 2009)

Community development and economic development are inextricably linked. As indicated in the bottom box of the figure, communities with social capital or capacity (the ability to act) are inherently more capable of creating good economic development processes. This occurs when people in a community analyze their economic conditions, determine their economic needs and unfulfilled opportunities, decide what can be done to improve their economic conditions and move to achieve agreed-upon economic goals and objectives (Shaffer *et al.*, 2006). When communities take action to achieve a development outcome, they can create and maintain effective economic development programmes that mobilize the community's resources and lead to positive economic development outcomes. These outcomes also improve the physical and social nature of communities, making them become more "development ready". The feedback loop of the chain shows the cumulative and reiterative nature of the model. Success in the outcomes of community and economic development creates more resources the community can use to strengthen its capacity building process and social capital. Factors such as a skilled labour force, good education system, quality of life, local infrastructure, and attitudes towards development can contribute to make a community "development ready". The scientists and policy makers involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of GP-DERUDEP strategy attempted in their own way to answer Dudley Seers' triangular inquiry about a country's (Cameroon's) development: "What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality?" (Todaro, 1989).

The objectives of this paper were: to describe the mechanism put in place to facilitate decentralized funding within the Grassfield

Participatory and Decentralized Rural Development Project, assess the impact of the project on agricultural output and income generation, and the lessons learned as well as the challenges and opportunities for rural development.

#### METHODOLOGY

The data used in this case study were collected from the 140 villages that were involved in phase I of GP-DERUDEP out of the 560 potentially eligible village communities in the North West Region. Case studies give greater depth to assess the extent to which project goals and objectives were met (Herman *et al.*, 1987). The villages represent all the seven administrative divisions of the Region, 34 Municipalities encompassing a total population of 1.73 million inhabitants at the time of project execution (2004-2010). The research strategy sought to generate contextual information on participation and decentralization processes as well as project outcomes in the selected rural communities. As a first step, seven focus group discussions were conducted in the seven administrative Divisions of the Region with the aim to assess the communities' level of participation and inclusion as well as the level of consensus around shared project goals. Based on the participants' knowledge of project outcomes, forty-two key informants, that is, six from each Division, were sampled purposively from the seven Divisions for semi-structured interviews. Field notes were kept from March 2009 to January 2010 on the main issues raised in discussions and observations of on-going project activities.

Field visits were conducted to the 140 communities that participated in the implementation of GP-DERUDEP see completed projects such as classrooms, feeder roads, pipe-borne water schemes, cattle vaccination points, and community halls and to collect data on the people's participation and

perception of how the project impacted their communities. Eight meetings including one, at the regional headquarters attended by thirty four participants drawn from each of the thirty four Municipalities of the Region and five participants from the project coordination unit as well as seven at the Divisional headquarters of the seven Divisions attended by a total of fifty-four project stakeholders were organized to assess the relevance, level of appropriateness and implementation of the activities and to have a good picture of the development issues involved. The methodology relied also on project monitoring and evaluation reports and related documents to assess the level of change in the targeted project components.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### *Agricultural output and income generation*

The activities envisaged under the project entailed: (i) an increase in the incomes of the farmers supervised (annual additional agricultural income per person ranging between CFAF 91,000 and CFAF 180,650); (ii) creation of 29,300 permanent and temporary jobs; (iii) creation of a self-promotion capacity for rural development operations by the beneficiaries; (iv) increased empowerment of farmers and development of human resources in general leading to a better organization of the rural world; and (v) promotion of small operators (day workers, artisans, farm workers, micro-enterprises and NGOs), following the experience acquired through the participation of associations in the implementation of community works. The increased incomes came as a relief for food crop farmers and large agricultural families who are also the poorest in the project area. The small farmers henceforth were able to bear some expenses relating to food, health and education. This resulted in an improved socio-economic situation and a reduction in the incidence of poverty. Women organized into agricultural

common initiative groups and cooperative associations benefited from the LDF and village funds to finance their activities.

The availability of water supply systems, as a result of the project, will contribute to alleviating the daily chores, which will allow the women in particular to give greater attention to income-generating activities, such as vegetable gardening, seed production, processing and marketing of farm produce including backyard livestock rearing. Some of the farmers indicated they would pursue programmes in functional literacy and farm management if their income generating activities for rice, maize, yam, cassava, plantain, groundnuts, potatoes, beans and chickens, and small livestock (pigs, rabbits, and goats) became more successful. Increased agricultural production contributes to increase the level of coverage of the needs of the communities in the Grassfield area in basic foodstuffs and to raise the level of their income.

GP-DERUDEP addressed issues related to improvement of crop yields through expansion of arable areas, intensification, improvement of animal health and the marketing of agricultural produce, through improved access to input and output markets, income generation, and strengthening of the institutional capacity of beneficiary communities and networking for improved service delivery. In this light the project procured and distributed 13 tons of improved maize, 88.5 tons of potato, 2 tons of beans, 16,000 tons of cassava cuttings, and 46 tons of rice as well as 265,000 day-old chicks, 543 piglets as support to farmers (MINADER, 2010). Production surpluses were sold on the local markets or exported to other regions or neighbouring countries (Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Chad and Nigeria). At the start of the project the average financial prices for the various crops in the North-West region were: CFAF 180/kg for maize, CFAF 84/kg for rice, CFAF 250/kg for groundnuts, CFAF 72/kg for potatoes, CFAF

128/kg for cassava, CFAF 150/kg for yam, CFAF 76/kg for plantain, CFAF 279/kg for beans and CFAF 60/kg for sweet potatoes (ADB, 2002). In view of the prevailing unmet high demand, partly due to the poor state of the road network in the region, the increase in production did not have much negative impact on prices because of the rehabilitation of feeder roads which facilitated access to markets. In effect, 32% of the projected length of 247 km of feeder roads were rehabilitated, 53% of the projected water supply schemes and health centres were constructed as well as 67% of classrooms, leading to an increase in school enrolment as a result of the added space. The local communities contributed 30% of the costs of infrastructure in the form of labour, building materials or cash (MINADER, 2010).

The impacts of the project on the environment resulting from rural infrastructure works and those for agricultural production were minimal as a result of the application appropriate mitigating measures. The rehabilitation of clean water supply systems contributed to curb the incidence of water-borne diseases as well as the strenuous chores of water fetching by women and children. Most of the potentially negative impacts were limited to the period of implementation of the project. These included: (i) risks of erosion related to site works; (ii) development of parasites in intensified crops; and (iii) accumulation of non-biodegradable packaging products. The project took a set mitigating measures including: (i) integration of environment-friendly technical specifications in the terms of reference of the works bids; (ii) agricultural extension service provision in relation with NGOs and the National Agricultural Extension Programme; (iii) health education related to the management of water points and environmental hygiene; and (iv) respect for the environment as criterion for the approval of funds for micro-projects.

GP-DERUDEP had an impact on decentralization policy, first, in the promotion of community involvement in decision-making and cost-sharing in the management of development affairs. Second, previously neglected rural areas like the Municipalities of Nkambe in Donga Mantung Division, Njikwa, in Momo Division, and Nkum in Bui Division, among others, had access to Local Development Funds, even if this may not have satisfied their long term development needs. Third, decentralization provided a training ground for political leaders at the local level. Nevertheless, some critics contend that Cameroon's decentralization programme is not achieving its set objectives because, citizen participation in decision-making, transparency in programme implementation, accountability and the involvement of the local people is still a myth. A centralized government by and large continues to influence development at the grassroots. (Banlilon et al., 2012).

With regard to capacity building, GP-DERUDEP organized the training of 35 Community Development Agents of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 320 municipal councilors of the North West Region, and 20 adult literacy trainers. Enhancement of the skills of farmer organizations contributed in raising awareness on the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS and endemic diseases. Rural community radio stations established within the context of the project promoted agricultural extension through broadcasting in local languages (MINADER, 2009).

The project's vision was that of enabling the rural communities to take on more responsibility for managing their own development, including project design, implementation and maintenance. This required a culture of administration that considers rural communities as development partners, rather than passive recipients of the

benefits of public financing. Local groups and organizations were empowered through training to participate in decision making and resource allocation, project identification, implementation, monitoring and evaluation with respect to their priorities. Although Village Development Committees were established within the participatory process to oversee matters related to project design, fund-raising, implementation, maintenance and follow-up, the resources for accompanying these measures were grossly inadequate. Consequently, some of the community needs assessed and formalized into village development and communal plans to guide the choice of projects for funding were not met because, some of the plans were never implemented (MINADER, 2010). Tracking capacity building outcomes from project interventions required enormous time.

*Lessons Learned, Challenges and Opportunities for Rural Development in Cameroon*

*Lessons Learned*

Although the local populations were initially unfamiliar with the procedures of engaging project funds, constant sensitization about the management of the innovative LDF increases participation, ownership and enhances capacity building at the local level. There were also difficulties in tracking all project outcomes due to the low level of literacy and record keeping at the grassroots. Often emphasis was placed on quantifiable data with less attention to the intangible outcomes, which often constitute the core of obstacles in the community development process. Intangible outcomes included improved interaction on project matters, development and use of social capital, evolution in the decision-making process and community leadership. Project plans had not paid sufficient attention to inflation, which could not be entirely predicted from the onset. The cost estimate of the GP-DERUDEP

at CFAF 15,726 million was made in 2002 while the project effectively started after two years when prices of construction materials had increased.

The participatory and decentralized approach fails to take into account what Cleaver (2001) describes as “the recursive relationship between structure and agency”. Consequently, it tends to lay more emphasis on the organization of collective action, treating participation as a technical method of project work while ignoring the complexities of power as embedded in social and cultural practices. The success or failure of participatory and decentralized development interventions depend as much on the conditions surrounding the particular intervention as on the quality of the work done at the local level. These include: economic growth, a favourable political and administrative environment, good governance, and the presence of ideologies that favour participation, self-reliance and collective action (ESCAP, 2009).

*Challenges and Opportunities*

Some of the challenges that make participation unlikely to attain full success in rural development projects include: a lack of income and productive assets; a lack of access to essential economic and social services; a lack of power, and the role of the state (ESCAP, 2009; 2007). Such factors reinforce each other, keeping the poor trapped in poverty (Nji, 2004). A lack of awareness of this multi-dimensionality of rural poverty or a reluctance to confront it, may explain much of the failure of past rural development strategies in reducing rural poverty. GP-DERUDEP did not seem to have gone far enough to remove the constraints of everyday life despite the efforts made to increase agricultural output, supply clean water and build schools, health centres and feeder roads in the rural communities. The participatory process within rural communities needs to go beyond the rhetoric of poverty alleviation, and

target the empowerment of people to become less dependent on relations of patronage for daily subsistence.

Another challenge of the participatory and decentralized approach concerns contextual factors and the role of the state. Efforts were made by GP-DERUDEP to empower rural people to identify, plan, implement, and evaluate the development projects in consonance with their needs and development goals. Nevertheless, the state of poverty in the rural communities is unlikely to be resolved without deliberate and proactive government policies, backed by appropriate and timely resource allocation (Nji, 1992). For this to occur, the state must work with the rural communities on a partnership basis, creating the conditions for their participation and supporting them with resource transfers, capacity building and working to promote social justice and reduce inequality (Nji, 1983). Participatory development projects should emphasize the importance of extension services, hone the needs of the rural poor, particularly the role women play in Africa's food production system (Fon & Nji, 2008; Heck, 2003; Nji & Nji, 1985).

#### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

GP-DERUDEP helped to step up food crop production and enhance the management capacity of the village communities, agricultural professional organizations (APOs) and producers. This resulted to an increase in agricultural output: 3,953 t for rice; 67,649 t for maize; 90,285 t for yam; 55,032 t for cassava, 16,279 t for plantain; 6,853 t for groundnuts; 65,162 t for potato; 36,223 t for beans and 8,996 t for sweet potato. The implementation of the project also facilitated the creation of permanent and temporary jobs, equivalent to an annual wage bill of CFAF 5.1 billion, contributing to curb the out-migration of youths from rural areas (GP-DERUDEP, 2010).

Community development outcomes are key enabling factors on economic development. Despite these tangible achievements, the full import of the participatory and decentralized approach to development has yet to be realized because the process aspects of development take more time to bear fruit. Challenges remain in implementing decentralization policies; and there are persistent economic constraints and dependence on external sources of funding rural development activities. These challenges and the long-term neglect in improving rural living conditions must be overcome to improve the chances for success of participatory and decentralized development programmes. Decisions throughout the project management cycle should be made jointly by all stakeholders and the government must continue to play its traditional role of providing an enabling environment for rural development initiatives.

GP-DERUDEP provided unique space to evaluate theoretical postulates on development within and African context. Participation, a key concept and focus in the project design, might not have achieved the desired results, largely because of the way decentralization is being implemented in Cameroon. Uphoff et al., (1979) posit that several factors impede the scientific implementation of decentralization, and this was found to be true in the Cameroon context. First, politicians misuse the fear that allowing the majority greater voice in allocating resources will overwhelm the government with excessive and unmanageable demands. Second, opponents of decentralization label the process with increased corruption and limited accountability; Third, institutional inertia and factionalism can greatly paralyze decentralization efforts; Fourth, the apathy of many people towards participation can be increased by political rivalry and less than genuine democracy; Fifth, government officials involved in the decentralization process may not

equally share the concept of time and timing in project operations. Sixth, the fear of elite capture of the project benefits; Seventh, mismanagement of project funds due to institutional and personal inefficiencies; and Eighth, the struggle by government to establish equality without enough precautions taken against reinforcing disparities between group and communities.

While decentralization remains a good strategy to reduce poverty, this analysis and experience with the implementation of GP-DERUDEP suggests that the above eight caveats should be taken into consideration by policy makers and development scientists in the African context.

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