VALORISATION OF NGOS' EXISTENCE IN CAMEROON: OPTION FOR A MORE ENGAGED CIVIL SOCIETY (VNEC-OECS)

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ABSTRACT: *Non-governmental organizations (NGO) have become quite prominent in the field of international development in recent decades. Even though, NGO have taken the centre stage in the fight against poverty, social injustice and human rights most are considered weak due to their dependence on funding from government and international aid bodies. This research activity highlights the probable values and weaknesses plaguing the civil society in Cameroon. Due to the pressures of obtaining and maintaining funding, less effort is placed on management leading to a lack of accountability and inefficiency in services offered to the public. The absence of a common platform for NGO makes coordination of their activities unrealistic. In our discussion we intend to propose ways by which NGOs can synergize their action plans. The paper will end by highlighting the distance NGOs have covered as development actors in Cameroon with recommendations deduced to valorise NGOs existence in Cameroon.*

KEYWORDS: Non-Governmental Organizations, Accountability, Development, Valorisation, Cameroon

INTRODUCTION

Before the word "NGOs" became solidified through UN charter and subsequent practice different authors had used other expressions. For example, they were referred to as private organizations by White (1933). Meynaud (1961) also talked of international pressure groups and the League of Nations talked of voluntary agencies or groups (Ziegler, 1998)**.** Salamon (1994) referred to the origins of NGO as a global associational revolution, where people were forming associations to care for: welfare needs, promote grass-root development, promote civil rights, and/or environmental degradation amongst others. In synopsis, caring for issues which before were either not attended to, or left in the hands of the state. He referred to the rise of this third sector as a revolution which could be seen all over the world and which will change the relationship between the people and the state in many aspects not just in a material sense. In addition (Anheier and Salamon, 1999) used the term 'third sector organisations' in which they talked of organisations whose activities were diverse and ranged from political pressure groups, welfare groups to hobby and leisure clubs.

These organizations dealt with economic and socio-political issues in the society influencing public policy and playing an important role alongside the state. These organisations are between the market and the state they are neither government agencies nor profit seeking. Anheier, (1990) also suggested that organisations which are between the government and profit making organisations, called 'intermediary organisations' should be considered as third sector organisations. While Anheier and Seibel, (1990), Gidron et al., (1992), and Salamon and Anheier, (1996) use the term third world organisation synonymously with non-governmental organisation, Uphoff, (1996) insist that there is different between NGOs and third world organisations. He says NGOs operate like the private sector in that they provide services and their clients are in no position to influence the administration of the organisation unlike third world organisations which is a people's organisation and the members have a stake and can influence its administration and activities. There is therefore a lot of ambiguity in the conceptualisation of NGOs.

The non-governmental organisation is a term which was coined after the Second World War by the United Nations (UN) for certain international citizen organisations that were independent of the United Nations members governments, and whose function was to observe and participate in United Nations affairs concerned with; development, human rights, the environment and peace (Lewis, 2007). The term "non-governmental organization" (NGO) was adopted in 1945 in the United Nations Charter, Article 71 which state thus:

'The Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence. Such arrangements may be made with international organizations and, where appropriate, with national organizations after consultation with the Member of the United Nations concerned'.

Martens (2002), accepts that the Article 71 of the United Nations charter definition of NGO is a guide but says the definition is too narrow. The author proposes a new definition of NGO's as 'formal (professionalized) independent societal organizations whose primary aim is to promote common goals at the national or the international level'. NGO's got a new status and profile as they were accredited to the UN for consulting purposes. Thus, the first scholars and researchers applied the term NGOs only when they were referring to those international societal actors engage with the United Nations (Martens, 2002). In recent years all societal actors are commonly referred to as NGOs. They are now very popular even outside the United Nations framework in the national, regional and international spheres (ibid) and have been increasingly accepted more amongst researchers, activist and even development policy activist in the Global North and South (Lewis, 2007). In this study we shall interchangeably use the word NGOs and civil societies. In this study we define NGO and civil society as agents of socio-political and economic change at micro and macro levels embedded in the different environments.

NGOs are a natural outcome of a free democratic and capitalistic society. They are legalised by the existence of poverty according to (Fowler, 1997). The idea is that as market forces require more and more relaxations of rules and regulations for their benefit, society will naturally demand social justice to balance out negative aspects of market forces such as exploitation and environmental degradation (Lewis, 2007). In addition, they push for social and economic changes in favour of the marginalized population especially in the case of non-governmental development organisations (NGDO). Non-governmental development organisations in strengthening ties with civil societies act as a vehicle for development and

social change in the communities by giving the poor an opportunity to negotiate and shape development frameworks that affects their livelihood and their different social 'realities'. This is done through a sense of community ownership and empowerment (Tembo, 2004).

Fonjong, (2007) explains that the voice of NGOs in Cameroon have had mixed impacts. Some of the reasons are: due to the absence of a common platforms for NGOs to expose their activities; civil society being a force for and ingredient of democratization, as well as a natural component of a market economy needs funds to function which in most cases are absent. According to Lewis (2007) donors make frequent reference to the potential of civil society to hold in check the state, to serve as the moral pulse of society and to further democratic value, but forget to realize that the means to carry out these activities are insufficient. In reality, most of them rely more on the state for funds, as this gives the government a stake in the affairs of the organisation. However in reducing the power of the state and increasing the role of the market, it is assumed that civil society too will flourish and will in turn encourage further economic liberalization. Moreover, civil society, state, and market are assumed to constitute an organic, symbiotic whole, characterized by unity rather than disjuncture and by cooperation rather than conflict.

There is thus an expectation that civil society will function to mediate and balance the power of the state and market, to provide a moral check on the market, and likewise to maintain the democratic integrity of the state which is not always the case as some NGO's are now being used as private money making machines (Yenshu, 2008). There exist inadequate collaborations amongst NGOs to come up with new ideas on working in the ever changing and challenging socio-political environment. NGO's now more than ever function on rules and regulations attached by donor funding, with little attention on the 'real needs' of the target population from our observation and working experience in this sector. A constrain to an NGO platform in Cameroon is generally attributed to the diversity in the different socio-cultural organisations present in the country, with over 200 ethnic languages (Ingram et al., 2007; Nkwi, 2006).

The Commonwealth Foundation Secretariat London and the Commonwealth Foundation, Marlborough House, London have over the years donated funds to NGOs and Government bodies in Commonwealth countries like Cameroon for projects on Democracy, Good Governance, Human Rights and Ethics, capacity building on Project Planning and Management as well as capacity building on the role of the media in Public Management. These are commendable activities but unfortunately the management of NGOs are side lined and this has led to an outcry on the absence of transparency and accountability in this sector especially in developing countries (Nkwi, 2006). The Republic of Cameroon (2009) vision 2035, has as its overall objective to make Cameroon an emerging country over the next 25-30 years and with medium-term objectives; 'poverty alleviation, becoming a middle income country, becoming a newly industrialized country and consolidating democracy and national unity while respecting the country's diversity'.

In order for our country Cameroon to attain it emergence by 2035, the Civil Society or Voluntary Sector is without any doubt justified as a major partner to this development as suggested by (Forje, 1999). The Voluntary Sector can play an important role in the development process, particularly through community participation as it did to some extend during the economic crisis in Cameroon during the 80's and 90's. The voluntary sector can offer alternative perspectives; committed expertise; an understanding of the local opportunities and constraints; and perhaps most importantly, the capacity to conduct a

meaningful dialogue with communities, particularly those that are disadvantaged. It is therefore essential that the government and the voluntary sector work together (Lewis, 2007).

Valorisation of NGOs or civil society organisations allows them to explore alternative paradigms of development; to challenge social, economic, and political forces that may work against public interest; and to find new ways to combat poverty, deprivation, and other social problems not excluding better management skills to become more transparent and accountable.

Literature review and Theoretical underpinning

The inability of nation-states 'to muddle through as it confronts the long term consequences of its own ignorance, corruption and lack of accountability' (Fisher, 1998: 2) coupled with the disillusionment of the people with conventional ideas about development facilitated a switch to a people centred organisations (Korten, 1990). According to Lewis (2001) in the mid-18th century there was very little written on NGO's, but in recent years there has been an explosion of writings on this subject especially with NGO mainstreaming in development policy and discourse. Edwards and Hulme (1995) termed NGOs as the 'favoured child' of official development donors. NGOs have been 'catapulted into international respectability' and are seen as important actors in development (Brodhead, 1987: 1) even though Ilchman et al., (1998) considers NGOs as an illusion in that it already existed as a third world organisations in the likes of philanthropic groups and religious organisations in the 1950's and 60's in West Africa (Lewis, 1999) like the harambe in Kenya. According to (Charnovitz, 1997: 185)

'Although some observers seem to perceive NGO involvement as a late twentieth-century phenomenon, in fact it has occurred for over 200years. Advocates of a more extensive role for NGOs weaken their cause by neglecting this history because it shows a long time custom of governmental interaction with NGOs in the making of international policy'.

Non-governmental organisations are now gaining access to policy makers and their presence as a policy voice has been apparent (Lewis, 2001). This type of organisation appeals to all sides of the political spectrum which explains their current ubiquity. The dual character of non-governmental organisations is that they alternate between theoretical and activist discourses, public and private identity, professionalism and amateurishness, market and non-market values, radicalism and pluralism, modernity and tradition reflecting their ambiguity. NGOs are also relied upon as vehicles of good governance and democratic progress. Fowler, (1995) aptly describes NGOs as the 'ladle for the global soup kitchen' in the process of what Deacon et al., (1997) termed as the 'residualisation of welfare'.

New roles are opening for NGOs to be involved in service provision as government roles are redefined and reduced (Turner and Hulme, 1997). These changes has affected NGOs engagement in service provision by making them highly dependent on a 'room for manoeuvre' depending on the type of government and level of influence. According to Clark (1991) NGOs 'can oppose, complement or reform a state but cannot ignore it' as they create an 'enabling environment' pointed out by Chambers (1994) through which government can provide sound management of the economy, provide basic public services and a democratic rule. NGOs are also considered a threat to state status quo and legitimacy if they provide development for example through an increased standard of living in an area untouched by government services (Bratton, 1989).

Nevertheless there is a shift from the magic ideology of NGO as agents of development to eradicate poverty and fight social injustice towards questions of accountability and efficiency within the organisation (Fowler, 1997). The importance of management cannot be overemphasised as 'management capacity is the lifeblood of all organisations, irrespective of whether they are private entities, public agencies, not for profit concerns or non-governmental varieties' (Udoh, 1998: 229). Most NGOs now exist as hybrids as they combine management practices of private, public and third sectors to remain efficient and effective in the changing world order.

Ambiguity of NGO

When the term 'non-governmental' is used, in simplistic terms this means separate from government and market and in the widest sense anything considered otherwise (Hossain and Myllylä, 1998). NGOs have been defined broadly by Charnovitz, (1997: 185) and Vakil (1997: 206) as agents of 'international relations' like the anti-slave trade movement and as a 'development agent' at local, national and international levels respectively. This draws a line then that NGOs are 'aid' industries (Lewis, 2001). In the current literature, the questions asked dwell on how to get out of this muddle or ambiguity, and more often than not these types of questions have seldomly been answered. Vakil (1997) suggestion of a structural/operational definition is supported by Lewis (2001) as the most useful but criticised for excluding small scale and grassroots organisations out of which the more professional NGOs emerge or expand with time (Billis, 1993). Non-governental organisations we can conclude 'exist as one diverse set of actors within a set of complex changing, context specific social and political process' (Lewis, 2001: 61)

The policy paradox of who is 'in' or 'out'?

NGOs were once considered as the magic bullet (Vivian, 1994). Their activity as development agents who worked effectively to reduce poverty and provide service delivery through grassroots initiatives was commended (Wallace et al., 2006). Recently there is a switch from the NGO towards civil society, this is seen in Blair, (1997) wordings NGO that has as one of its primary purpose influencing public policy can be considered a civil society but not all NGOs are 'CSOs'. This change is also partly as a result of the search for new terms which is a characteristic of development industries (Craig and Porter, 2003). A measure of disillusionment is being felt in the development circles as NGOs performance in key development areas has fallen below expectation in relation to its performance, sustainability and impact (Lewis, 2001).

There are now stronger claims by donors according to Lewis and Opoku-Mensah (2006: 667) of 'bringing back the state in' through development policies that entail budget support, governance reforms and poverty reduction plans for a better economic growth and poverty reduction strategies. The World Bank Development Report (1997) advocates that a failure in state dominated development will subsequently lead to a failure in stateless development. This calls for a strong state and also the need for a government-government assistance (Wallace et al., 2006). This dominant policy framework is what Mosse (2005) labels intrusive aid which engages more with the state than NGOs. The practice is in vogue, it is one of direct budgetary support to government ministries in the form of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) with NGOs as intermediaries between the government and the people (Craig and Porter, 2003). The NGOs are then awarded the status of watch dogs and legitimized to show case a participatory process which is non-existent.

METHODS

The research approach to this paper is a careful, diligent investigation into the subject matter through perusal of relevant literature. The research paper involves a broad description of NGOs and a close look at their contributions in some development sectors in Cameroon. The technique use in the research is doctrinal through the review of literature from journals, articles and reports.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section authors have discussed the emergence of NGOs in Cameroon. How they have been framed by different socio-political and cultural situations and their developmental impact in the country. The definition of the term NGO in the Cameroonian context is no different from other countries. It developed as a result of people wanting to meet some basic needs, which was not provided by the state (Fonjong, 2007). A rise in the creation of NGO was witnessed in the 1990's especially in what Awasom (2005) described as the opening and expanding of the political space in Cameroon. Thus, activist rose from student groups and worker's union demanding change in the degrading conditions which plagued the then lone state University, known today as University of Yaounde 1 which was created in 1961. The University hosted more students than its capacity. Graduates roamed the streets as a result of the unproductive labour market and the souring economy (Ndembiyembe, 1997; Nyamnjoh, 1997). Traditional societies like the Takembeng and the Anlu emerged and were instrumental in the political struggle and subsequent change after post 1992 presidential elections (Fonjong, 2007; Nyamnjoh, 1999).

Socio-political framework

The emergence of NGO in Cameroon as described by Fonjong, (2007) was favoured by the economic crisis which resulted in salary cuts within the public service, which at that time was the largest employer. As a result many people started reflecting on how to find a solution to their problems and to organise themselves to provide a solution which the state was unable to do at that time. The advent of democratization and promotion of private initiative and the recognition of their contribution to economic development through international institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank during the early years of the structural adjustment also contributed to the rise of NGOs (Ndembiyembe, 1997).

In recent years, Cameroon experienced an unprecedented proliferation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) whose common concern was the welfare of the population. The First Freedom of Association law outside the political sphere in Cameroon was the Freedom of Association Law, No. 90/053 of 19 December, 1990 (Ewumbue, 1992). This law replaced Law No. 67/LF.19 of 12 June 1967 on Freedom of Association with less rigorous control by the state. But the catch is that these laws leave too much allowance to the government authorities. It accord government authorities the right to dissolve a national or international civic organisation, effectively renders the right of civic organisations to exist in Cameroon subject to 'government's fiat' (Rutinwa, 2001; Temngah, 2008) leaving room for misuse. Law No. 99/014 of December 22 1999 made possible the creation of NGO's but unfortunately it has not yet been implemented even though NGO activities are recognised. There are many NGOs in the country, but very few are operational due to lack of strong

organisational structures (Mbuagbo and Fru, 2003) and also what (Yenshu, 2001) labels as weak social mobilisation.

NGOs in Cameroon can be classified into three categories according to the authors: basic NGOs which are usually groups of farmers, fishermen, farmers and artisans. They define their own goals and work only on local resources; NGOs services that provide services to beneficiary communities to help mobilize funds for their activities. They maintain working relations with the state, local authorities, and donors. They generally have very limited qualified staff; NGOs which support services are centred on the needs of grassroots groups, potential beneficiaries of their support.

The areas of intervention of NGOs in Cameroon are generally on rural development with a strong focus on food security (agriculture, livestock and fisheries). The agricultural sector employs more than 50% of the active population who are members of grass-root and community organisations which are involved in community natural resource, forest and biodiversity management. Issue on marginalisation of minorities mostly focus on rights and access to resources are tackled not excluding health and culture, political advocacy to enforce the basic rules of democracy, decentralization and good governance at the local level. These have emerged as a vibrant economic and social sector alongside the public and private sectors. The main objective of this sector is to take care of the social, environmental, cultural, religious, political and economic, gather people and motivate them to take charge, but sometimes it's difficult due to no information and sometimes no implementation (Tchoumba, 2002).

The Highlands which consist of the Tikar, the Wedikum, and the Fulani's have a high concentration of CSOs compared to the rest of Cameroon. This is because of the high level of ethnical difference in language and culture, and the need for each community to have a forum for which their problems can be solved. This diversity is seen from the more than 240 different languages spoken in this geographical area (Ingram et al., 2007). In addition, the civil society in Cameroon lacks what can be explained from the basis of ethnicity, as Cameroon is made up of approximately 240 ethnic groups with the different organisations pursing their own goals, making the civil society organisations to be weak (Bayart, 1993; Yenshu, 2001).

Legal Framework

With the advent of the democratization of political life, the legal framework of associations as a structuring element of civil society organizations in Cameroon has been enriched by a large number of texts.

- Law No. 90/53 of 19 December 1990 concerning freedom of association was a significant improvement over the past, Law No. 67/LF.19 of 12 June 1967 on Freedom of Association, which made mandatory that all associations be authorized by the Minister in charge of Territorial Administration. Eventhough this new law has facilitated the establishment of associations without prior authorisation as before itgives a lot of allowance to government misusethrough its open to interpretation rules and regulations (Rutinwa, 2001).

- Law No. 90/052 of 19 December 1990 concerning freedom of social communication (Ewumbue, 1992).

- The principal legislation governing public meetings and processions is Law No. 90/55 of 1990. Section 3 of this law requires that all meetings intended to be held in public places, or in a place open to the public, be declared in advance. Even though the requirement is usually a declaration to the right authority of the agenda and composition of the meeting for a receipt in acknowledgement of the declaration. TheThere is administrative authority still has a rght to put an end to the meeting if he thinks there is a need. Most government authorities have used this excuse to stop human right meetings and even meetings of marginalized groups to handle issues relating to their welfare. An examples is the case between the the voluntary association for the Mboraro people, MBOSCUDA registered under Law No. 90/053 with Alhaji Ahmadou Danpullo concerning land ownership and the use of political influence to stop meetings held by MBOSCUDA (Rutinwa, 2001).

- Law No. 92/006 of 14 August 1992 on cooperatives and Common Initiative Groups (GIC-Coop)

- Law No. 92/07 of August 14, 1992 on Trade Unions and Employer Associations

- Decree No. 93/574 of 15 July 1993 to determine the form of professional trade unions admitted for registration and other instruments relating to professional trade unions for civil servants.

- The Law No.93 / 105 of 22 December 1993 on the Economic Interest Grouping (EIG)

- The Law No. 99/014 of 22 December 1999 governing non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

- Section 18 of Law No. 99/014 of 22/12/99 stipulates: 'Duly approved NGOs shall be exempt from taxes and registration duties, in accordance with the General Tax and Registration Code.

- Decree No. 2001/150/PM of 3 May 2003 dwells on accrediting NGOs and the follow-up of their activities. This law is expected to be implemented by a technical-ministerial committee that has been set up. So far the process of accreditation is so tight that not more than twenty groups or organisations have received their accreditation three years after the law of application (Law No. 99/01, Law No. 90/053) (Temngah, 2008)

Ingram et al., (2007) makes reference to the existence of about 19 legal NGOs in Cameroon from 1993 to date. In the South West and North West regions what Ingram and colleagues labelled Civil Society Organisations is a mix of: 15,468 Common Initiative Groups (CIGs), 1067 cooperatives, 238 CIG Unions, 50 Unions of Cooperatives, 22 Federations of CIGs, 3 Confederations and 125 Associations. There is an estimated 90% of CSOs registered are active in agriculture, livestock and forestry. Interestingly not more than 50% of these CSO's are probable active as some of them are suitcase CSOs with leaders who have no iota of civic responsibility's says Nkwi, (2006).

Organizational framework

In Cameroon, non-governmental organizations operate according to a standard regimen of Directors composed of a General Assembly, a Board of Directors, and an Executive Office delegating its authority to a director or executive director, as outlined by Law No. 99/014 of 22 December 1999. It should be noted that in most countries in the sub-region, non-governmental organizations are increasingly adopting more modern management methods. The Board meets regularly and reports to the General Assembly which is the foundation of the organization.

However, the leaders of some NGOs, not animated by the virtues of good governance, based on subjective criteria retain the power for themselves or in a small group. Similarly, the recruitment of members of the General Meetings is no longer only within the family or circle of friends. Members are chosen by the resources they can bring to the organization, following the objectives of the organization, according to their skills and experience in community life, etc. To better defend their interests and better respect ethics, non-governmental organizations have emerged, in most parts of the country, collectives and networks. This organization also allows them to become more professional and better focus their interventions on the ground (Ingram et al., 2007).

In some countries, the State has created a special structure, outside ministries to regulate the activities of NGOs. For example in Chad, the State has established the Intergovernmental Committee for the Coordination of Activities of NGOs whose powers are exercised by an executive body called the Permanent Secretariat of NGOs. In Equatorial Guinea, the State requires that local NGOs work with partners from outside. So every foreign NGO who wants to settle in the country will have to find a local partner with which it must work. Every year the government distributes the priority projects to NGOs so that they choose the ones they think they can run together with the government.

Economic framework

Fonjong (2007) and Nkwi (2006), both outlined the emergence of civil society organizations in Cameroon, which was made possible by the process of economic transformation itself caused by the crisis of 1980. This transformation has led governments of countries in the sub-region to adopt a series of measures and economic reforms like the structural adjustment programme, often with the assistance of the Bretton Woods institutions (Mbuagbo and Fru, 2003). These reforms were in turn characterized by reduced state funding of the social sector, leaving a large part of the population, especially the poor, without institutional protection and forcing them to seek other forms of collective expression. The new economic order promoted by liberalization gave free rein to the private sector and other civil society organizations to replace the governments in many social and economic sectors, particularly health sectors, industrial and commercial sectors, the financial and banking sectors, agricultural enterprises. (Fonjong, 2007; Nyamnjoh, 1997)

The objectives of liberalization in the industrial and commercial sector were to strengthen the incentives for investment and promote competition. Thus with the 1992 Law on cooperatives, opportunity was given to non-governmental organizations, particularly Economic Interest Groups (EIG) to engage in profitable economic activities for the mobilization of resources for their operation the case of the Association for the construction of rural infrastructure in Congo (CARI), the Association for the Promotion of African Community Initiatives (APACI)

in Cameroon, and the Local Development Initiatives Support Service (LDISS) in Cameroon (Ingram et al., 2007). As for the financial and banking sector, it has experienced a recovery plan with new provisions relating to the exercise of the banking profession and insurance intermediaries. These are new provisions which have allowed the creation of new private banks, cooperative societies that drain each day the money of small savers and enable them to have access to small loans.

The International Monetary Fund (2004) envisaged the implementation of reforms to enabled government rehabilitate and privatise or liquidate unprofitable businesses as costly public subsidies, of which they would have to pay to support them. This has given the opportunity for the emergence of other forms of community associations and organizations in which NGOs have become the main actors, sometimes directed or created by deflated public enterprises restructured or closed by officials wanting to provide their populations experience gained at or outside the public service. In Cameroon, for example, the creation of the Cameroon's Union of Palm Trees Exploiter (UNEX-PALM) follows this logic. Also, in the agricultural sector, the deregulation policy has caused the dissolution of most regulatory bodies and suddenly, the rural world has been empowered to ensure survival. This has contributed to the emergence of civil society organizations.

Environment Framework

Cameroon is blessed with a lot of natural resources like forest, mountains and fertile soils in most areas. There are more than 50 CSO's in the highlands of the Cameroon. These organisations are mostly interested in resource use management for the marginalized communities. More than half of the communities with forest have asked for a part to be managed by the community (Ingram et al., 2007).

Etoungou (2003) in his field work on forest communities in East Cameroon realized that most of the NGO's were either funded by the state or international NGO's, who decided on the activities of these NGO's in the communities and even their composition. He also noted the ambiguity of the word 'community' approach to forest management which was problematic as forest laws in Cameroon did not support this concept. This called for a change in the concept used to incorporate private associations to fit in with the law. law of Cameroon makes reference only to public and private and so communities then was re-adapted to imply private associations in the community it is based.

Nevertheless, the 1994 law Forestry Law regulating forestry, wildlife and fisheries requires communities to form legal bodies representing all sectors of the community which seem like a difficult requirement due to the heterogeneity in any community due to the social-cultural structure, the political and power hierarchy, the gender differentiation amongst others (De Sardan, 1995). Etoungou (2003: 15) at the end of this research 'doubts as to whether the concept of community forestry is sociologically and politically appropriate for local communities in Cameroon' and calls for reorganization in this sector to suit the needs of the people in these areas.

Impacts of NGO's in Cameroon

Today the process of sustainable development as explained by Tanga and Fonchingong (2009) requires the participation of all stakeholders. To do this, it is commendable to note the synergy between the State and NGOs which is not always an easy alliance. This partnership

has been enforced thanks to support provided by international bodies like the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank, International Labour Organisation and the Centre de développement Sous-Régional pour l 'Afrique centrale (CDSR- AC). In addition, the desire of people to take care of themselves has enabled NGOs to get in partnership with the State and other development agencies to contribute to the effort of sustainable development in the Cameroon.

NGO contribution to the development of social and health services

According to Nzima (2014) the socio-economic development of any country is through the production of healthy people. The structural adjustment programs and other economic reforms have significantly reduced the field of state intervention. The health sector is diverse and there is urgency for the participation of all the beneficiaries for free health coverage and medical care to the layers of the population who have no guarantee. Also, some of the NGOs development activities in Cameroon include; health, education and training, environment, women's development, democracy and human rights, rural and urban development, capacity building and research, HIV/AIDS sensitization and community development in partnership with community based organizations (Tanga and Fonchingong, 2009)

The full participation of local communities in the management and financing of health sector activities in Cameroon, as defined in the new policies and programs of the State, is today more than ever the alternative solution to overcome constraints to the objective assigned by the WHO - "Health for All". The cost of health services are very often above the population budgets. Only a system of solidarity and mutual assistance can ensure the success of this participation and effective contribution to reducing poverty in the country (Nzima, 2014).

Much of the major debate on women's issues among NGOs during the past few years has focused on moving from a 'women-centred' approach to a 'gender' approach particularly in the context of their contribution to development (Butt, 2013). Health has been one of the most recent issues to be approached in this way. The NGO Symposium *Health for All women and men: a gender perspective,* held in Geneva in October 1997, recognized that:

'. . . the concept of gender refers to women's and men's roles and relationships which are shaped by social, economic, political and cultural factors rather than by biology. Gender, moreover, is a dynamic concept which examines the nature of these roles and relationships between women and men in the context of the perspectives and beliefs of society. These socially constructed roles and relationships have a direct bearing on the health and wellbeing of both sexes. A gender perspective helps identify the inequalities between women and men which in the field of health can lead for both to increased illness or death from preventable causes'.

According to Butt (2013) NGOs moreover, recognize that gender inequalities in many different sectors when not readily identified can have an adverse effect on women's health (Author's note)

- Non-involvement of women in decision-making on resource allocation for the health sector results in decisions being taken by men who may not take into account the kinds of health services that only women will need. High maternal and infant mortality rates in particular can be attributed to the lack, or defective distribution of, resources in the health sector;

- Discrimination against girl children (a) before birth through pre-natal sex selection; (b) at birth through infanticide and (c) during childhood through neglect and son preference, compounded by their unfair share of food and of domestic chores, can lead to anaemia, malnutrition and stunting of growth;

- Widespread and largely unreported prevalence of violence against women, including psychological and sexual abuse can cause lasting damage to their health and is not infrequently fatal;

- Women's bodies are far more susceptible to infection by sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV/AIDS, and the risk of infection is compounded by their inability to insist upon safe sex. The associated complications include infertility and even death.

- Unfair share of family income received by women and girls, together with their reduced opportunities for education and training, and consequential inability to obtain gainful employment, may force them to resort to commercial sex, and increased exposure to risk of contracting STDs or HIV/AIDS;

- Early arranged marriages, a practice over which the girls concerned have little or no control, can lead to too early and un-spaced pregnancies with associated health risks;

- Cultural practices which preclude women's rights to make their own decisions, such as female genital mutilation (to which two million girls are subjected every year) and widow inheritance can have a serious and long term effects on their health.

NGO Contribution to the consolidation of Human Rights

Non-governmental organizations also have the role to create and to take care of a permanent dialogue on the common socio-economic questions confronting the entire society at short or long term. From their actions, they also press on decisions that touch the whole society. NGOs use strategies such as debates, social movements; lobbying, dialogue and pressure groups to make heard the voice of the voiceless. For example in the course of the past years, Cameroon government has associated NGOs or civil society to the elaboration strategy in poverty reduction and governance. It is in this way that in Cameroon like in Chad; NGO has contributed and are implicated in the process of launching the major part of development programmes.

NGO have brought actions in favour of changing the judicial environment in Cameroon thanks to their activism concerning the enactment of law projects, adding to the African Charter for Human and Peoples Rights (Economic Commission for Africa, 2008). In the defence of the general interest of everybody in a nation, non-governmental organizations contribute to the consolidation of a state of peace or rule law and a vehicle of the practice of best political life. International NGOs are better placed at fostering capacity building needed to guarantee the sustainability of projects. They are also involved in small and large-scale projects geared at poverty alleviation, socio-economic empowerment of women and efforts at gender mainstreaming tailored to improving the welfare and livelihood of the population (Tanga and Fonchingong, 2009).

NGO contribution to capacity building

Many NGOs are now participating in the capacity building of their members and the public by providing the proper techniques in various fields of life. There are many seminars, conferences, workshops and courses made available to a large segment of the population to acquire knowledge and to be made aware about the problems that dominate their habitat.

In addition, NGOs such as the Circle of Research and Support to Entrepreneurship of Women and Youth (CRAFEJE), the Integrated Health for All Foundation (IHAF), Cameroon, the Association for the Support for Woman entrepreneur in Cameroon. Some of these NGOs have organized capacity building trainings on Gender Based Violence (GBV), Project Planning and Management for Development (PPMD), etc. These trainings organized to build capacities of NGOs actors, educationists, government servants as well as corporate representatives. However, these efforts from our experience are very much inadequate with respect to the development trend in Cameroon

In the context of this study, NGOs are social development actors outside the realm of the state, political society and are involved in activities and practices to improve on the welfare of the population. Among the diverse organisations that make up civil society, NGOs are now often regarded as key intermediaries in development. A discourse of state and civil society's responsibility for social welfare pervades neo-liberalism's recent quest to establish partnership with NGOs (Tanga and Fonchingong, 2009).

Implication to Research and Practice

A lot of research has been written on the developmental impacts of NGOs and civil society in Cameroon with little or no research on how they are managed and related issues of transparency and accountability (Mbuagbo and Fru, 2003; Nkwi, 2006; Yenshu, 2008). This is a gap which needs attention as many aid agencies deal with NGOs in the developing countries as intermediaries in the strive towards poverty alleviation and positive socio-economic change (Lewis, 2007). In recent years development aid agencies are disappointed with the low performance of NGOs in eradicating poverty and promoting social change. They are proposing NGOs as intermediaries between the government and the people trying to show case the notion of participatory development (Lewis and Opoku-Mensah, 2006). The prominent framework is now the call for direct interaction between government ministries and international aid through the development on Poverty Development Strategy Papers which have come to replace the structural adjustment programmes (ibid). Many NGOs are legalized by the government to act as proxy and this is taking grounds like the recent case of the NGO bill 2015 passed which replaced the NGO Act Cap 113 in Uganda where the government has unprecedented powers to shut down NGOs or even jail its members (Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2015).

CONCLUSION

From the above, we note that the NGOs of in Cameroon, even being in a primary phase of their existence, are conducting activities that have an impact on the process of socio-economic development of the countries where they operate. Despite their significant contribution to the population, they face a significant number of problems of which it is imperative to find solutions, if the government of Cameroon including funders wants NGOs

to be the full partners in development and well-being. Despite their recognition by the State and their active participation in the process of endogenous development, NGOs in Cameroon are struggling to get their ideas and implement projects because they lack the necessary funding because they are not broken in negotiation skills, analytical and decision allowing them to easily mobilize resources. Other international organizations that have the material, human and adequate financial, national NGOs hardly realize their activities. Women's NGOs have even more difficulties due to the traditions that forbid women participation in the public sphere especially in rural areas. NGOs in Cameroon also suffer from a lack of institutional structures such as seats, proper working equipment (computers, Internet, etc.) to function properly and meet the needs of populations, so they function in suitcases and the impact does not reach the assigned communities. This indicates the urgency of capacity building projects or valorisation of NGOs so that they are becoming professionals and reach the level required for the effective management of their activities. In this capacity, the trading character of experience between NGOs in Cameroon and between them will also prevail.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The valorisation of existing NGOs is expected to lay down a watch-dog structure for the promotion of Good Governance, Transparency, Accountability and Networking amongst NGOs in Cameroon and International Development Agencies.

- Evaluation of NGOs activities should be done through a team of professional and trained evaluators of NGOs/Associations activities in Cameroon.

- NGOs need to be trained to achieve professionalization enabling them to improve their image with the Government and other partners.

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