

Decentralization and its Effects on the Development of Decentralized Structures: The Case of Buea Council, South West Region-Cameroon.

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Abstract:- Decentralization is generally aimed at devolving central administrative authority to the local level. This paper examines decentralization with emphasis on the development of decentralized structures in Cameroon. We adopted a case study approach focusing on the Buea Council in the South West Region, so as to enable a clear understanding of how decentralization affects local development. The theoretical framework used was the participatory model of development provided by Stöhr and Taylor given the fact that it stresses on development from below. The bureaucratic model by Max Weber was also employed given that the study area is operating with a bureaucratic model based on the principle of hierarchy of authority.

We did a random sampling of thirty respondents who were known to be workers of the Buea Council and a questionnaire was used to sample their opinions that could help answer our research questions. Beside questionnaires, the researcher used already existing documents, which provided a comprehensive literature for the study.

The findings of the study showed that; there is a high level of job performance which positively affects local development as sanctions and rewards are levied on workers either for poor or good performance; there is a high level of commitment to job at the Buea council, from the Mayor to the staff.

We concluded that at the Buea council, necessary measures have been put in place to equip the staff for an efficient service delivery to the local population.

Keywords:- Decentralization, Local Development, Performance, Decentralized Structures.

I. INTRODUCTION

Decentralization is today widely used as an instrument of development. In the late 1700s, as Jefferson was leading the United States of America into its future, he professed a firm belief in the value of a system of governance that was built on small local government, with the state and federal governments

only performing the functions that were not feasible at the local level (Dale: 2008,3). The recently institutionalized Cameroon government policy towards decentralization is an indication that the Cameroon government has in recent times equally accorded some value to a system of governance built on small local governments. The Local Council is therefore the basic unit of local government in Cameroon. Generally, decentralization stimulates the search for program and policy innovation, first of all because it is, per se, an innovative practice of governance. Second, because through its implementation, local governments are required to assume new and broader responsibilities in order to provide public services for all. The assumption of new responsibilities through decentralization often requires improved planning, budgeting and management techniques and practices; the adoption of new tools; and the development of improved human resources to operate the decentralized programmes. Ndue's (1994:9) study on decentralization and local government in Cameroon holds that decentralization can be interpreted as the organization of government activity outside the headquarter of the central government either as an administrative measure involving the transfer of resources and responsibilities to agents of central government located outside the headquarters, or as a political arrangement involving the devolution of specific powers, functions and resources by the central government to sub-national level government units.

He further posits that services rendered by local councils are assessed through the level and structure of running expenses and those towns which have a high amount of running expenses quite often only have an administrative organization which is under-equipped in materials and staff.

Abangma's (2009) study on the functional autonomy and the performance of communes in Cameroon questions whether government is for local people, as he strongly argues that councils in the country lack real autonomy because of the rigid supervision by central government. He attributes the inability of most communes to perform to the over centralization of the commune.

Before the 2004 and 2008 laws of decentralization were put in place, the local government in Cameroon performed purely civil functions such as the granting of birth certificates

as well as the granting of marriage certificates. One could also observe that, the recruitment of council personnel then was based on mainly political reasons, depending on which political party is ruling the council at the moment given the limited functions they had to perform. By 2004, the government policy towards decentralization entailed the transfer of power and resources to the councils for their intervention into other domains of service delivery which goes beyond issuing of birth certificates and marriage certificates to include local development such as construction of roads, hospitals, schools and many others. This assignment of new tasks, which inevitably led to the extension of the functions of local government, makes it necessary for local councils to revise the standard of recruitment of council personnel in an effort to render the delivery of services patterning to new tasks assigned to them more performant.

In the last few years that is, ever since the dawn of multi-partism in Cameroon, much has been written about the rise of decentralization in Cameroon. Academics and newspaper reporters have all discussed about the central government policy on decentralization. The main purpose of this work is not to revisit or restate what they have written about the concept of decentralization but to investigate the performance of the Buea council in terms of Staff performance and service delivery following the 2008 law changing provinces to regions and the 2010 decrees to lay down conditions for the exercise of some powers transferred by the State to councils.

Our study is thus important given that all the efforts to take the government closer to the people so as to meet their local needs places decentralization at the top as Tuner et al (1997) asserts devolution to be the only true form of decentralization because of its inherent democratic value. Also, service delivery can be improved by devolving powers to councils and the Cameroon decentralization law of 2004 places the council at the top of the provision of services at the local level. The 2010 decrees came in to concretize these laws by clearly stating domains of transfer of power and resources to councils so as to enable the effective implementation of these laws. Given the transfer of power and resources to councils, we thus find it necessary to investigate the factors affecting the link between decentralization and performance at the local council.

Municipal administration in Cameroon dates back to the colonial period. In 1922, in the British Cameroon, the colonial authority created the Native Court. Native Authorities had the right to legislate and levy taxes under the control of District Officers. This was the indirect rule policy, 19 years later, this movement started in the French-speaking Cameroon with the introduction of mixed councils in which the Mayor was appointed and the Municipal Counselors elected. (Edou:2).

In 1955, a new stage was reached with the legal distinction between two types of councils: the “Commune de Plein Exercise” (CPE) where the Municipal Counselors were elected

and in turn elected from within the Mayor and his Assistants; and the “Commune de Moyen Exercise” (CME) whose Mayor and Assistants were appointed. (Edou,p2). Such organization prevailed until 1974, fourteen years after independence.

In the 1974 reform, the council was defined as a decentralized local government and legal person, established in the public interest with legal personality and financial autonomy. Although the principle of election of the Municipal Counselor was adopted, the instituted system caused the coexistence of two methods of designation of the executive: in rural councils, Municipal Administrators were appointed; and in urban councils, Mayors were elected by Municipal Counselors, except in some major cities where Government Delegates were appointed. (Edou,p2). Given the fact that the 1974 reform could not meet the challenges of the state seeing that the council was only defined as a decentralized local government with no effective transfer of resources which is one of the major tools for effective decentralization and the councils could not really perform effectively as a decentralized structure, it was needful to restate the idea of decentralization in the 1996 constitution.

The Cameroon decentralization law is based notably on the 18th January 1996 constitution which established the decentralized nature of the State. Article 55 of the constitution stated that local authorities shall enjoy full administrative autonomy in the management of local interest, despite this constitutional provision, it was noticed that full autonomy was not yet enjoyed by the local authorities as the council remained incapable to carryout major developmental projects. Due to the challenges facing decentralization at that time it was needful for the government to create another law so as to meet and overcome the weaknesses of decentralization at the moment.

The weaknesses of the 1996 constitution led to the establishment of the law no 2004/017 of 22nd July 2004 on the orientation of decentralization to make local authorities more performant. In order to ensure that local councils become more performant in the execution of their tasks, the law instituted the idea of devolution of power and transfer of resources which are basic tools for effective performance. Despite all efforts put in by the government to ensure effective decentralization, it still remained a process with many lapses as the real meaning of decentralization was not clear as the transfer of resources remained a “paper idea” than a reality. Under this law, the central power exercised supervisory authority over the councils. It was in the face of the challenges of the 2004 law that Cameroonians opted for a more pragmatic approach to decentralization with clear-cut powers given to regions and local councils.

In order for the government to come out with a more pragmatic approach to decentralization, the president of the republic signed a decree in 2008 decree No. 2008/376 of 12 November 2008 changing the appellation provinces to regions.

Despite the decree in 2008, the performance of councils as a decentralized body remained questionable so the government had to sign another decree in 2010 to reinforce the power of the councils as a complete decentralized body.

➤ *Decentralization*

According to Hague and Harrop, decentralization refers to a situation where central government functions are executed by sub-national authorities. Under decentralization the administrative and decision-making task of the government are distributed to subordinate field agencies so that services and functions are dispensed to the local level. (Premdas and Steeves, 1985:4).

According to UNDP (1999) “Decentralization, or decentralizing governance, refers to the restructuring or reorganization of authority so that there is a system of co-responsibility between institutions of governance at the central, regional and local levels according to the principle of subsidiarity, thus increasing the overall quality and effectiveness of the system of governance, while increasing the authority and capacities of sub-national levels. Decentralization could also be expected to contribute to key elements of good governance, such as increasing people's opportunities for participation in economic, social and political decisions; assisting in developing people's capacities; and enhancing government responsiveness, transparency and Accountability.” While decentralization or decentralizing governance should not be seen as an end in itself, it can be a means for creating more open, responsive, and effective local government and for enhancing representational systems of community-level decision making. By allowing local communities and regional entities to manage their own affairs, and through facilitating closer contact between central and local authorities, effective systems of local governance enable responses to people's needs and priorities to be heard, thereby ensuring that government interventions meet a variety of social needs.

Decentralization is a complex phenomenon involving many geographic entities, societal actors and social sectors. The geographic entities include the international, national, sub-national, and local. The societal actors include government, the private sector and civil society. The social sectors include all development themes - political, social, cultural and environmental. In designing decentralization policies and programmes, it is essential to use a systems-approach encompassing these overlapping social sectors and the different requirements which each makes. Decentralization is a mixture of administrative, fiscal and political functions and relationships. In the design of decentralization systems all three must be included. (UNDP 1999:2-3).

According to article 55 of the 18 January 1996 constitution, ‘decentralized local entities of the Republic shall be regions and councils, decentralized local authorities shall be legal entities recognized by public law. They shall enjoy

administrative and financial autonomy in the management of local interests. They shall be freely administered by boards elected in accordance with conditions laid down by law’. Decentralization is therefore a process where centralized governments initiate reform agendas with the aim of transferring some powers, tasks and resources to regional governments and local authorities.

According to Ntem (2012:14) decentralization refers to the transfer of some special powers from centre to other components of the system. With respect to local authorities, it will refer to delegation of some special autonomous powers by the central government to them. This will be without further intervention in the sphere of influence.

➤ *Local Government*

Local government being a product of devolution is a dimension of decentralization. Olowu (1998:12) remarks that there are two approaches to the definition of local government. One approach which is usually adopted in comparative studies, is to regard all such national structures below the central government as local government. A second approach is more circumspect in that local governments are identified by certain defining characteristics. These characteristics usually focus on the following attributes; legal personality, specified powers to perform a range of functions, substantial budgetary and staffing autonomy subject to limited central control, effective citizen participation and localness. These are regarded as essential to distinguish it from all other forms of local institutions and also ensure its organizational effectiveness.

From a legal point of view, local government may be said to involve the conception of a territorial, non-sovereign community possessing the legal right and the necessary organization to regulate its own affairs. This in turn presupposes the existence of a local authority with power to act independent of external control as well as the participation of local community in the participation of its own. Robson (1937:574)

➤ *Performance*

Performance may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. Goffman (1959:15-16). In the organizational context, performance is usually defined as the extent to which an organizational member contributes to achieving the goals of the organization. Employees are a primary source of competitive advantage in service-oriented organizations (Luthans and Stajkovic, 1999; Pfeffer, 1994).

➤ *Local Authority*

A local authority sometimes also refer to as a municipal authority, is a term that refers to a rural and urban political subdivision below the national level which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs and which includes authorities in countries, cities, villages and others. The term

excludes districts or regional sub-divisions of the national government that are set up solely for national administrative purposes. (United Nations, 1997: vi). Local authorities are created to render services in defined geographical areas, primarily because of the inability of the central government to attend in detail to all the requirements of society that have to be satisfied by a government institution. The range of urban services provided by local authorities in developing countries more particularly in Africa are; parks, streets cleaning, sanitation, refuse collection, road construction and maintenance, housing, water, etc.

In line with the current global trend of streamlining the role of the state, the governments of most developing countries have devolved power to grassroots institutions with a view to make the local government more performant. But in reality, such devolutions have in many cases been quite inefficient to achieve this goal. The need to empower the local people responds to the growing recognition that local people in developing countries lack control over resources and opportunity to participate in decision making processes. Unless rural people are empowered to participate in the development process, development efforts will only have partial positive effects if at all they have any positive effect.

The government of Cameroon promulgated law No. 2004/017 of 22nd July 2004 on the orientation of decentralization with section 2 (1) stating that decentralization shall consist of devolution by the State of special powers and appropriate resources to regional and local authorities; section 3 states that; regional and local authorities of the Republic shall be the regions and councils, they shall carry out their activities with due respect for national unity, territorial integrity and the primacy of the State. In section four of the same law, Regional and local authorities shall be corporate bodies governed by public law and they shall be endowed with administrative and financial autonomy for the management of regional and local interests; section 19 states that regional and local authorities shall freely recruit and manage staff needed for the accomplishment of their missions, in accordance with the laws and regulations in force. Given these sections of the 2004 law under study, the 2010 decree was put in place because the 2004 law local which empowered local government was ineffective as local governments were complaining of the slow pace of decentralization as power was given to them but the resources necessary for the implementation were not given to them. Given the 2010 decree which came in to reinforce local councils by empowering them with the resources necessary for the implementation of the decentralization laws, it is therefore necessary for us to investigate the extent to which this decree influence the performance of local councils.

Due to the emerging nature of our society today that requires a bottom-up model (Ndue: 1994, 34) of decision making unlike in the past where the state was seen as the main actor in decision making, the central government left alone may

not really be able to implement this bottom-up approach of decision making, as a result, it became necessary for local authorities to be created. The state therefore through the process of decentralization devolves special powers to them to ensure that the needs of the local people are met. It is in light of these prevailing circumstances that it becomes necessary to assess decentralization and its effects on the development of decentralized structures in Cameroon.

The study therefore aims at investigating the impact decentralization and its effects on the development of decentralized structures in Cameroon;

- Investigate the factors affecting the link between decentralization and performance of the council;
- Seek for measures taken by the council to increase the performance of staff for an effective service delivery; and
- To propose policy recommendations based on our findings.

II. METHODS

In this study, we adopted the mixed method of data collection which consisted of both the qualitative and quantitative data collection, using the descriptive design. Data for this study was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source was collected from questionnaires, interviews and observations while the secondary source was obtained from books, academic journals, articles, internet sources, decrees and official documents

We adopted a case study approach focusing on the Buea Council so as to enable a clear understanding of how decentralization affects performance. We did a random sampling of thirty respondents who were known to be workers of the Buea Council in the South West Region, Cameroon. Questionnaires and Interviews were used to sample their opinions that could possibly to an extent answer our research questions. The researcher also used already existing documents, which provided a comprehensive literature for the study.

➤ *Study Population*

A population is defined as a group of individuals, objects or items from which samples are taken for measurement. Ndue (2013:10). In this research, employees of the Buea council form the research population through which the sample was drawn from.

The study population include the following categories of people; the Mayor, chief of service and the staff of the Buea council. The questionnaires were administered to some randomly selected workers of the Buea council and interview was conducted with some chief of services. The reason for such a population is that local councils apart from being actors in the implementation of the decentralization laws are the closest representative of the government to the local population.

The main area of study is Buea the head quarter of Fako division of the South West Region, Republic of Cameroon. The sample size of the study is made up of the respondents randomly selected and tested as representatives of the Buea council. To analyze and interpret data into information, the researcher used qualitative analysis by grouping interview responses according to research objectives, Data from questionnaires were input and analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2010. The results were summarized and presented on tables and charts.

III. RESULTS

➤ Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Frequency distribution of respondents by gender

Sex	Frequency(f)	Percentage frequency
Male	14	46.7
Female	16	53.3
Total	30	100

Table 1 above shows a slight dominance of female (53.3%) to male (46.7%) workers who took part in the study.

Table 2: Frequency distribution of respondents by Level of education.

Level of education	Frequency(f)	Percentage frequency
GCE O/L and below	3	10
GCE A/level	4	13.3
Undergraduate	6	20
Graduate	16	53.3
No answer	1	3.3
Total	30	100

From the above table, it can be seen that 53.3% of the respondents constituting the majority are graduates.

➤ Measures taken by the council to increase the performance of staff

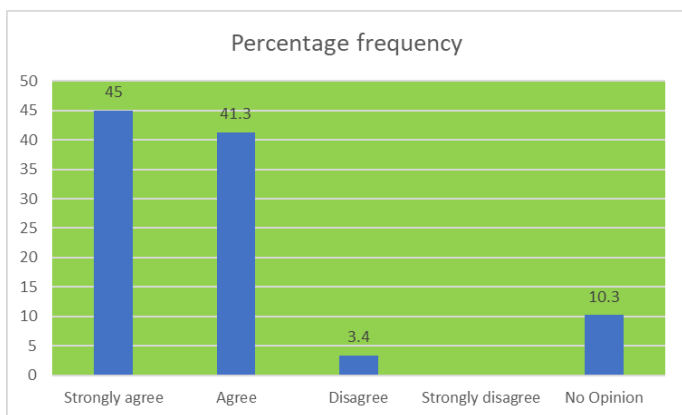


Fig 1: Buea council organize sessions regularly to train it's workers

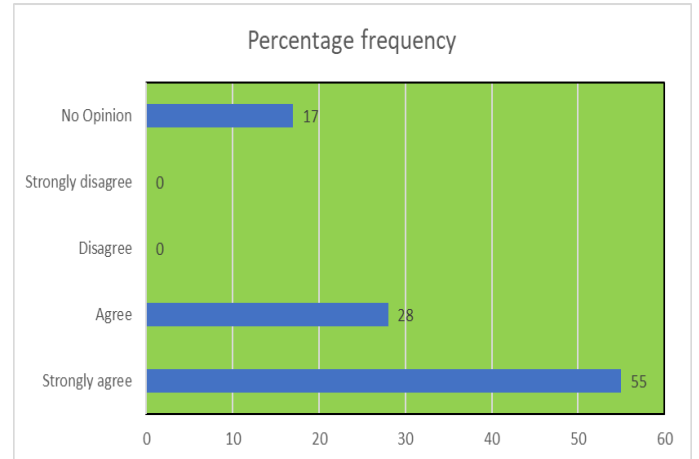


Fig 2: Response on whether workers of the Buea council attends meetings on time

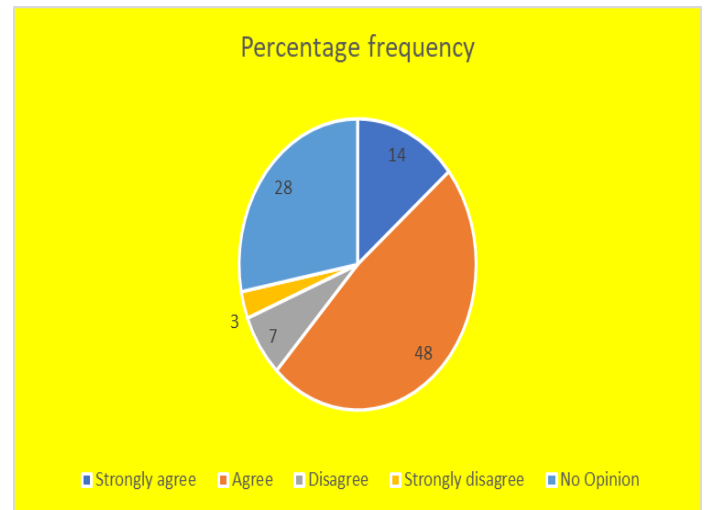


Fig 3: There exist a committee that evaluates workers output.

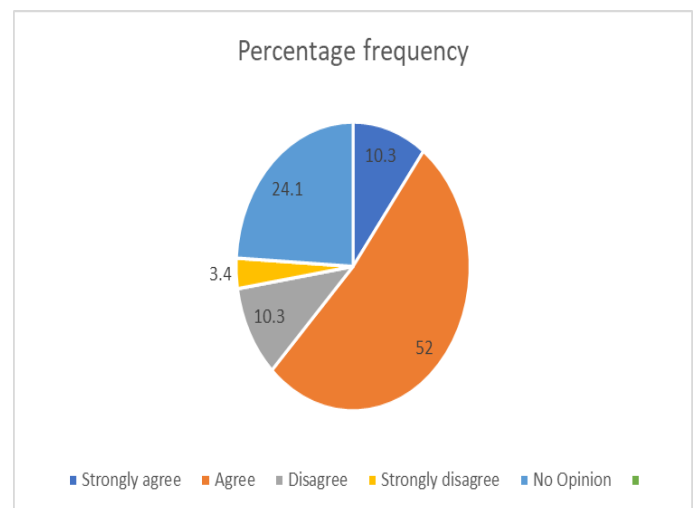


Fig 4: Workers are sanctioned for poor performance of their duties

IV. FINDINGS

The participants in this study were slightly dominated by women (53.3 %), while graduates (53.3%) equally constituted the majority of the respondents indicating that they have to an extend a knowledge on the concept of decentralization and local development. The findings are discussed in accordance with the research objectives which are based on the analysis of field data and relevant literature and compared to that of other researchers.

A. Measures Taken By The Buea Council To Improve The Performance Of Staff And Render Effective Services

The decentralization process in Cameroon which led to the empowerment of local councils for their involvement in other issues of governance at the local level gives the council enough reason to strengthen its measures of service delivery. Thanks to this new task accorded to them, performance which is a basic requisite for effective service delivery has become a call for concern to local councils in Cameroon in general and the Buea council in particular.

➤ *Training at the Local Government Training Center (CEFAM).*

In an effort to make the staff up to the task of decentralization and to meet the needs of the decree of application that extended the functions of local government to other domains of local development, the Mayor at the head of the council ensures that a good number of personnel are sent to CEFAM each year for training. This is done in order to meet the new demands and challenges of decentralization and to be able to ensure effective local development.

➤ *Organization of regular meetings and seminars for council personnel.*

The main aim of the organization of these meetings is to keep the workers alert to the objectives of the organization and also to ensure that they are well equipped with the knowledge that is suitable for an effective service delivery for local development.

➤ *Direct sanctioning of misconducts by council staff.*

Human beings fear sanctions. Due to the sanctions that awaits those who do not take their job serious like late coming and non-respect for hierarchy, the workers all strive to do their best so as to escape these sanctions. Given the fact that the personnel of the council are very close to their boss who is the Mayor, they remain very alert because of the sanctions that awaits them in case of misconduct. According to the figure it is evident that sanctions such as demotion, salary decrease and suspension are always levied on workers because of misconduct. In the case of demotion, a worker can be sent from the position of chief of service to a normal bureau staff. These disciplinary measures that are used in the Buea council makes the workers to be duty conscious.

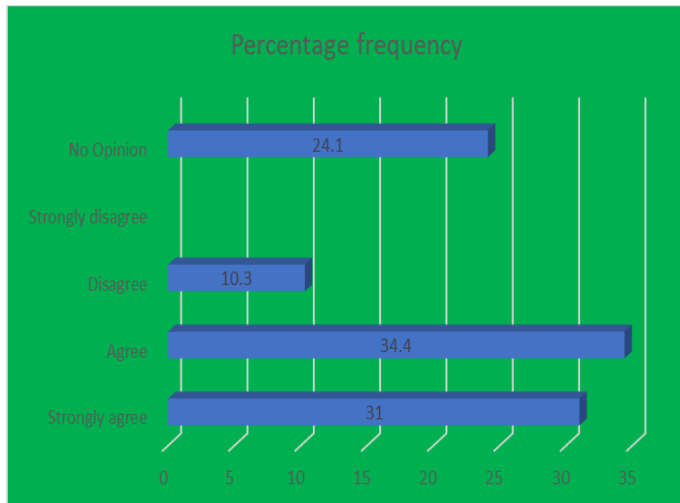


Fig 5: workers in the Buea Council are usually sanctioned for coming late to work

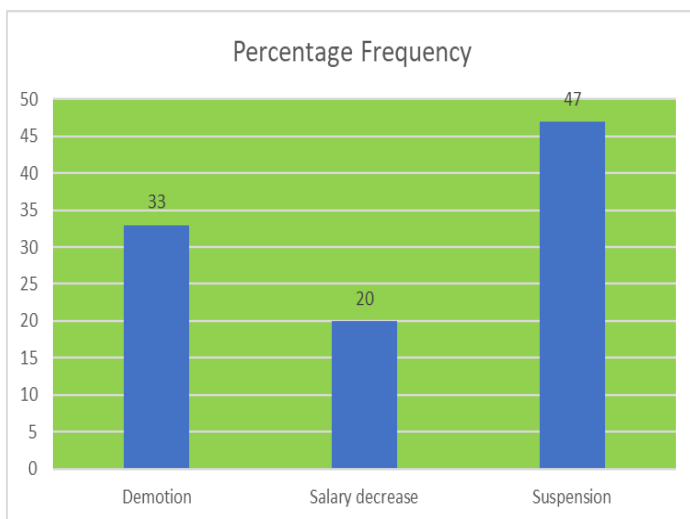


Fig 6: Sanctions council workers face due to poor performance

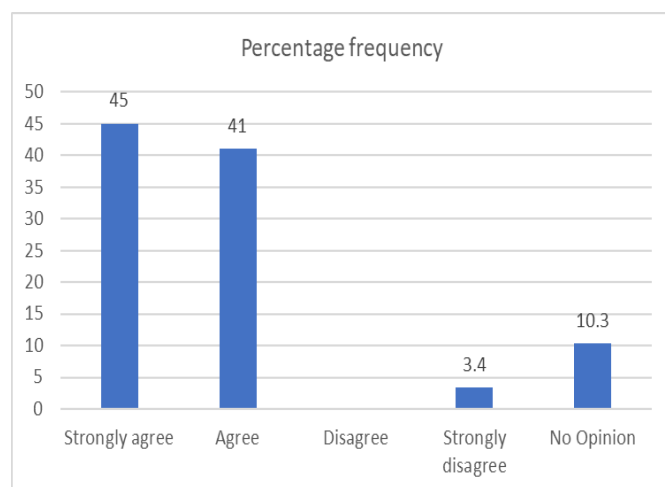


Fig 7: The council sponsors workers at CEFAM to acquire skills to aid in the management of the council

Another measure put in place by the Buea council is the system of best worker award that was put in place since 2010. This award is given to the best worker. It can sometimes come as promotion or salary increase. With this put in place, each worker strives to render service delivery performant so as to earn the award.

➤ *Factors affecting the link between decentralization and local development*

From our questionnaires administered, the respondents put forth the following opinions as constituting the factors affecting the link between decentralization and performance. These factors can be outlined thus;

- Too much of bureaucracy slows down the process of decentralization,
- Lack of proper supervision of projects since the government at times take major developmental projects such as road construction and give them to contractors directly from the Center, when they come to execute the project at the local levels, the local government is not better placed to supervise the project since the contract was given by the central government.
- Lack of proper follow-up which leads to poor performance of local developmental projects assigned by the central government.

According to the information recorded from the local population, as well as personal observation, it was noticed that the Buea council has recorded some achievements overtime such as good roads, construction of the new Council building, infrastructures, the construction of the Buea town market as well as the mile 17 motor park.

The Buea municipality puts in all its efforts to ensure that the town remains clean. This is done with the aid of the Council police. According to the prefectorial order No. 146/2014 of 7th April 2014, the days to keep Buea clean are every first and third Wednesday of each month. During this period, businesses are not expected to be operational until from 12:00 noon, and the council police goes round the town to look for those who will default this order and the defaulters are fined. The council police therefore act as a watch-dog to the implementation of this prefectorial order. Since the establishment of this order, one can notice that even the Council police are on guard in the performance of their duties.

From the presentations above, we can see that the measures taken by the council to increase the performance of staff which forms part of the objective of our study are; the regular sessions organized by the council. These sessions keeps the workers always alert in achieving organizational objectives which is geared towards the rendering of an effective service delivery. Also the various committees that was put in place by the council is also a vital tool to render service delivery efficient and performant. Another measure put in place by the council to increase the performance of staff is the fact that the councils

sponsors workers to go and be trained in CEFAM, when these workers receive the training from CEFAM, they come back to the council and act as specialist in various domains.

V. CONCLUSION

The pillars on which the performance of local councils in Cameroon is built and which also constitute the basis for our study are the reform of 14th -20th September 1974; the constitution of Cameroon, law no 96/06 of 18th January 1996; law no 2004/017 of 22nd July 2004 on the orientation of decentralization and decree no. 2010/0243/PM of 26 Feb 2010 to lay down conditions for the exercise of some powers transferred by the State to councils relating to the granting of aid and relief to the destitute and the needy. The tested hypothesis through our questionnaire research and interview revealed that the Buea Council has a high performance rate which produces effective and efficient results with regards to adherence to organizational norms and service delivery. This is due to the strict sanctions and rewards system that was instituted by the Mayor of the council since 2010. This therefore means that as the decentralization laws become strengthened, local development becomes inevitable with the setting up of strict organizational norms.

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