

Original Research

Impact and Challenges of Centres for Education and Community Action in Cameroon's North West Region

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of community education and challenges facing Centres for Education and Community Action as a rural development strategy in Cameroon. The study was conducted in the North-West Region of Cameroon, employing field observations, semi-structured interviews with key informants using a convenient sampling technique and through elaborate review of documents. These research instruments were blended into what is termed triangulation and the data collected was analysed descriptively. The main focus of qualitative analysis is to understand the ways in which people act and the accounts that people give for their actions. This paper posits that extreme dependence on the provision of Western formal education cannot solve the problems of a rapidly changing society like Cameroon, which is facing a long-term economic crisis and persistent unemployment issues of graduates. Consequently, education should be redefined in the context of the prevailing economic crisis to make it responsive to the aspirations of rural communities. Findings showed that community education had contributed towards rural development immensely but has suffered many challenges due to neglect of the field in the policy agenda. This paper recommends the integration of community education with formal education to facilitate group and community betterment in particular and rural transformation in general.

Keywords: Community Education; Non-formal Education; Rural Development Strategy; Poverty Reduction

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Introduction

Many studies tend to explore education only from a formal perspective (Dasen & Akkari, 2008; Herzog, 2008; Hirsch, 2010). This tendency has led to the neglect of a vital sector of education and training that could contribute to self-employment and thus resolve the current unemployment crisis in Cameroon. Education helps communities in developing the right personality in societies; equips individuals with knowledge and appropriate skills needed in the labour market (Leibbrandt, Levinsohn, & McCrary, 2010). It helps individuals develop creativity to bring about positive attitudes and changes in societies. Education, therefore, serves as an instrument for social change that contributes to social development. This paper discusses community education challenges against the backdrop of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). The central concept of Bandura's theory is reciprocal determinism, whereby the interacting factors in learning are both cognitive and environmental, acting on the learner's behaviour. These determine not only the learners' emotional reactions but also their beliefs, expectations and behavioural manifestations. To Bandura, learning is copying, modelling, observing and imitating but with some awareness. Observational learning requires continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural and environmental factors. In observational learning, one learns by observing the behaviours of others. Dewey (1997) advocated the potential and power of observational learning. As one observes the external, one also engages in a self-observation which is internal. Social learning theory demands teacher-guided facilitation of students' interaction in cooperative learning (Tchombe, 2011). The students' ability to retain information is strengthened as they engage in cooperative learning with peers.

Although some form of community education was in practice in Africa before the advent of European colonization, African governments have not given adequate attention to this form of community education in national development programmes (Anyanwu, 2002; Ojong, 2008). With the adoption of Western education, there has been a gradual decline of African forms of community education with a consequence of increasing unemployment, underemployment, poverty, deviance and criminality in the society (Association for the Development of Education in Africa, 1989; UNESCO, 2008). This situation reveals the shortcomings of Western education in meeting the development needs of African countries in general and Cameroon in particular. South Africa, for example, instituted the Adult and Community Education Training

programme to empower the illiterate population, particularly women, with skills to increase employment and economically develop the disadvantaged members of society (Tawiah, 2017). Community education shares a close connection with the traditional African education system, which was community-based. With the passage of time, diverse changes have taken place in both the scope and initial purposes of community education in Cameroon. The reorganization and restructuring of centres for community education and a quest to meet the immediate and future needs of rural communities still remained a fundamental purpose. Despite the shifts in scope and purpose, community-based education remains a vital aspect of education provision in Cameroon. For demand related reasons the mainstream National Education System is unable to shoulder all the responsibilities of the development needs of the country, hence the need to revisit the role of community education has arisen.

The objective of this paper was to examine the rationale, background, impact and challenges of community education in the Cameroonian context, drawing from the experiences of the Centres for Education and Community Action of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The persistent problems of unemployment among graduates from formal educational institutions have led to a revisit of the role of community education in rural development. In recognition of the shortcomings of extreme dependence on the Western-oriented formal education system with little genuine efforts directed at the non-formal aspects since independence, this paper argues that community education should be given more attention within Cameroon's Growth and Employment Strategy to adequately equip rural communities for active involvement in their development process (Ministry of Economy, Planning & Regional Development, 2009).

Literature Review

Formal education involves “the training and developing of a population's knowledge, skills and character in a structured and certified programme that takes place in a school setting” (Ololube & Egbezor, 2012, p. 72). It is classroom-based and delivered by qualified teachers. Community education is a ‘non-formal education’ system where knowledge and skills are acquired both within and outside formal educational institutions and can involve persons of diverse ages (Coombs, 1985; Egbezor & Okanezi, 2008). Apama and Andong (2008) have criticized the formal

school system for its inability to teach the skills, which relate to the conditions of most people living in rural areas. Formal education is selective, exclusive and discriminatory when compared to community education and training, which takes care of a wider domain and is non-discriminatory (Osuji, 2006). The Global Report on Adult Learning and Education revealed that adult education is a powerful tool for eradicating poverty and acquiring skills for sustainable economic development (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2009). However, it noted that the institution of adult education was neglected by many countries. This neglect has contributed to a lack of skills and economic development for many youths including women. Depending on national policy on education, it covers programmes that impart adult literacy, basic education for out-of-school children, work-skills and general culture. Non-formal education programmes do not necessarily follow a ladder system of accomplishment and maybe of different durations. They may or may not confer certification of learning achievement (UNESCO, 2008). Ngwang Gumne (2000) has argued that non-formal education serves immediate societal needs and that the formal education system is not well adapted to local realities in Cameroon. Fonkeng (2005) argues that non-formal education in Cameroon is not offered by the Ministry of Education. Nevertheless, it offers youths, who have adaptation problems, possibilities of achieving some education. Ministries such as Agriculture and Rural Development, Women Empowerment, Youth and Civic Education, Employment and Vocational Training, offer those who have been excluded from the formal education system, possibilities of social integration through short professional training in institutions created by the State and some private agencies. These institutions lay emphasis on socio-professional integration. Primary and secondary school leavers in Cameroon generally do not possess appropriate skills to be usefully employed in local communities. Formal education, in its present form, cannot serve Cameroon's needs, given that over 90% of its geographical space is rural.

The need for reform had become both political and social due to the ill-adapted curriculum that deviated from developmental priorities and failed to address self-reliant skills. Regrettably, even subjects such as arts, craft and agriculture were not emphasized on the timetable. In an attempt to give education a rural dimension in policy, the Cameroon government created a rurally-oriented primary teacher training institute, abbreviated in French as ENIR, in 1967. This was later transformed into a centre for rural-oriented applied education (IPAR) with a centre in Yaoundé (1969) and another in

Buea (1974) respectively. Experimental schools were set up for the implementation of an integrated and participatory approach to the curriculum and teaching (Amungwa, 2012). However, rural-oriented education has been slow in achieving its expected goals and also failed to meet the approval of many Cameroonian parents. While Western values of education were seen as synonymous with social mobility, rural values did not convey the notion of elitism and affluence to parents.

The term 'community education' refers to a range of educational activities and practices complementary to those of formal schools, colleges and universities. Akande (2007) posits that community education can be traced back to the early Christian missionaries and colonial administrators who discredited traditional African community education on the grounds that it lacked literacy and proper documentation and failed to address the issue of poverty. This eventually led to a general acceptance of Western education and culture in Africa. Most Cameroonians educated in this system tend to look on African culture with disdain. Accompanying the general acceptance of Western education and culture, there was a gradual decline of enthusiasm for indigenous community education. Western education was not without its demerits. There have been cases of massive unemployment, underemployment, poverty, diseases and general economic decline. Growing dissatisfaction with the effects of formal education in relation to development goals led to a craving for a system that would relate knowledge acquisition to community needs. This brought the need for non-formal education to the fore as the recipe for a learning society. Regrettably, inadequate awareness of the meaning of community education due to its many configurations exposes it to the danger of being defined so broadly that it loses clarity.

Community education, on the one hand, is seen as an extension of the service provided by second and third-level education institutions into the wider community. In this sense, it incorporates almost all adult learning opportunities provided by the formal education sector at the community level. A second view considers community education in a more ideological sense as a process of communal education towards empowerment, both at an individual and collective levels (Government of Ireland, 2000). Such an approach sees education as an interactive challenging process, not only in terms of its content but also in terms of its methodologies and decision-making processes. It assumes a different character from all forms of formal education, not merely in terms of its content but in terms of the relationships between the participants themselves and

tutors, the learning process, outcomes and the modes of assessment. In this vein, community education is opposed to a syllabus or institution-driven agenda and geared rather towards the articulation of community needs and problems. Its primary focus is the adult as a learner and the community as context. Anyanwu (2002) submits that in developed countries, community education may be understood in terms of expanding existing services and resources for wider use by the local community. In developing countries, it may be concerned with growth in political awareness that will encourage people to press for social change. Others define community education as a process aimed at raising consciousness and providing the necessary skills and material resources for social, economic, political and cultural development (Ezimah, 2004; Findsen, 2006; Olube & Egbezor, 2012). Community education remains a catalyst to development processes and a channel for enhancing the initiative and creativity of people in solving their problems. This implies that education must go beyond reading, writing and calculating to enable its beneficiaries to build their capacities for involvement in development.

Community education is a prerequisite for community development, considered by Jones and Silva (1991) as a development model which identifies problem-solving as the core element. Typically, problem-solving phases include (1) identifying the problem; (2) determining how to address it; (3) addressing the problem; and (4) evaluating the results of the intervention. This model utilizes problem-solving (borrowing from the process model) to generate action; community building (drawing from elements of the social planning model) to establish broad ownership for that action; and systems interaction (bringing characteristics of the social action model) to give necessary direction to the action. In its stronger sense, community education is parallel in the tradition of community organization in the United States of America, social pedagogy in Germany, animation in France and socio-cultural work in Belgium. Its focus in most developing countries is closely related to community participation and could be seen as close to the Latin American tradition of popular education or the associative life of the French tradition. Different practice traditions have arisen in various contexts but there are some similarities with the pragmatism of John Dewey (1997) and pedagogic method of Paulo Freire (1980). In Freire's method, education is seen as a vehicle for social change. This model emphasizes the need for learners to think critically about their world and to take action to transform it. In traditional views of education, the teacher holds the

knowledge and power and decides what information is needed by the learner at any given time. In community education, power is shared, and both the tutor and the learner engage in the education process to identify what skills are most useful to the local situation and this agenda is pursued in a flexible, developmental manner.

In the context of this paper, community education is defined as organized learning activities that groups or individuals undertake for their personal, community, cultural or economic development (Findsen, 2006; Nsamenang, 2005). Such education touches all other areas of learning but its primary focus is the adult as a learner and the community as context. It is the education for people's empowerment, where literacy and other functional skills become integral components of a comprehensive strategy for rural transformation.

Materials and Methods

The case study design was adopted in this research, and all the 18 Centres for Education and Community Action (CsECA) of the North-West Region were visited to conduct interviews, group discussions, and observations. Case studies focus on asking 'how' and 'why' questions to explore the relevant features and issues in the study units for description and analysis. No single source of data has a complete advantage over the other sources and the description of a particular case or situation is used to draw some conclusions about the phenomenon under investigation (Berg, 2004). Most people of the North-West Region live in clustered village settlements and the ethnic groups have identical cultural values and heritage. The population is unevenly distributed with some areas registering very high population densities such as Mezam with over 850 inhabitants/km² while others, like Ako and Furu Awa in Menchum and Nwa in Donga Mantung, along the borders with Nigeria, are sparsely populated. It is estimated that 64% of the population of the region occupies about 40% of the 17,812km² total land surface (African Development Bank, 2002). The field visits were undertaken to make observations in the CsECA and to conduct focus group discussions and interviews with key informants. The interviews were semi-structured and presented as a guide to the 18 directors of the CsECA and staff participants chosen through a convenient sampling technique. An elaborate review of documents was done. Observational data are primarily descriptive of settings, people, events and the meanings that participants ascribe to them. Mixed methods (triangulation) were used because they complemented

each other. The data collected through these instruments were analysed descriptively. The main focus of qualitative analysis is to understand the ways in which people act and the accounts that they give for their actions (Creswell, 2014). A visit was undertaken to Yaoundé, the national capital, to discuss with stakeholders at the Department of Local and Community Development and also to review relevant documents for secondary data. Vital information was also gathered from the Regional Delegation of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Regional Head of Service for Local and Community Development as well as some staff of the municipal councils. This study represents the outcomes from the field visits, semi-structured interviews, discussions, observations and documents. Key informants provided dependable and reliable information for the study.

Background to Community Education in Cameroon

Pre-colonial African societies had their own educational systems related to the existing production systems (Sarumi, 2002). The education was purely indigenous in the sense that it was peculiar and relevant to the needs of the population of a particular community. It was community-based as the entire community of adults served as facilitators for the younger generation. If a child in a given community misbehaved while the parents were not around, any other adult member of the community could discipline the child on the spot (Adeyinka, 2006). Thus, children were initiated into the socio-cultural uprightness of the society and extreme cases of deviance and criminality were kept in check. Indigenous community education in Cameroon was gender-based. The boys and girls were given the kind of education that enabled them to fulfil masculine or feminine responsibilities in their village communities. Thus, young boys were taught animal husbandry, hunting, house construction, tool-making and some also learned special skills related to medicine, traditional government, blacksmithing and related crafts. Young girls were instructed by their mothers, elder sisters and grandmothers on proper techniques of crop cultivation, food processing and preparation, childcare and some acquired special skills and knowledge of medicine and ritual, basket-weaving and pottery-making. Female education was predominantly designed to produce future wives and mothers. Indigenous community education was not formal but functional, communalistic and largely democratic. It placed emphasis on initiation and learning by doing profitable occupational activities. In this system of education, there was no room for unemployment, underemployment, or idleness and each learner was a productive member of the community.

The education provided by the colonial government during the period of German annexation from 1884 onwards was not designed to prepare young people for the service of their own country. Instead, it was motivated by a desire to inculcate the values of the colonial society and to train individuals for the service of the colonial state. The interest in education, therefore, stemmed from the need for local clerks and junior officials. The Christian Missionaries were interested in education as part of their evangelizing work. Initially, what we term today as community education was known as mass education. It came relatively late but had an impact on the improvement of rural living conditions. When education for the African was being considered during the second decade of the twentieth century, its exponents had in mind formal education which began with children and was given in formal schools. Non-formal education was not given attention.

The first attempts to organize adult classes in Cameroon were made by teachers at the Government school in Buea, the headquarters of the territory, as a means of promoting contact between the school and the community. This effort was short-lived, due to disruption by the outbreak of the Second World War, which led to the ousting of the Germans. The British Government gave some importance to functional adult education through the creation of the Advisory Committee on Native Education. This committee advised that education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of Africans. Mass education in Africa was aimed at adult literacy. The first Adult Education Officers were appointed in 1947 to organize adult education in Nigeria and the Southern Cameroons. Later on, the Cameroon Development Corporation (C.D.C.) made great contributions through their workers' camps in Kumba and Victoria where centres were opened for the education of the largely illiterate labour force employed in the plantations. The programmes included literacy campaigns, community development and leadership and citizenship training, conducted by the C.D.C. and by the Government. Adult literacy in the plantations was the responsibility of the C.D.C.'s Education Officer who supervised adult education organizers and instructors, mainly trained primary school teachers of the C.D.C. schools. In plantations where there were no schools, time-keepers and office workers with some secondary school education were employed as instructors. This initiative helped to inculcate reading and writing skills in the workers, enabling them to fill their tax tickets, read the figures of their wages, or keep accounts of their savings. By 1955,

the C.D.C. was conducting adult literacy classes in 89 Centres with 1400 enrolled. Literacy classes in the territory (outside the C.D.C. plantation) were being organized in 95 centres in various villages (Ojong, 2008).

Although some progress was reported in the adult literacy campaign, women had not been affected. The economic role of the Cameroonian woman and her domestic chores left her no time for what offered no immediate benefits. To enlist the full participation of women in literacy, measures were introduced to relieve them from time-consuming activities. Corn mills were provided by the Department of Education to Corn Mill Cooperatives in some villages and paid for, by members. With this technology, women were able to grind corn less laboriously and attend literacy classes, which also inspired collective activity. According to Ojong (2008), difficulties encountered in the organization of adult literacy in the territory led to a request in 1956 for UNESCO to provide an expert to assist in planning an adult literacy campaign. It was the first time the problem of adult education in the territory was referred to UNESCO, which sent an expert for the job in 1959.

Community education in Cameroon started in the post-Second World War period and was pursued in a very limited sense as an aspect of mass education. It emphasized the role of women in community development. In Cameroon, as elsewhere in Africa, much of the household work, childcare and farming, are tasks undertaken largely by women while the men engage in trading, craftwork and hunting. The history of community education in Cameroon reflects largely the history of the role of women in the community. In 1944, the Colonial Office changed Mass Education to Community Education. Earlier attempts to teach domestic science to the wives of teachers at the Government School in Buea were not very successful.

In 1949, a female Education Officer started community education activities at Banso in Bamenda Division. The community education campaign was more intense in rural areas where the local population lived in poor hygienic conditions and far from domestic science centres located largely in the towns. By 1950, each of the divisional headquarters of Bamenda, in the grassland area, and Mamfe, Kumba and Victoria in the forest zone, had a domestic science centre, serving both girls and adult women. A women's institute modelled on United Kingdom standards was started in Bamenda and a second lady Education Officer was sent to reinforce community education activities.

In 1954, it was realized that the community education campaign was not producing the expected results, due to the laborious daily activities of the women who did farm work and domestic chores throughout the day. Thus, the introduction of community education in rural areas needed special campaign methods. The Education Officer for Bamenda, O'Kelly, remarked that the money provided by the Education Department was used for the purchase and installation of corn mills in pilot villages and the women encouraged to organize themselves into cooperative societies (as cited in Ojong, 2008).

The corn mills project became very popular and led to the setting up of 91 co-operatives with a membership of over 6000 women (Ojong, 2008). With the acquisition of more corn mills, new co-operatives were formed not only to grind corn but to serve as an instrument for women's participation in other forms of community improvement such as water development schemes and acquisition of skills in home economics and related subjects. During the 1950s, short courses for selected women became a regular feature and after the training, women returned to their villages to disseminate the new ideas and skills. Improved farming methods such as erosion control and the enclosure of farms featured prominently in women's education programmes. The innovative ideas became very useful in facilitating peaceful co-existence between pastoralists and crop producers. In the English-speaking zone of Cameroon, community education was basically concerned with domestic science, sewing, knitting, washing, cookery and housewifery, offered in the Government and the C.D.C. promoted domestic science centres.

Centres for Education and Community Action in Rural Cameroon

The place and role of community education in a changing society has been and still is, a subject of heated discussion in many African countries today. This is reflected not only in the changing conception of community education over the years but also in the shifting emphasis on its role in the development process. Conventionally, rural development has been part of the modernization paradigm, which equates development with four basic processes: capital investment, which leads to an increase in productivity; the application of science and technology to production and services; the emergence of nation-states and large-scale political and economic organization (Handelman, 2000). After independence, community development services existed only in the English speaking zone of Cameroon, with the objective of helping to raise awareness of

development problems and mobilizing the population to solve these problems through self-reliant efforts. In 1976, following the reorganization of the Ministry of Agriculture, community development services were extended to the whole national territory. In the same year, seventeen (17) Community training Centres were transferred from the Ministry of Youth and Sports to the Ministry of Agriculture and placed under the Department of Community Development (Amungwa, 1984). These centres were formerly known as Community and Cultural Action Zones (abbreviated as ZACCs in French), launched in 1970 as a non-formal educational system aimed primarily at dealing with the problem of rural out-migration of the youths who constitute a modernizing force in the rural areas. A number of pilot zones were thus created where farmers could acquire innovative techniques and return to improve farming in their villages. However, the ZACCs were not very successful as experiments in the teaching of modern agricultural techniques. The technology employed had little relevance to the situation of village farmers. The ZACC plantations did not often exceed 2 to 3 hectares and their production remained low. Due to the lack of well-trained instructors, regular funding, the centres went into a prolonged state of neglect and the goal of motivating trainees to live and work in rural areas was not attained.

In an attempt to remedy the situation, the National Plan for Community Development formulated in 1981 recommended the establishment of operational CsECA within the 5th Five-Year Development Plan (Amungwa, 1984). In 1982, the Community training centres were integrated into the Plan as CsECA with the specific objective of involving the rural population in the identification, planning and implementation of development actions. In the same vein, the National Forum on Education organized in 1995 placed a strong emphasis on relating education to the development needs of Cameroon (Ministry of National Education, 1995). In 2002, the Cameroon Government validated a 12-year National Action Plan for Education for All (EFA), outlining actions intended to facilitate the achievement of EFA goals by 2015 (Ministry of National Education, 2002; UNESCO, 2000). EFA objectives include equal and unrestricted access to and retention in quality basic education (to eliminate gender disparities) and equal access to education programmes responding to the needs of youths and adults for appropriate knowledge and skills for daily life. In an effort to create a more literate environment, Cameroon established Regional Educational Resource Centres that produce literacy material and also run local newspapers and

correspondence networks for new-literates (Aitchison & Alidou, 2009). According to UNESCO (2008), only 32.1% of adults (15+) in Cameroon are illiterate. The Fifth World Conference on Community Education, convened in 1987 in Nairobi and attended by scholars and practitioners from 40 countries from around the world, affirmed their commitment to community education goals (Akande, 2007). The declaration in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, and reaffirmed in Dakar, Senegal in 2000, indicated that educational opportunities should be extended to all without exception by 2015. The lack of skills necessary for gainful employment to participate in the economy emanates from the fact that the majority of women in the world, Cameroon inclusive are illiterates (Adelore & Olomukora, 2015). When more people have access to education and training, then sustainable economic development can be achieved in their lives. Arguably, it is through the acquisition of new skills in programmes like the CsECA that rural communities are able to take control of their lives and economically develop themselves and their environment.

The creation of CsECA nation-wide was intended to provide rural people with the opportunity to enhance their capacity for problem-solving and income-generation. The CsECA are grassroots structures of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and resources are provided by the State, municipal councils, and some NGOs. Currently, there are 107 CsECA spread over the ten administrative regions of Cameroon. Each of the CsECA has a Management Committee, which guides in planning rural development activities. The centres organize educative talks on life skills for women and youths, processing of local products, functional literacy, labour-saving technologies, home economics, craftwork, community mobilization and family planning. Short-term training lasting from a few days to several months are offered to meet local people's needs and aspirations. Long-term training in basic crafts or trades such as carpentry, carving, weaving, tailoring, traditional and modern dressmaking, bamboo works, electricity and computer literacy lasts for 3 years. Some of the centres provide training in agriculture and animal husbandry, enabling participants to establish modern farms on completion. The design of training programmes is often preceded by needs assessments to ascertain the priorities of rural communities. In the field discussions, this study found that commendable results continue to flow from the youth self-employment opportunity courses, specifically in the CsECA of Kishong, Upper Dzekwa and Ntumbaw, Lassin and Bonchup-Mbaa, as well as Balikumbat and Santa.

In 2008, the CsECA of Nkwen, Bamenda established working relations with GATSBY Foundation, for the financing of micro-enterprise initiatives like catering, poultry farming, hairdressing, trading, and documentation services. Through this partnership, 25 unions of farming groups in Mezam Division, with a total membership of 500 women, operating under the auspices of North-West Gentle Women's Association, were granted soft loans to the tune of 100 million CFAF at an annual interest of 10%. One of the CsECA in Wum, Menchum Division initiated a 6-month course in 2008, for the training of underprivileged youths in basic education and income-generating activities. As a result, 16 female Mbororo youths successfully completed the programme, sat and passed the First School Leaving Certificate examination and then set up self-managed income-generating enterprises. In agricultural training, most of the 18 CsECA in the region established demonstration units and community farms in partnership with the rural communities. These farms were managed by community members to facilitate learning and transfer of knowledge and skills. Some of the 134 youths who completed this training were admitted into the government agricultural training schools in the region while others started self-managed businesses in their localities. Three female Mbororo girls, trained in CsECA Wum were admitted into the Community Development Specialization Training School, Santa, for further 2-year training. Findings of this study showed that a total of 406 youths and 225 adults acquired training in different CsECA of the region in 2008.

By Ministerial decision No. 003/MINADER/SG/DDLC/SAAP of 9 January 2008, a new vision was envisaged for the CsECA laying emphasis on capacity building and village development planning. Within the context of decentralization, each municipal council area is expected to set up a Local Development Plan and Management Committee chaired by the mayor. This represents a shift away from centralized policy towards a people-centred approach whereby the local people identify their development needs and participate in finding solutions. The management committee of each CsECA adopts an action plan yearly to support council and village development projects. This approach to planning creates synergy and minimizes the waste of resources (human and financial).

Challenges of Community Education in Cameroon

In discussions with the directors and staff of the CsECA, the following challenges were identified: 1) inadequate funds for capacity-building and organizational development; 2) lack of a core curriculum and appropriate training materials; 3) lack of monitoring, evaluation and research; 4) lack of a coherent policy and legislation; 5) inadequate staff, infrastructure and resources; 6) lack of an appropriate assessment framework for quality assurance and national qualifications; 7) Inadequate attention to special needs groups, and 8) poor coordination of formal and non-formal education activities.

To begin with, funding for the CsECA is inadequate and erratic in spite of the acute financial needs and the crucial roles the sub-sector plays in national development. Funding is an on-going challenge and does not allow for the strategic development of community education programmes (Aitchison & Alidou, 2009). Overall, funding was seen as a major barrier. Community education is funded mainly in a short-term manner and while some activists were content to offer one-off programmes, others wanted to be able to deliver a progressive programme over a longer period of time. Funds are needed for investment in capacity development for both the staff and the rural population. The onset of the economic crisis in 1986 contributed to a slow-down in the community development spirit in Cameroon as prices of agricultural commodities, especially coffee and cocoa, dropped drastically, rendering farmers too poor to support self-reliant development. This notwithstanding, many communities have continued to forge ahead under a number of village development and cultural associations created by ethnic groups to implement self-help projects in their localities. In some parts of the country, schools are created by government 'on paper' and through self-help efforts, the local people do the best to construct the buildings. Without money, it is much harder to build social cohesion, good governance habits, and technical capacities that are needed for communities to plan together and agree on managing resources judiciously. Furthermore, the shortage of funding affects supervision and monitoring activities, especially transportation for personnel to undertake systematic collection and analysis of information on programmes.

Second, no core curriculum exists for the CsECA, despite the need to diversify curricula to meet appropriate vocational needs. Besides, the CsECA lack proper

pedagogical materials for the type of training they are required to deliver. Training manuals and pedagogical materials should be acquired for use in these institutions. The contribution of community education was particularly acknowledged in areas such as reaching large numbers of participants, frequently in disadvantaged settings; pioneering new approaches to teaching and learning in non-hierarchical, community-based settings; and in taking the lived experience of the participants as a starting point. In a more ideological sense, community education is viewed as a process of communal education towards empowerment, both at an individual and a collective level. Such an approach to community education sees it as an interactive challenging process, not only in terms of its content but also in terms of its methodologies and decision-making processes. Community development and community education share a common goal of the collective empowerment of community members based on an analysis of the structural barriers to people's life chances, although community development usually implies a dimension of organized action following such an analysis (Government of Ireland, 2000).

Large government-supported initiatives, give priority to a process of externally-facilitated village development planning, which almost always results in a ranked list of the village or commune-level infrastructure priorities such as wells, classrooms, health centres, and feeder roads, which are then funded with external inputs (GP-DERUDEP, 2010). Without capacity building and training, community-based organizations, especially those that reinforce social organization and build effective community capacity and control, will not function effectively. Unless these 'softer', intangible, but crucial aspects of community development take hold, the 'harder' aspects may have a little lasting impact.

Third, a general lack of a participatory monitoring and evaluation system is evident in the CsECA and there is a weak culture of adult learning and research due to the fact that the programme is under-funded. Most countries have difficulty generating straightforward statistics on the provision – on the number and types of programmes, formal and non-formal, and on the number of learners involved, and on what their learning achievements are (Aitchison & Alidou, 2009). Without national data showing trends and background information, it is usually impossible to make informed judgments on whether the provision of community education has been expanding relative to need and demographic change. Data on participation (and non-participation)

as influenced by age, class, ethnicity, language and educational background is very limited. There is also the paucity of information on facilities for the guidance of learners or on their actual experiences, motivations, expectations and opinions. The lack of substantive support for community education research in higher education tends to undermine the importance of the sector. Development action in dispersed ranks is not an optimal way of using scarce resources. Effective evaluation of the CsECA programmes is stifled because there are no objectively verifiable indicators. Hence, it becomes difficult to make comparisons at the local, national and international levels or to look at the effectiveness, efficiency, organization and management of the programme.

Fourth, a coherent policy and legislation on community education needed to guide and regulate the CsECA is lacking and this affects the sector negatively. Nji (2007) remarks that Cameroon's agricultural and rural development policies, as well as education policies, are segmented, incongruent and not as effective as expected. Government education policy must address this challenge, and strike a balance between the softer and harder components of community development to avoid placing infrastructure development at its centre, without building the necessary capacity to sustain the programme.

The fifth problem facing the CsECA in Cameroon concerns inadequate staff, infrastructure and resources. In effect, no considerable effort has been made to recruit professional community educators to reinforce programme activities. Rather, poorly-trained teachers with little or no knowledge of community education and community development principles are often employed in the system. The lack of well-trained staff in the CsECA to provide special needs training for the disabled, elderly and hard-to-reach areas constitutes another major challenge. Due to a shortage of staff in the CsECA, their directors resort to hiring workers to address some of their activities. This method cannot be pursued in the long term, considering the budgetary constraints under which the centres function. The need for infrastructure, resources and sites near to where rural people live and work is crucial to the success of the CsECA programme. The Village Development Committees and municipal councils need to look into these matters which constitute part of the answer to the sustainability of community education in key areas like agriculture, social services, economic development and physical infrastructure.

The sixth challenge has to do with a lack of an appropriate assessment framework for quality assurance and national qualifications. Moreover, the lack of routine assessment of community education and standardization of the process is seen as a major challenge. Generally, what seems to be viewed as the best model is ‘continuous assessment’ (itself governed by guidelines and regulations) in the classroom, backed up by annual proficiency examinations for the learners and by periodic reviews and impact studies by external evaluations of the programme. There is a lack of national standards, quality assurance mechanisms or national assessments of learning achievement and curriculum in non-formal education and literacy for youth and adults. An assessment and quality assurance system and national qualifications framework is needed to satisfy public esteem for certificates related to the training provided in the CsECA.

The seventh challenge concerns inadequate attention to special needs groups. Those with special learning needs including disabled people, prisoners, migrants, refugees and nomads, need to be catered for in community education programmes. The issue of childcare was raised in focus group discussions as a barrier to the participation of Women in community education programmes. While many community education classes can be held when children are at school to try to accommodate participants, this is not a solution for parents who are working during the day in the home or outside, or for parents who have very young children. The costs associated with the participation of people with disabilities, such as the need for social care and the costs associated with using accessible venues, were also emphasized in focus group discussions.

Eighth, formal and non-formal education in Cameroon, are poorly coordinated as these fall under different government ministries with highly centralized administrative processes. In this situation, what obtains, in reality, is simply the extension of line management systems downwards rather decentralization of decision-making. When responsibility for promoting literacy and adult education is devolved to regional and local levels, but without the requisite funds, resources tend to remain in the urban areas, benefiting only those who live there (Aitchison & Alidou, 2009). This has implications for the establishment of an assessment framework that can lead to similar goals in learning achievement. Another relevant issue is the identification of critical competencies required by different groups of learners.

The high cost and poor national connectivity concerning ICT and internet and electronic mass media also inhibit the adoption of innovations in the CsECA. There is a lack of a national database with basic information about resources available to communities, including people with expertise, and potential funders of the CsECA activities. Such information at the level of municipal councils, CsECA, NGOs and community groups is very useful. The database should be user-friendly to enable people working on village development planning to amend it, as the status of plans changes.

Prospects for Community Education in Cameroon

Notwithstanding the many challenges identified and discussed above, community education has many prospects, as one of the factors underpinning growth and development. Past policies to tackle social issues such as illiteracy, unemployment, underemployment, rural poverty, HIV/AIDs and environmental problems failed to fulfil the expectations primarily because they were not grounded on adequate understanding and prospects of community education. However, community education, if fostered, has many prospects for social transformation and sustainable rural development in Cameroon. In the first place, community education remains a mechanism through which mass involvement in learning activities can progress because it has the potentiality of improving rural people's ability to think and take action for planned change. Second, community education remains an important tool in enhancing community participation in Cameroon. Such participation can be in the areas of formulating policy, determining areas of priority in education, mobilizing resources and providing development facilities. Thus, non-formal community education deserves very special attention in view of its immense potentials in making community members responsive to educational transformation. Third, the quest for moral rectitude in the face of rising criminality in Cameroon can be met through community education. Such education has great potential in developing the process by which societal members can learn and work together within the purview of the Millennium Development Goals to identify community felt-needs.

Conclusion and Way Forward

In this paper, an attempt was made to document the fact that community education is largely marginalized within the education sector in Cameroon and to provide an operational definition and background. Community education, geared towards preparing

citizens for active involvement in the development of their communities was carried out before the advent of Western education in Cameroon. However, this approach, which is expected to provide opportunities for the acquisition of needed knowledge and skills for community development, has not fared well in Cameroon due to several challenges. Through discussions with key informants and observations, this study found that a high proportion of the managers of CsECA and past trainees perceived that the centres had improved the income-generating skills, economic prowess, and socio-cultural involvement of those trained in the centres. It is therefore ideal to indicate that community education has made some contribution towards the development of the rural communities in Cameroon. Considering its prospects for socio-economic development, the integration of community education and formal education is recommended for sustainable rural development in Cameroon.

Among the measures that could be taken to promote community education in Cameroon: first, there is the need for wider dissemination of knowledge geared toward a better understanding of the meaning and prospects of the CsECA. To achieve this, workshops, conferences and seminars should be organized regularly for professional bodies, extension agents and the rural population to raise the level of awareness of the value of community education. The potential use of radio, television, magazines and newspapers cannot be overemphasized in this respect. Second, more efforts should be geared towards promoting transformative research in community education. This research activity will enable community members to recount their experiences, reflect upon them, and determine ways to improve. Third, there is a need for collaboration between governmental and non-governmental agencies in promoting community education programmes in Cameroon, most especially in the area of financing the training and retraining of extension agents working with rural communities. Fourth, it is necessary to give direction and vision to determining priorities that hinder community education in Cameroon. In this regard, the Government, the private sector, and civil society organizations should devise training programmes to tackle the problems of unemployment and persistent poverty, deviance and criminality. This implies that educational programmes should be increasingly related to the social and economic needs of the various communities.

In cooperation with municipal councils and community leaders, a national strategy for the development of CsECA should be carefully planned, to ensure expectations for

these centres are clear. Given that many African formal education systems do not provide lasting solutions to the problem of youth unemployment, it is thus vital to adopt community education as a strategy for rural development. Universities should be strengthened as vital research and development partners in community education.

At a theoretical level, this study highlights the impact that community education has upon people's attitudes that can lead to income generation and social capital. The theory and practice of community education are given different emphases and interpretations by researchers in the field. While some propose a radical agenda which questions systemic inequalities, others propose a more gradual agenda that emphasizes discourse and dialogue in the learning process. The emphasis placed on 'excluded' learners also differs. In the Freirian approach, the desire is for a more just and equal society. This approach to community education gives attention to inclusive processes that happen beyond the conventional classroom. Finally, this study envisages a key role for community education, first as a provider in its own right which needs to be resourced; as an important voice, locally, regionally and nationally in education and training policy development, and as a contribution to theory building in community education.

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