

## Youth empowerment for national development in Cameroon: The case of youths in Buea municipality, south West Region

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### Abstract

Youth empowerment remains a major issue in Cameroon and the world at large. This study sought to establish the link between youth empowerment and National Development, examine the activities of the government in the process of empowering youth as well as assess the challenges faced in empowering youths in Buea municipality, South West Region of Cameroon. A cross-sectional descriptive design was used. Random sampling procedure was used to select the youths. The sample size comprised 60 respondents. A 5-point Likert scale was, where variables were categorized as follows: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Data were presented as means of each group of charts and graphs. The results revealed that there were strategies used by the government to empower youths in the municipality with policies that emerged from the study such as the Cameroon national youth policy (2006), Special youth triennial plan, Growth and Empowerment Strategy Paper (GESP 2010) even though they were not that adequate enough. Conclusion given was that such as financial literacy training should be open for all youths, public partnerships should be fostered between the government, development partners, non-governmental organizations, financial institutions and other relevant financial institutions to help youths to access information and capital were then given to ensure and promote adequate youth empowerment.

**Keywords:** Youth Empowerment; National Development; Buea Municipality; National Youth Policy, Special Youth Triennial Plan.

### 1. Introduction

It is generally said that youths are the leaders of the tomorrow. Thus, making the youths responsible and self-reliant is one of the government's goals. According to (Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary, 2020), youth is the time of life when a person is young, especially the time before a child becomes an adult; with the United Nations taking youth as those persons between the ages 15 and 24 years. (Meyer et al, 2017) conclude that the environment ought to provide opportunities and space in which self-actualization can take place. Similarly, an enabling environment provided by the government must be created for the youths to meet their needs in all these levels, especially in the domains of development and empowerment. Faced with increase in crime wave, many children from disadvantaged homes due to poverty, the crises in the North West, South West, Northern and Eastern regions of Cameroon among others, many young people have been finding it difficult to feed or even meet up with their daily lives needs.

According to (Titanji, 1994) most Cameroonian families are not only poor in terms of money but also in terms of psychological support; which parents and other adults can provide to youths to enhance their maturity and responsible contributions to sustainable development of Cameroon. (Villaruel *et al.*, 2003) municipalities must commit to making youth empowerment towards national development a priority. Today, there are 1.2 billion youths which accounts for 16% of the global population (<https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth>). Youth can bring about social, political and economic change if they are actively involved and engaged in political, educational, economic and socio-cultural

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activities, Hafeez and Fasih. In a developing nation such as Cameroon, with a median age of 18.69 years, (knoema et al., 2017) the youths can play a vital role in the national development. Thus, having productive national policies that foster economic development and youth engagement is deemed necessary, (Ali *et al.*, 2011). Strategic mobilization and empowerment of the youth can help the nation to prosper and reduce the rate of societal ills in the municipality (Salau, 2014).

Youth empowerment through higher education according to (Okeke, 2018) it can be realized through creation, research, dissemination, teaching and volunteering services to the community. (William et al., 2008). They further maintained that this can also be possible if properly and effectively pursued and complete actualization youth empowerment is always assured. (Okpete et al., 2013) asserts that to this end the educational experiences of youths have to be such that it is conducive to promote the acquisition of knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and occupational skills that are appropriate for maintaining the social status quo, advancing economic progress and developing individual (youth) personality.

The reduction of unemployment among the youthful population has become one of the most difficult tasks of the current era for any government. According to (Liu et al., 2014) young people who possess entrepreneurial intentions are likely to take initiative rather than rely on government employment opportunities. According to (Baba et al., 2023) entrepreneurship has been recognized as an important aspect of an organization and economy. (Godwin et al., 2016) asserts it contributes in an immeasurable way towards creating new jobs, wealth creation, poverty reduction and income generating for both government and individuals. Entrepreneurship is very significant to the growth and development of economies.

According to the International Labour Organization, a reduction in youth unemployment can significantly add to the country's GDP and accrue economic gains to society. By empowering youths, the high rate of violence and crime waves across cities could be brought to a mere minimal. Moreover, it could also give the youth a sense of patriotism and opportunities to achieve their visions and dreams.

According to (Anam et al., 2016) reports it is a sad reality that youths in the country are energetic and full of potential, but it has not been properly directed and channelized. It is undeniable that youth have a role to play in policy making and national development, but they have been kept away from national policies which hits their self-esteem, (Long et al., 2015). The damning consequence of it is quite reflecting on the ongoing multitude of challenges that my country faces and currently is confronted with, including negative processes of sociocultural change such as identity politics, high unemployment rate, marginalisation of the minority English speaking community, impoverished political and democratic culture, and a handicap economy. The level of youth engagement in Cameroon specifically Buea municipality is quite high at 59% compared to the youth demography in the municipality (<https://www.globalgiving.org/microprojects> reports). Thus, responsibility on the part of the government and local administrative officials is wanting. The government should encourage top-notch entrepreneurial activities that provide youths with innovative ideas and interest-free loans, organize awareness campaigns and seminars, and create opportunities for self-empowerment.

The government of Cameroon in July 2004 enacted a law applicable to local councils which mandated them to provide basic services within their municipalities in several domains. Since then, the government has fostered the process through other instruments such as the Growth and Empowerment Strategy Paper (GESP) of 2010. The National Commission Driven development of Program (abbreviated PNDP (Programme National de Développement Participatif)) for the French acronym was therefore commissioned to contribute towards poverty alleviation using participatory strategies at the level of local councils which also involves empowering the youths. The overall objective of the CDP is to guide the council, ensure a fair and balance development of the municipalities with youth's empowerment inclusive. Hence councils will carry out projects that are cost effective, meets the needs of the communities and youths with the limited resources that they can mobilize each year. In empowering the youths, municipalities may promote participation, transparency, fairness in the selection of investment and development actions.

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem**

It is generally accepted in most developing countries like Cameroon, that government policies alone cannot easily develop all the sectors needed to empower youths for greater empowerment. The role entrusted to the youth organizations is by visibly effects of government policies towards the youths, role, and their development and effectiveness could certainly be a way for national development.

The government of Cameroon recognizes the youths as not only the future leaders but also those who will continue in developing the nation. Besides being blessed with natural resources such as minerals, lakes, oceans, and mountains,

Cameroon also has many tribes which is a contribution to the diverse population, culture, and languages. The youths make up more than about 42.43 percent of the total population of Country (Statista, 2021). Public authorities have however been making sustainable efforts to improve the general economy of the country and the life of the youths through empowerment.

Youth unemployment as one of the major problems facing the country, affecting 17% to 25% of the population in urban areas. The country also faces youths idling and gallivanting the streets of major cities including Buea due to joblessness. Young people in Cameroon particularly in Buea municipality face strong difficulties in accessing decent employment as an attainment. According to (Statista, 2021) in the year 2022, Youth unemployment in Cameroon as of 2022 it stands at 7%. It is a source of enormous debate that has triggered a good number of public policy reforms since the 1990s to roll back the surging trend. (Camyosop, 2014). Despite the continual reorganization of key governmental departments especially during the appointment of members of government after the December 08, 2004 presidential election that set up the Ministry of Youth Affairs and the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training, it is worth noting that very minute inroads have been achieved in stepping down surging youth unemployment in Cameroon.

According to the (UNFPA, 2007), the African youths are facing the problem of inadequate economic empowerment. This low rate of youth economic empowerment in Africa at large can be recognized by slow economic growth, undersized labor markets, weak research organizations for policy alternatives, high population growth rate, lack of rigid educational system, youths limited access to capital support system etc. Despite government effort to effectively address the challenges youths face through formulating the national youth policy, the development packages, and designing long and short-term initiatives, it is worth noting that unemployment and poverty still persists among the youth (UNFPA, 2007). In 2003, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education started reviving activities for the youths by formulating a national youth policy with support from UNFPA and UNICEF (United Nations Children's Emergency Fund). The practical implementation of the national youth policy of 2006 in Cameroon is gradual and it is inadequately integrated into all stakeholders. Some major causes of disempowerment are ineffective justice in land administration, slow implementation of the youth development package, inadequate monitoring and evaluation of existing programs for the youths, poor commitment of leaders and experts to develop new programs and policies to empower youths, insufficient job creation, poor work culture and inadequate knowledge, skill and technical-know-how to perform available jobs (Hiruy, 2014). The national youth council of Cameroon (CNJC), which was created in 2009 as representative platform for Cameroon's youth, has been criticized for not effectively representing Cameroon's youth. It is said to be too dependent on the government and its agenda, therefore not able to improvise to take drastic decisions and effective tailored programs to suit the youth achievement agenda (Teke, 2019). Without understanding the defined responsibilities of the members of the organization, conflicts in appointments and functions, unrealistic specific time allocated to achieve set tailored goals to benefit Cameroonian youths, the national youth council remains a shadow of itself (Teke, 2019).

The situation of young people concerning participation in social life and decision-making is characterized by a low level of involvement. This can partly be explained by inadequate training of young people due to a poorly structured legal framework and the lack of an advisory youth council, and also by the reluctance of adults to involve young people in the decision-making process (John, 2016). This tends to limit the positive effects of government policies on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) & 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) which could be looked as promoting peaceful and inclusive society for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, build effective and accountable and inclusive intuitions at all levels.

Public authorities have however been making sustainable efforts to improve the general economy of the country and the life of the youths through empowerment. A great era of hope dawns on the country with social investments such as constructors of classrooms, health facilities, hospitals and roads, according to the Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (GPRSP) of 2004. According to the United Nations World Food Programme, over 55% of Cameroonians live in poverty (health, education, living condition, work affected) with 37.7% being severely impoverished ([Cameroon | World Food Programme \(wfp.org\)](#)). As reported by (Hafeez and Fasih, 2018), youth partnership and engagement in educational, economic and political sectors of the youth by the government in collaboration with NGOs, social groups and influential people can help in youth empowerment. Thus, this study therefore investigated how the government of Cameroon empowers youths in the Buea municipality.

## 1.2. Research Objectives

- Identify the strategies of youth empowerment for National Development that have been put in place in Buea municipality
- Examine the possible obstacles to youth empowerment for National Development in Buea municipality

- Assess the measures of youth empowerment for National Development are put in place by central government in Buea municipality.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Study Design

A cross-sectional descriptive design was used. (Borg and Gall, 2007), asserted that a descriptive study may often result in the formation of important principles of knowledge and solutions to significant problems. It was necessary for this study because the fact that there is less study on youth empowerment towards national development in Cameroon, no matter the words used in this study, the ideas were likely to be familiar to the youths with the main purpose of the study as is to evaluate the current practices of youth empowerment in Buea Municipality for national development.

#### 2.1.1. Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study population consisted of 60 youths randomly sampled from Buea municipality.

### 2.2. Data Analysis

In this research, in order to get appropriate results of data analysis, the researcher prepared A marking guide for the questionnaire and respondent code were prepared. Therefore, items with close-ended questions to solicit quantitative data were coded by assigning numbers to represent the construct to enable the computer to interpret the information. The researcher used a 5-point Likert scale, whereby the items were coded as follows: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. The data gathered was analysed according to the order of the research objective and themes of the study. Charts and graphs were also used to present the quantitative data. Analysis was mainly descriptive, that is, mean, and standard deviation.

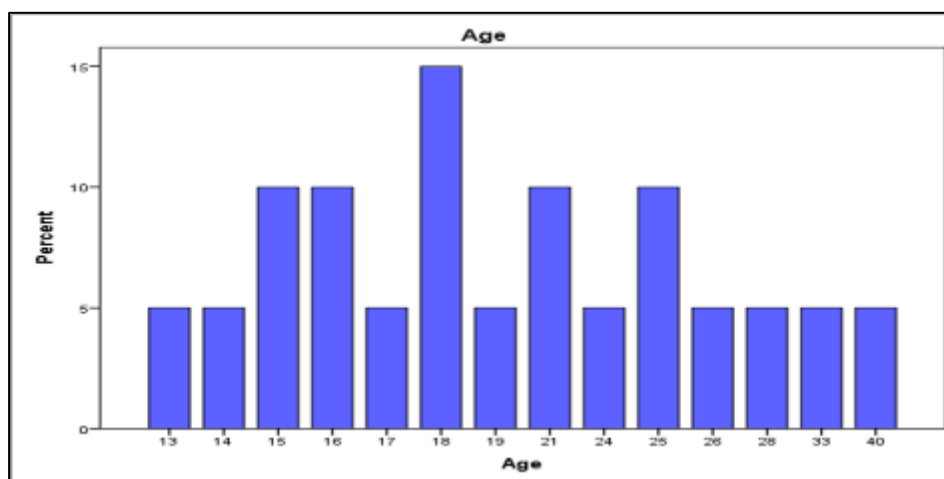
## 3. Results and Discussion

The following findings and discussions were presented according to set research objectives:

**Table 1** Description of sampled youths by gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	27	45.0
Female	33	55.0
Total	60	100.0

Respondents' population had more females 55%, table 1.



**Figure 1** The distribution of sampled youths by age range

Figure 1, shows that the sample data contained youths between the ages 13 and 40. Those 18years made up 15%, those 15years, 16years, 21years, 25years had 10% each. The rest have 5

### 3.1. Identify the strategies of youth empowerment for National Development have been put in place in Buea municipality

According to study results, an overall mean of 2.8 shows that, there are very few key strategies of youth empowerment for National Development that have been put in place by Buea Municipality amongst the five questions. A mean of 3 for question 1,2,4 and 5 depicts that, administrative authorities do not take time to explain the idea of youth empowerment, the population are not in support of the current national and regional policies for economic empowerment for the young people, a majority of youth are not aware of any national mentoring scheme in their municipality and the municipality doesn't take part in global entrepreneurship week, every year. A mean of 2 for question 3 shows that youths are aware of government loan guarantee scheme providing non-collaterized loan to youth lead business

**Table 2** The strategies of youth empowerment for National Development that have been put in place in Buea municipality

Response Options and Frequencies								
S/N	Questions	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Administrative authorities take time to explain the idea of youth empowerment to you	27	9	12	9	3	3	1.025
2	In support the national strategy and policies for economic empowerment for young people	12	6	18	18	6	3	1
3	Aware of government loan guarantee scheme providing non-collaterized loan to youth led business	6	9	15	21	9	2	1
4	aware if a National Mentoring Scheme do exist in your municipality	15	12	15	18	0	3	1
5	The municipality take part in global entrepreneurship week, every year	15	21	15	6	3	3	1
Overall Mean							2.8	

Source: Field survey, 2023

### 3.2. Examine the possible obstacles to youth empowerment for National Development in Buea municipality

Regarding the possible obstacles to youth empowerment for National Development in Buea municipality, an overall mean of two depicts that, there are a number of obstacles to youth empowerment for National Development in Buea municipality are not alarming. Responses to question 1,2,3 and 4 have a mean of 2 which will mean that, adults stand as barrier to youth empowerment ideas of the youth, a good number of youths have had some assistance on empowering the youth, youths are confident that they will succeed in what they do as regards youth empowerment. A mean of 3 for responses to question 5 show that youth are not actively involved in decision making. Therefore, possible obstacles are; Adults stand as a barrier, Difficulties in trainings and no active involvement in decision making.

**Table 3** The possible obstacles to youth empowerment for National Development in Buea municipality

Response Options and Frequency								
S/N	Questions	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Deviation
6	Adults stand as a barrier to your ideas about youth empowerment	9	12	6	15	18	2	1
7	Had assistance in any form on empowering the youths in the municipality	27	3	6	18	6	2	0

8	Encountered any difficulties in training for youth empowerment	6	3	18	27	6	2	1
9	Confident that you will succeed in whatever you do as regards to youth empowerment	12	3	9	24	12	2	1
10	Youths are actively involved in decision making as concerning the Buea municipality	18	12	18	12	0	3	1.33
Overall Mean							2.2	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

### 3.3. Assessing the Strategies to facilitate youth empowerment for National Development in Buea municipality

From the study, A mean of 2 stipulates that the central government in Buea municipality have put in place some measures of youth empowerment. A mean of 1 and 3 for question 5 and 1 shows that the youths feel that the government is accountable when they are not well empowered and that they hardly receive grant from youth empowering organizations. A mean value of 2 for question 2, 3 and 4 shows that the central government carry out training involved with youth empowerment and are capable of empowering youths and opportunities introduced by the central government for youths to learn new ways of being empowered.

**Table 4** Assessing the Strategies to facilitate youth empowerment for National Development in Buea municipality

Response Options and Frequency									
S/N	Questions	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Deviation	
11	Received any grant from any youth organization that empowers the youths	18	12	6	18	6	3	1	
12	Central government carry out trainings involved in empowering youths	18	3	9	27	3	2	0	
13	Seminars or workshops carry out by government capable in empowering youths	9	3	15	30	3	2	1.052	
14	New opportunities introduced by the central government for youths to learn new ways of being empowered	18	3	12	18	9	2	1	
15	Municipal authorities be held accountable when their youths are not well empowered	3	3	6	9	36	1	1	
Overall Mean							2		

Source: Field Survey, 2023

## 4. Conclusion

The study concludes that the youth empowerment positively influenced the youth's livelihoods. Financial literacy training programs for the youths contributed heavily to the establishment of sustainable production enterprises in Buea Municipality. However, the trainings alone might not be enough as more concrete action is expected from the government/local authorities by the youths for their empowerment. It was noted that the educational level was one of the key issues that contributed to the slow rate of uptake of any trainings on business skills and entrepreneurship thus bringing out a gap on record keeping. These trainings on financial literacy were intended to equip the youths with knowledge and skills to manage their business successfully, take up responsibilities if voted or appointed to post of responsibilities in their municipality and make sound financial decisions.

## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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