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**« Ce n'est qu'au début du crépuscule que la chouette de Minerve prend son
envol »**

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich HEGEL

“En tant que groupe social, en tant que totalité, les intellectuels doivent à présent passer de la description de ce qui ne marche pas – du pourquoi et du comment cela ne marche pas – à une réflexion sur la “société dans laquelle nous souhaitons vivre” et sur les moyens de la réaliser”.

CHOMSKY Noam, Qui mène le monde ? Québec, Lux Editeur, 2018.

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DEMOCRACY BEYOND ELECTIONS :

The role played by the Santa council in promoting citizen participation in local governance

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Abstract : Citizen participation in local government has been acknowledged to play a vital role in improving public policies. Participation enhances policies responsiveness to the population's needs and their quality, as citizens make creative and innovative proposals to solve development challenges. It is also an opportunity for the marginalized group in the society to take part in the activities of government thereby supporting democracy, promoting good governance and, importantly, fulfilling the global agenda of inclusive growth. What prompted this research was to investigate if the Santa council in Cameroon seeks the consent of its citizens when taking decisions at the level of the council. Making use of purely qualitative method, the paper opines that, the municipality of Santa has been implementing several specific and general pro-youth participatory democracy policies, aimed at ensuring the inclusive input of youths in the institutional and decisional processes of the municipality. It concludes that although there exist many avenues for citizens participation in local governance in Santa, a majority of interested citizens are largely unaware of the opportunity that citizens are supposed to participate in the governance of the council.

Key Words: Cameroon, Citizens, Democracy, Local Governance, Participation, Santa.

Résumé : Il est reconnu que la participation des citoyens à l'administration locale joue un rôle essentiel dans l'amélioration des politiques publiques. La participation améliore la réactivité des politiques aux besoins de la population et à leur qualité, à mesure que les citoyens font des propositions créatives et innovantes pour résoudre les défis du développement. C'est également une opportunité pour les groupes marginalisés de la société de participer aux activités du gouvernement, soutenant ainsi la démocratie, promouvant la bonne gouvernance et, surtout, réalisant l'agenda mondial de croissance inclusive. Ce qui a motivé cette recherche était de déterminer la commune de Santa au Cameroun, rechercher le consentement de ses citoyens lorsqu'elle prend des décisions au niveau de la municipalité. En utilisant une méthode purement qualitative, cet article estime que la municipalité de Santa a mis en œuvre plusieurs politiques spécifiques et générales de démocratie participative en faveur des jeunes, visant à assurer la contribution inclusive des jeunes dans les processus institutionnels et décisionnels de la municipalité. Il conclut que bien qu'il existe de nombreuses possibilités de participation des citoyens à la gouvernance locale à Santa, la majorité des citoyens intéressés ignorent largement l'opportunité qu'ont les citoyens de participer à la gouvernance de la collectivité.

Mots clés : Cameroun, Citoyens, Démocratie, Gouvernance locale, Participation, Santa.

INTRODUCTION

A very important pillar of democracy is the involvement of citizens in the political decision-making process¹. Citizen Participation (referring to the active involvement of individual and groups in all aspects of decisions that affect or may affect them directly or indirectly) has become one of the most fundamental characteristics of good governance in the 21st century². According to the UNDP³, when local people fully participate in their own governance, they have a voice in deciding on local policies, determining the use of resources and ensuring the delivery of public services, in short, making choices about their human development. By giving a greater place to citizens in public life, governance can promote equality among them, improve the effectiveness of public governance, or further rehabilitate politics and representative democracy, especially today in a neoliberal era where economic and financial powers dominate.

Citizens can participate in governance in several ways, but the intention is always the same: to influence and change one's environment. It is now broadly recognized that government action is, and should be, subject to citizen influence throughout the policy process. The change from "government" to "governance", which has been also noticed in the literature, implies a greater involvement of different stakeholders in the decision-making process and in the process of public policy implementation.

As citizens across Europe and beyond demand greater transparency and accountability from authorities, it is pivotal for governments to develop democratic tools that meet the increasing needs and provide citizens with complementary ways to participate, alongside elections, in order to make their voice heard in decision-making. This is one of the main components of good governance and can bring about direct routes of accountability with authorities, thereby improving public service delivery and generating better, thus more inclusive, policy-making⁴.

Moreso, Citizen participation in decision-making processes at all levels of government level has increasingly become fundamental human right and not a discretionary policy option that policymakers can implement at their whim. It is an affirmation of the right of every individual and group to take part in the conduct of public affairs, but also a part of the solution to poverty and social exclusion. The

¹ JURLINA ALIBEGOVIĆ Dubravka, and SLIJEPCHEVIĆ Sunčana, attitudes towards citizen participation in the local decision-making process: a comparative analysis, The Institute of Economics, Zagreb, 2015, p.1.

² See ROBERT H. Wilson, understanding local governance: an international perspective, RAE review, June 2000, p.52

³ UNDP report, local governance and Decentralization: programs, experiences and views from the field, UN publishers, 2010, p.17.

⁴ Nino Tvaltvadze, 2017. "Institutionalized Citizen Participation: Assessment of Existing Mechanisms".

right to participate is reflected in numerous international instruments, and is also enshrined as a legal right under domestic law⁵.

In many countries round the globe, it is local and regional tiers of governance who face the challenge of ensuring their effective implementation. Citizen participation requires trust, empowerment and a belief that involvement can make a difference. Failure for local authorities to practically implement citizen participation mechanisms, may further the gap between constituents and the democratic institutions that represent them, leading to a lack of public trust, and dissatisfaction with traditional structures and models of political representation, as well as with democratic processes as a whole. It is with this perspective that central and local authorities must engage, together with citizens, to ensure that the most effective policies and practices are put in place, and that the process is not only understood by citizens but that they have a say in its co-production⁶.

In Cameroon, variety of attempts have been made to address youth voicelessness and lack of participation in decision-making and governance. In 2012, the government adopted the *Politique Nationale de la Jeunesse*, or National Youth Policy that was drafted in 2006 to encourage, among other aspects, youth participation in governance and democracy. Paradoxically, many young people and youth leaders in particular, are still unaware of the policy's existence and content and of how they can engage to facilitate its implementation in their communities. Meanwhile, adults remained reticent to involve youth in decision-making bodies such as councils and Parliament⁷. The prevailing socio-economic conditions of youth characterized by poverty and unemployment, has posed a challenge to peace in the country. In the face of persisting youth apathy and increasing disillusioning, the government of Cameroon has increasingly realized that, it will not be able to conduct and effectively implement policies as good as they may be if their citizens do not understand and support them. So, it has been looking for new or improved models and approaches for better informing and involving their citizens in the policy-making processes.

The place where these processes begin is the local community. It is therefore within the framework of Decentralization that citizen participation in public affairs is taken an important turn in Cameroon. Increasingly, local governments are more and more, drawn to pay greater attention to issues pertaining to citizens participation, especially in the policy making and implementation processes. It is equally widely

⁵⁵ Initiative for Social and Economic Rights 2018. "Citizen Participation in Local Government Service Delivery Process in Uganda". Accessed from, <https://iser-uganda.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Citizen-Participation-in-Local-Government-Service-Delivery-Processes-in-Uganda.pdf>, on August 2nd 2021.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ PATIENCE A. Agwenjang, "Engaging Youths in Municipal Youth Policy Development (Santa, North West Cameroon)" 2018. Accessed from, <https://agwenjangpatience.wordpress.com/2018/02/02/engaging-youth-in-municipal-youth-policy-development-santa-northwest-cameroon-participedia/>, on August 2nd 2021

believed that citizens can assist their local government in determining its mandate, since they best know their needs⁸.

The municipality of Santa in the North west region of Cameroon has not been left out of the trend towards fostering citizen participation in local governance. This is particularly so considering the fact that, this municipality has represented a unique constituency in Cameroon since the inception of multi-party democracy in the early 1990s, as it has remained a centre of political confrontations between militants of the ruling party, the Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement (C.P.D.M.) and the main opposition party, the Social Democratic Front (S.D.F.). This has often led to the political manipulation of youth, as well as subsequent arrests, assaults, and killings. During the 2004 and 2011 elections, Santa had been a hot spot for both parties, who have accused one another of using youths to influence electoral outcomes through malpractices such as “ghost voting,” and this has left Santa’s youth vulnerable to political confrontations⁹. Despite the apparently high level of participation during elections, a cross section of youths within the municipality of Santa still feel excluded from the management of the affairs of the locality beyond elections.

The Santa council area which is made up of 10 villages, (Akum, Alahteneng, Awing, Baba II, Baligham, Mbu, Mbei, Njong, Pinyin, and Santa), is mainly populated by young people aged 15–35, who have little knowledge about the activities, functions, and responsibilities of their municipal council and officials. This reflected a widening communication gap between councils and other policy-making bodies and young people. It equally posed a challenge to the integration of youth into decision-making on key issues that affect their wellbeing in society, such as employment, education, health, agriculture, environment, and the like. Hence, there was a need to strengthen youth awareness and advocacy for the development, adoption, implementation, and monitoring of a municipal youth policy that would aim to address these very challenges around youth participation in governance and decision-making. This paper therefore sort to investigate if the Santa council in Cameroon seeks the consent of its citizens when taking decisions at the level of the council. In so doing, it will question the various mechanisms put in place by the Santa Council to ensure citizens participation in local government activities within the municipality.

Making use of purely qualitative method, the paper opines that, the municipality of Santa has been implementing several specific and general pro-youth participatory democracy policies, aimed at ensuring the inclusive input of youths in the institutional and decisional processes of the municipality. The Participative governance theory was mobilised for this analysis. If we consider governance as “*a process of coordinating actors, social groups and institutions, with a view to*

⁸ MOLOKWANE Thekiso and MUHIYA Lukamba, “Citizen Involvement in the Formulation of Public Policy” Research publication 2018.

⁹Ibid.

achieving objectives defined and discussed collectively”¹⁰, then the implication of a multiplicity of actors (including citizens) can only contribute to legitimise the processes and outcomes. Within the framework of participative governance, the Santa Council has created space for youths to voice their opinions, to monitor decisions affecting them, and to develop strategies to overcome barriers to their integration in decision-making structures. However, there are other mechanism through which youths are participating in the affairs of the municipality. Given that young people constitute a new generation of social, political, and economic leaders, their participation in decision-making and governance was imperative for inclusive policy making and community development.

I- THE SPECIFIC PRO-YOUTH POLICIES OF THE SANTA COUNCIL

Several Efforts have been deployed by the Santa Council in the past to Engage its Youths in the Development of its Constituency. An interview conducted with the former mayor of the Santa council Mr. Atanga Clement on September 4th 2020 revealed that, the Santa council in 2008 took the initiative to empower and include youth in community governance, the council partnered with the Youth Outreach Programme (YOP), the Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), the Welsh Assembly, and other development actors to develop a National Youth Volunteering Scheme with the objective to recruit and train young people in professional development so that they could obtain jobs within and beyond Santa¹¹.

The mayor of the Santa council had concern about youth empowerment and often assumed that persons over the age of 40 still experienced youth-related challenges such as unemployment and low participation in decision-making. Hence, he often disbursed funds to sponsor youth activities and invited YOP volunteers to train youths in the Santa community. These efforts attracted external support and funding; for example, YOP and VSO responded by providing several trainings on project management to councillors and to youth on good governance, advocacy, human rights, entrepreneurship, life skills, and behaviour change¹².

However, after the 2013 municipal elections, Santa’s Council was led by Pastor Khan Elroy Moses, the first C.P.D.M. Mayor since the advent of a multi-party system in Cameroon. Hence, all attempts to regenerate the Council’s enthusiasm to establish youth-oriented actions were met with several challenges. During this period youths were sidelined from the activities of the council. The mayor quelled down the efforts made by his predecessor to promote citizens participation in local government in the Santa constituency¹³.

¹⁰ LE GALÈS, Pierre, « Gouvernance », dans Laurie Boussaguetéd., Dictionnaire des politiques publiques, 3e éditon actualisée et augmentée, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po. 2010, pp. 299-308 https://www-cairn-info.proxy.bnl.lu/feuilleter.php?ID_ARTICLE=SCPO_BOUSS_2010_01_0299.

¹¹ Interview with the Former Mayor of the Santa Council, on the 2nd of September, 2021.

¹² PATIENCE A. Agwenjang, “Engaging Youths in Municipal Youth Policy Development (Santa, North West Cameroon)”, 2018.

¹³ Ibid.

A- The National Youth Volunteering Scheme in the Santa Council Area

According to an interview with the former Youth council president, Mbuh Derrick Ticha, conducted in Bamenda on Tuesday 8th September 2020, youth engagement in Santa was led by the Municipal Council in collaboration with YOP and Cuso-VSO (Cuso International merged with VSO). From 2010 to 2015, Santa received financial, institutional, and technical support for this initiative from diverse sources. Cuso-VSO consistently provided short-term and long-term institutional development advisors to the Council, and financed strategic planning meetings, training workshops, and micro-grants to single mothers, while the Welsh Assembly and YOP provided technical support. Other funding came from the 10th and 11th European Development Fund through two national programs in Cameroon: The Support Programme for the Structuring of Civil Society (PASOC) and the Civil Society Strengthening Programme (PASC), of which YOP was a beneficiary. UN-HABITAT also funded entrepreneurship training and micro-grants to youth farmers through YOP. Santa Council provided space for meetings, while YOP and Cuso-VSO provided volunteer facilitators and training materials and coordinated content development for the youth policy documents. Over 50 youth leaders volunteered their time and personal resources to mobilize youth participants for their engagement¹⁴.

1) The Composition of the National Youth Volunteering Scheme in the Santa Council Area

The youth leaders involved in advocating for a youth policy were members of the Santa Youth Council, identified and screened through the joint efforts of the Youth Council President and the Youth Officer for Santa Municipal Council, Mbuh Derick Ticha. Socio-demographically, the group was composed of female and male youth aged 18–35, representing all 10 villages of Santa and including ethnic minorities, students and non-students, skilled and unskilled workers, single mothers, youth with physical disabilities, and youth with different religious affiliations. Other participants included hundreds of community leaders, including traditional authorities, government officials, and concerned community members from all 10 villages invited by Santa Council to take part in the deliberations on issues concerning them and their children¹⁵.

2) The Activities of the National Youth Volunteering Scheme in the Santa Council Area

A succession of deliberative methods, including workshops, dialogue forums, action-learning and planning meetings, and town hall meetings were used to facilitate youth engagement around policy development in Santa.

¹⁴ Interview with Mbuh Derrick T, former youth council president of the Santa council, held on the 10th of September, 2021.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Workshops : Over 20 workshops were held on various themes with different youth groups, council workers, and councillors to boost youth leadership, facilitate inter-generational dialogue, and boost the technical skills of council workers, councillors, and youth alike. According to Mbuh Derrick Ticha, over 20 workshops were held with different groups of youth leaders, council workers, and councillors. In 2010, a Good Governance workshop organized by the Council's Youth Officer provided youth leaders with knowledge on governance concepts and practices, which they used to demand better governance during the periodic *Have Your Say* meetings with councillors and constituents in the villages.

In August 2012, 12 youth leaders and 12 community leaders attended a Joint Youth Action-Planning workshop with their counterparts from neighbouring Tubah Council where they elaborated a two-year Youth Action Plan (2012-2014) for Santa's and Tubah's respective youth policies.

In 2012 and 2014, 20 youth leaders joined a group of 330 participants in a series of advocacy workshops focused on Youth Policy Development and Implementation in 15 municipal councils organized by YOP. During these workshops, participants engaged in open, frank, and respectful discussions, and often sought collaboration to address the issues raised. Decisions were made through consensus with participants, occasionally with reservations pending the opinion of non-participants¹⁶.

Have Your Say Dialogue Forum : This social accountability tool was used to bridge the communication gap between Council, youth, and community members, as well as to reinforce mutual trust amongst them. In 2010, Santa Council organized periodic youth-led social accountability meetings with over 1,000 participants, including youth, community members, and traditional authorities. These meetings were either held at the community market square or in councillors' respective villages. The forums allowed youths and community members to evaluate what the Council was doing well and how it could improve the lives of citizens. Youth participated in three ways: (a) students were engaged in a drawing competition based on their vision for Santa; (b) some youth submitted written suggestions for improvements to Santa Council; and (c) others shared their suggestions using the microphone. Santa Council received a great deal of criticism, particularly concerning the absence of good farm-to-market roads, fertilizer factories, streetlights (solar panels) for security, and youth employment. Council, on its part, justified its choices and explained budgetary realities. These demands were later deliberated upon during council sessions, but most projects were rejected as implementation costs would exceed Council's budget¹⁷.

Action-Learning and Planning (ALP) Meeting : These meetings focused on using a Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) framework to

¹⁶ Interview with Mbuh Derrick T, former youth council president of the Santa council, held on the 10th of September, 2021.

¹⁷ Participedia, 2018. Engaging Youths in Municipal Youth Policy Development (Santa, North West Cameroon). Accessed from, <https://participedia.net/case/5176>, on September 13th 2021.

prioritize the implementation of projects in the Local Economic Development Plan of Santa, and to reinforce the project management skills of council workers, councillors, and youth leaders.

Upon developing the 2010 Local Economic Development (LED) Plan for Santa, the Council appointed councillors, council workers, and youth leaders from the *Have Your Say* team to participate in action learning and planning sessions focused on Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) in the management of community projects. This exercise aimed at reviewing the council budget and re-prioritizing activities for implementation. Deep reflection led the team to determine which projects could help alleviate poverty in the municipality, which could yield income for the Council, which would be sustainable, and how to ensure adequate budgeting for educational purposes. Most of the selected projects aimed to improve natural resource management in Santa. Youth leaders presented the youths' concerns and ensured that the priority activities selected addressed these. Overall, these reflections enabled participants to improve their ability to plan, execute, evaluate, draw lessons, and use learnings from community actions¹⁸.

Town hall meetings : These were youth-centred forums to deliberate on key issues to include in the Municipal Youth Policy, to define the implementation plan, and to determine progress and evaluate successes. Two major town hall meetings were held in 2012 and 2015, with youth and community leaders deliberating on key issues to include in the Municipal Youth Policy and to ensure it follows the spirit of the National Youth Policy adopted in 2012. The 2015 meeting was a review session that incorporated emerging concerns and actions into the Youth Policy drafted in 2012.

The meeting was attended by a diverse group of female and male youth leaders from all 10 villages, as well as community leaders such as the Mayor, Councillors, council workers, the Delegate of the Ministry of Youth and Civic Education, and the Director of the Community Education and Action Centre, a development agency under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The cohesion among different stakeholders was remarkable, as both the youth and community leaders took turns to make presentations and receive feedback on their proposed actions, perspectives, and prospects. Deliberations were quite lengthy and differences were resolved, but the post-2013 Council did not maintain their predecessor's commitment to adopt the Municipal Youth Policy developed in 2012¹⁹.

B- The impact and the challenges faced by the National Youth Volunteering Scheme in the Santa Council Area

The goal of developing and implementing a Municipal Youth Policy in Santa was partially achieved, as the Youth Policy Framework and Youth Action Plan were developed and reviewed twice. While the Municipal Youth Policy was not formally adopted, given that it was not a priority for the post-2013 council leadership, various

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

aspects of the Municipal Youth Action Plan were implemented, leading to a number of key outcomes.

1) The Impact of the National Youth Volunteering in the Santa Constituency

As earlier mentioned, certain aspects of the Municipal Youth Action Plan were implemented, leading to a number of key outcomes. These include increased employment, entrepreneurship, and volunteering in the communities, as well as a stronger perception of youth as credible and legitimate voices in community development conversations.

The pre-2013 Council often sponsored youth-oriented actions, and paid volunteer allowances under the Santa Youth Volunteering Scheme, adopted and implemented in 2011 as a response to demands for increased promotion of youth employment and employability. It successfully recruited over 50 volunteer nurses and teachers who later gained employment with the government. The scheme has remained functional in Santa since then, enabling an increasing number of young farmers and single mothers to gain entrepreneurial skills and obtain micro-grants from YOP and Cuso-VSO.

Mbuh Derrick Ticha made it clear that, this initiative equally inspired youths and adults to embrace volunteering as a way of sustaining community development programmes. It has also fostered a culture whereby individuals and groups are happy to dedicate their time and effort to realize various tasks in support of development in Santa. Youth leaders gained visibility and credibility as they were invited to join public deliberations. After the adoption of the National Youth Policy in 2012, Santa's youth leaders joined their counterparts across Northwest Cameroon to compile youth signatures to petition the Ministry of Youth and Civic Education and the National Assembly of Cameroon to translate the National Youth Policy and adopt a text of application to speed up the adoption of their Municipal Youth Policy²⁰.

The use of multiple deliberative processes in Santa did ignite youth engagement as it expanded their voices and choices. Their engagement with Council in support of a Municipal Youth Policy equally fostered the Council's use of citizen-centred and youth-inclusive approaches in their decision-making mechanism at least until 2013. Thus, the adoption and partial implementation of the Municipal Youth Policy constitutes a solid foundation upon which to continue efforts towards building peace, reducing violent conflict, facilitating dialogue, creating economic opportunities, and promoting good governance practices in Santa such that youths were meaningfully included in the public decisions that affected their lives.

The policy equally allowed for a broader understanding of youth priorities and actions, and, over time, greater social accountability. Continuous engagement in training workshops and public deliberations over the period also fostered solidarity among the youth, which in turn has reinforced their resolve to demand for more effective political accountability and youth integration in decision-making.

²⁰ Interview with Mbuh Derrick T, on the 10th of September, 2021.

Repeated pushback from Council caused a significant number of youths to shift their engagement through other channels and to mobilize for demonstrations and civil disobedience. In demanding for better services, youth involved in the transport sector stopped the payment of road toll fees. Bike riders particularly realized that they were paying road toll fees for a service they were not using and refused to continue payments²¹.

2) The Challenges of Leadership Changes

After the National Youth Policy was adopted in 2012, there was an expectation in Santa that a Municipal Youth Policy would likewise be adopted. Yet the latter was halted by the council leadership elected in 2013. This is a reminder that political processes are in no small part affected by the will of those in positions of power and authority. In a context as highly politicized as Santa, a change in leadership meant a significant change of direction and priority for the Municipal Youth Policy. This dynamic continues with the recent death of Mayor Khan in September 2017, and his replacement in November 2017 by Fon Samkie Elvis Ganyam to complete his term of office.

In 2014, Cuso-VSO closed down its operations in Cameroon, bringing to an end the institutional development partnership in Santa and to the accompanying financing and facilitation of social accountability meetings. One year later, YOP eliminated its support for Youth Policy Advocacy. This, along with the departure of the Santa Council's volunteer Youth Officer in 2013, left Council with no direct youth involvement in council management. This marked reduction in support posed a challenge for meaningful youth participation in municipal governance in Santa, as this type of engagement often requires dedicated human resources and financial commitment to succeed²²

The post 2013 era in Santa has been marked with youth discontent and poor governance practices expressed through an authoritative style of municipal leadership. Council has been disengaged and generally unavailable and unresponsive to citizens. Youth have clamoured for the adoption of the Municipal Youth Policy, but have been neglected by Council. They have instead been met with barriers to accessing Council and to influencing its institutional development strategy. In this climate, youth in Santa have continued their engagement and struggle to have a voice by participating in demonstrations and civil disobedience, despite increasing risks. Perhaps an illustration of youth passion and determination, it is noteworthy that as the political and civic space in Santa has shrunk with the new administration, youth have adapted and found different ways to maintain pressure and carry the struggle for youth voice forward.²³

²¹ Interview with Mbuh Derrick T, former youth council president of the Santa council, held on the 10th of September, 2021.

²² Participedia 2018. Engaging Youths in Municipal Youth Policy Development (Santa, North West Cameroon).

²³ Ibid.

II- OTHER PRO-YOUTH PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY POLICIES IMPLIMENTED BY THE SANTA COUNCIL

I- Apart from the specific pro youth policy instituted and implemented by the Santa council between 2008 and 2013, there are other statutory mechanisms enshrined in national laws which are supposed to permit citizens to participate in local government governance.

Indeed, following the re-introduction of multiparty democracy in early 1990s, a number of political and administrative reforms were initiated to empower communities to actively participate in the process of local governance in Cameroon. Citizen participation in the planning process was particularly desired as it provided an opportunity for them to engage in the making of local public policies and developmental programs alongside elected government officials.

Moreso, over the last decade, the idea according to which policy making should be the exclusive prerogative of the elected officials has been increasingly criticized. Citizens expect and demand more transparent and participatory policymaking²⁴ and denounce interpretations of representative democracy that restrict their roles to passively casting their vote. These criticisms have led to the promotion of participatory democracy schemes in which the ‘will of the people is determined through many other mechanisms which enhance the interaction between individuals of a defined community and local government in local governance processes instead of only through bargaining of power between elected representatives.’²⁵ Representative democracy needs to be complemented by mechanisms of citizen participation, that enable those elected to engaged better what are the needs and priorities of citizens, as well as to create a sense of ownership on the part of citizens of the services provided by government.²⁶

A- Pro-youth Participatory Budgeting and decision making.

Many studies exist which claim that the participation of youths in the budget or policy making process may lead to better public services, which comply with the needs of citizens, better decisions, higher quality and more efficient collaboration in using public money for public services. Mindful of the provisions of article 12 of the African Charter of Values and Principles of Decentralization, Community Governance and local development, which stipulates that “*local authorities or local governments should encourage the participation of all segments of the society in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programs and projects, through structured community platforms and other forms of participation,*

²⁴ DOMINI Alberto and CHICOT Julien, modalities of public participation in vision setting for transformative research and innovation policies: in depth case studies analysis, conference paper, research gate June 2019, P.1.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ International Development Department School of Public Policy, Local Government Decision-Making: Citizen Participation and Local Accountability Examples of Good (and Bad) Practice in Kenya, University of Birmingham England May 2002, p. 4.

with a view to ensuring the provision of quality services"²⁷ and in line with the concept of shared governance, the Santa Council authorities have taken steps to include citizens in budget and decision making.

1- Citizens of the Santa Constituency and Participatory Budgeting

According to Carmen Melana and Mahi Khallaf, participatory Budgeting (PB) is a process whereby citizens directly participate in the allocation of a defined part of a government's budget. It refers to the process through which the residents of an area, be it a neighbourhood, village, city or local authority area, directly participate in the allocation of a portion of the local government budget or the budget of a specific government sector such as maternal health, public transport, school, health centre. PB initiatives are typically initiated by local government authorities, frequently in response to demands from community groups. Participatory budgeting creates opportunities for educating and empowering citizens and for strengthening citizen-government relations. PB also helps to promote government transparency and accountability, and the responsiveness and effectiveness of government programmes and services. PB initiatives usually have a specific aim of involving traditionally excluded political actors such as the poor, women, youth and other disadvantaged social groups giving them the opportunity to directly influence local public spending.

A focus group discussion and one on one interviews conducted in the Santa council urban space on the 21st of September 2021 revealed that.

"Participatory budgeting by the citizens of the Santa constituency is still a nightmare. They have never taken part in the allocation of budget in any project in the Santa constituency; the council does not invite them to participate. They have never known anything concerning the income and the expenditure of the Santa council. The mayors and councillors of the council have never done anything to reveal the income and expenditure of the council. Because the council hardly declares its income and expenditure to the citizens of the constituency, a lot of embezzlement has been going on in the council"²⁸.

There is a controversy here because during my interview with the council workers, I was made to understand that the council usually declares the income and the expenditure of the council to the citizens.

2- Santa Citizens and Local Government Decision Making

The citizens of any local government are supposed to participate in decision making or public policies. They are supposed to take part in policy identification right up to policy evaluation. But citizens of the Santa constituency made it clear that they hardly take part in decision making. Most of them are not even aware of the fact that they are supposed to take part in decision making in their local government area.

²⁷ Charte Africaine des Valeurs et des Principes de la Décentralisation, de la Gouvernance locale et du Développement local adoptée par la 23^{ème} Session Ordinaire de la Conférence Tenue Malabo en Guinée Equatoriale, 27 juin 2014.

²⁸ Interview conducted with a focus group in the Santa Urban space, on the 21st of September 2021.

They think it is the mayor, concillors and their traditional rulers that are supposed to make decisions for them. The major problem here is lack of communication between the council and the citizens of this local government area. The council is supposed to interact with its citizens, give them in details the programmes of the council and organize debates with the citizens. It is due to lack of communication between the council and the Santa citizens that most policies in the area have not been identified and executed.

In the absence of direct citizen participation in decision making with the council, voting during elections has emerged as the only efficient mechanism through which citizens can influence the Santa council decision-making process. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted unanimously by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, recognizes the integral role that transparent and open elections play in ensuring the fundamental right to participatory government. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 21 states: Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot or by equivalent free voting procedures²⁹. The citizens of the Santa constituency usually play a major role when it comes to elections, especially municipal elections. They usually do everything possible to elect those candidates they think can provide their needs. A tough competition usually takes place between the Cameroon's People Democratic Movement (CPDM) and the Social Democratic Front (SDF). According to respondents in the Santa constituency.

"A lot of electoral fraud used to take place during election periods, this is because electorates always try to do everything possible for their favourite candidates to win. This period is always characterized by a lot of tension. The type of electoral fraud that usually takes place during this period is, ballot stuffing, multiple voting, intimidation and the buying of voters. Despite all these negative aspects, the citizens of this area always make sure that they participate massively in municipal elections in order to elect their leaders"³⁰.

A- The Citizens of the Santa Constituency and Volunteering

According to Wilson, volunteering is defined as *"any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organization."* From an identity theory perspective, helping others is an intentional act which reflects the person's

²⁹ University of Minnesota Human Rights Library 2003. "Study Guide: The Right to Vote". Access from, <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/studyguides/votingrights.html>, on October 6, 2021.

³⁰ Interview conducted with a focus group in the Santa Council area on the 22nd of October 2021.

attempt to validate the definition of one's self via the volunteer role.³¹ Volunteers played an important role during the event. According to the basic definitions, “volunteerism” denotes helping others without expecting financial rewards. Volunteering is an important social behaviour, needed to sustain civil society. Voluntarism usually occurs in the context of an organization, which means that it is performed under the auspices of particular entities. According to respondents during a focus group discussion in the Santa constituency. Volunteering has emerged as one of the principal mechanisms through which the citizen in Santa participate in the governance of the municipality. According to information gather during interviews;

“Volunteering is mostly done in the form of clean-up campaigns, keeping our environment clean is one of our major priorities. This is because we belief that cleaning our environment will do away with disease causing bacteria. We usually organize ourselves and try to keep our various communities clean, this is mostly done on Wednesdays. The citizens in this area feel a sense of commitment to their neighbourhood and are actively involved in activities to improve the quality of their lives”³².

CONCLUSION

It was in the year 2008 to 2013 that the Santa council made the initiative to include its citizens in the activities of the council. This was the initiative of the former SDF mayor of the council Mr Atanga Clement, this was done under the banner, National Youth Volunteering Scheme. After his tenure as the mayor of the Santa council, things did not remain the same, his successors decided not to include the citizens of this constituency in the activities of the council. Due to this reason, there has been a lot of mismanagement, corruption, embezzlement, nepotism and tribalism in the council.

Many scholars have suggested that citizen participation plays an important role in the process of development management. Participation leads to improved public efficiency by achieving both allocative efficiency through better resource allocation choices and managerial efficiency through improvement of the process of public service provisions. Participation also leads to effective policy implementation. In particular, citizen participation helps better identify and understand citizens’ needs improves local planning and budgeting enhances rational decision-making eases the implementation of decisions.

³¹ Richard E Adam and Joseph, A Boscarino “Volunteerism and Wellbeing in the Context of the World Trade Centre Terrorist Attacks” 2015.

³² Ibid

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