



## DECENTRALIZATION AND THE FINANCING OF ACCESS TO SECONDARY EDUCATION IN CAMEROON: COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS COUNTS?

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### **Abstract:**

Communities play a key role in educational development in many countries. In Cameroon, a number of legislations transfer certain educational responsibilities from the central government to local communities in line with the decentralized form of the state. Using the 2015/2016 academic year as the basis for assessment, this study examined the extent to which communities are responsive to the educational tasks assigned to them, and whether their contributions counts with regard to access to secondary education. Focus was on a sample of 65 randomly selected secondary schools in Fako Division of the South West Region of Cameroon. Principals from the schools responded to a questionnaire – the main instrument for data collection. Interviews were also held with parents, community leaders, councils and other stakeholders to complement questionnaire responses. Research data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and finding presented in the form of frequencies and proportions. Multinomial Logistic Regression Model was used to appraise the predictive power of community contributions on access to secondary education. The findings showed that community financing was little to inexistent and did not account for the relatively good access to secondary education reported. A major recommendation was for the government to effectively implement the process of decentralization by adequately empowering communities and other stakeholders at the decentralized level with finances and other resources needed to enhance the volume and quality of their participation in the achievement of state's development concerns.

**Keywords:** decentralization, financing, access, secondary education and community contributions

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## 1. Introduction

Inclusive and quality education depends on the availability of adequate funding which in most cases are highly insufficient. Where effectively backed by public support, communities constitute an important partner whose actions can profoundly shape access to education and the overall progress of a country. There is a wealth of literature on the activities of communities in educational development, including operation of community primary and secondary schools, maintenance of public school facilities and closure of other resource gaps through members' giving of their own money, time and energy. These initiatives, where substantial, have been shown to have positive influence on the enrollment of children, especially those from low income backgrounds. In Cameroon, a number of legislations transfer certain educational responsibilities from the central government to local communities in accordance with the supposedly decentralized form of the state. However, very little evidence exists regarding community responsiveness to these legislations, thereby necessitating further empirical work in that direction. This study examined community contributions as a form of third stream funding to secondary education financing within a context of decentralization; the goal was to determine whether such contributions count in terms of magnitude and influence on access. The paper recommends measures to guide policy and practice regarding the financing of secondary education in Cameroon.

### 1.1 Background

The participation of communities and other private entities in educational development can be traced as far back as the beginning of formal schooling. Until the twentieth century, the role of government in education was largely dormant as the provision of schooling prior to that period was championed mainly by churches and other voluntary agencies (Cummings & Riddell 1994). During the colonial era, many educational systems in Africa saw community financing in one way or the other. In the British trust territory of Southern Cameroons, for instance where the territory was ruled mainly through local intermediary bodies known as "Native Administration", the provision and management of formal education was mainly in the hands of these local administrative authorities. Between 5 to 10 percent of their annual budgets were spent on education in the areas of school construction, building maintenance, teachers' salaries, school equipment, cost of books, grants to qualified mission schools, etc. (Fonkeng, 2010).

While the role of the government significantly increased subsequently, especially after the Second World War, following a surge of international advocacy for the former to assume top role in the provision of education as contained in international resolutions such the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Right, the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child, and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, notwithstanding, around the end of the twentieth century, there was a policy shift from government as the main provider of education, to a renewed and stronger advocacy for a broad-based participation in education

financing. This was in connection with the arguments in favour of cost-sharing, including the belief that state resources were limited and competed upon by other sectors of the economy which also required fair attention from governments.

The 1990 Jomtien EFA declaration which has been praised on grounds that it inspired efforts to improve the quality of basic education and to find more cost-effective ways to meet the basic learning needs of all stresses in its Article 7 the need for new and revitalized educational partnerships at all levels – partnership with non-governmental organizations, the private sector, families, local communities, religious groups, etc. (WCEFA, 1990). The final report of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All that held in 1996 in Amman, Jordan for a mid-decade review echoed the 1990 Jomtien call for strengthened partnerships in the observation that as governments seek ways to decentralize responsibility for education, equalize educational opportunities and raise more funds, they need strong and innovative allies (Bray, 2001).

International opinions hold that if well implemented, decentralization of power and responsibility from the central governments to grassroots provides unique opportunities and avenue for inclusive local participation in national development and fosters a country's overall progress. On this ground, a UNESCO (1998) document which focuses on the use of basic education for the reduction of poverty and empowerment of the poor recommends decentralization of the functioning of all ministries and departments concerned with development planning and administration down to the village/habitation level, accompanied by devolution of authority, financial and executive power. UNESCO opines that *"decentralization is advocated to make the community responsible for the basic education of its people and eventually build a sense of ownership of the educational arrangements made to extend basic education to different clientele groups"* (p. 138).

In many countries, educational policies have been adapted to suit the decentralized educational planning and management models. In Cameroon, the 1998 law on the orientation of education disseminated the hitherto highly centralized educational authority and responsibility to regional, sub-regional and local levels within the framework of the educational community. It described the educational community as *"all individuals and corporate bodies that contribute towards the functioning, development and prestige of a school"* (Section 32). The educational community include the administrative and support staff, teachers, parents and students, persons from socio-professional circles, regional and local authorities among others. Members of the educational community are required in their various capacities to contribute in cash, in kind, or by other worthy means towards education and to involve, through their representative in the management of educational and other public credits at the decentralized levels.

Councils constitute the power hub of local communities; they possess the ability to influence the extent to which communities contribute to local development projects. Their educational roles and responsibilities features in a number of instruments which falls within the framework of decentralization. For instance, Law No. 96/06 of 18 January 1996 to amend the Constitution of 1972 states inter alia that *"Regional and local*

*authorities of the Republic shall comprise Regions and Councils...They shall have administrative and financial autonomy in the management of regional and local interests...The duty of councils of regional and local authorities shall be to promote the economic, social, health, educational, cultural and sports development of the said authority”* (Article 55). Law No. 2004/018 of 22 July 2004 to lay down rules applicable to councils also makes explicit the educational competences transferred to councils (Section 20 of Chapter 3, Part 3): in keeping with the school map, setting up, managing, equipping, tending and maintaining council nursery and primary schools and pre-school establishments; recruiting and managing backup (support) staff for the schools; participating in the procurement of school supplies and equipment; participating in the management and administration of state high schools and colleges in the region through dialogue and consultation structures, etc. (Official Gazette, 2004: 41).

The critical role of parents in the academic life of children cannot be overemphasized. Parents and household inputs have always constituted great backup in areas where government influence is absent or where public investment as reflected through the quality of infrastructure and human resources is inadequate. The Parent Teacher Association (PTAs) or Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs) and similar bodies are among some of the earliest civil associations advocating for the rights of children, especially within the school milieu. The basic rationale for the establishment of PTAs is to build parents knowledge of the importance of education and to enhance their contributions and involvement in the schooling life of their children. The formation of PTAs in all primary and secondary schools in Cameroon was authorized through Inter-ministerial circular No.242/L/729/MINEDUC/JMS of 25<sup>th</sup> October, 1979 organizing curricular and co-curricular activities in schools. Circular No.G.370/477/MINEDUC/SAAF/BEP of 17 November, 1987 laid down the rules and regulations surrounding the activities, membership, organization, structure, and functioning of PTAs. The objectives of the association as stated in Chapter 3 of the circular include to engage in useful activities of all kinds affecting the education and welfare of the kids, pupils and students attending the school by building classrooms, paying PTA teachers, supplying materials and equipment, and carrying out general maintenance of school property as well as assisting in ensuring proper sanitation of schools among others.

Education is important to the individual in many respects. For instance, it generates streams of future benefits including higher earnings. According to UNESCO (2014), on average, one year of education is associated with a 10% increase in an individual's wage earnings. Education also leads to greater production and consumption efficiency and better health of oneself and family. But the benefits of education transcend the individual level; well educated communities often gain much from the spill-overs of the accompanying benefits enjoyed by their educated sons and daughters. Such communities are characterized by peace and quiet, high sense of unity among members, better hygiene and sanitation, presence of basic amenities such as pipe-borne water and electricity, and high rate of progress. Secondary education in particular equips adolescence with sociocultural knowledge and skills which enable

them to effectively assume more adult roles in their respective communities. These and other benefits constitute the backdrop of community participation in defining and shaping educational processes that affect the wellbeing of their children and that of the community as a whole. It therefore goes that the reduction of educational oversight by the central government and trust of power and responsibility to local authorities and communities enables strong local control and active community involvement in education which itself lends credit to the integrity of educational processes. That is, besides being a potential guarantor for educational funding, community involvement provides checks and balance in educational activities and ensures that schools are characterized by attributes of good governance including participatory decision-making, transparency, accountability, effectiveness and efficiency, and equality of opportunity. These values in turn enable schools to better serve the educational needs of children and the society as a whole.

But the extent to which communities feel enthusiastic to give up scarce resources to education does not depend only on the perceived importance of the latter; in fact, it depends more on the attitude of staff and students towards parents and the general nature of school/community relationships. Onsomu and Mujidi (2011) assert that in majority of Africa countries, teachers appear not to accommodate community involvement or entice parents to become more involved. They provide very little guide to parents, uses less effective communication mechanisms and hardly visits homes. Naidoo and Anton (2013) supports this claim; adding that in most cases the families/communities are not given chance in doing the business of schooling, create site-based decision making that involves parents, and recreate a school structure that is less bureaucratic among others. Institutional behaviours of this nature present unconscious but strong artificial barriers to community financing of education; assessing the situation in Cameroon is a worthy endeavour.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Cameroon has as long term goal to emerge socioeconomically and politically by 2035. To realize this dream, the government intends, as stipulated in the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP) to effectively develop the nation's human resources by setting up a quality and inclusive basic education system covering the primary and lower secondary levels, and a quality upper secondary education based on a dynamic balance between general and technical education (Cameroon, 2010). Enormous progress has been made in this respect at the primary level with a surge in enrolment and completion rates. The same cannot be said for education at subsequent levels. Secondary education which is widely believed to provide the optimum setting to equip adolescents with the range of knowledge, skills and aptitudes required for effective participation in economic and sociopolitical development of a nation serves mainly the minority urban population while the majority, especially those in rural areas find it difficult to pursue education beyond primary level. The same situation applies to many other countries. The EFA global monitoring report (UNESCO, 2015) for instance shows that in 2012, a total of 62,893,000 adolescents of lower secondary school age were out-of-

school worldwide. Of this total, 21,098,000 (33.55%) were from Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA). Many achievement studies conducted in developing countries reveals that primary schools pupils, upon graduation, are able to demonstrate only a shaky grasp of core competencies. Children who do not proceed to secondary education usually finds it difficult to consolidate the skills acquired at the primary level and so are likely, in the short run, to forget what had already been learned since retentive capabilities at this age are often not fairly developed; they therefore constitute part of the population which is most susceptible to social vices, poverty, diseases, and other problems that threaten world peace.

In Cameroon like many other countries, inadequate funding and consequently lack of educational opportunities is the main cause of exclusion. The need is for the government who owes the duty to provide education to its citizens and who holds ultimate accountability for quality to commit more resources to secondary education to trigger the desired growth in the sector and guarantee universal access. The intended increase in the share of national budget allocated to education from 15.9% in 2009 to 17.4% in 2020 (Cameroon, 2010) is hoped will augment the current allocations to secondary education. However, this cannot be expected to suffice as the overall percentage still falls short of the 20% minimum recommended by UNESCO (2013). Communities, as noted in the 1990 EFA Framework for Action, are an in-country key agent for educational financing and improvement; their involvement can greatly enhance educational processes and experience of learners. More than the other actors at the decentralized levels, communities have greater responsibility to carter for the educational wellbeing of their children by helping them with the resources needed to gain access to educational opportunities. In other words, in circumstances where public investment is inadequate, communities are expected to invest in schools that can provide quality experiences for their children, in the same way they should feel enthusiastic to contribute in educational financing where government effectively demonstrate interest in educational development. But just how this argument applies to secondary education in Cameroon is what this study sought to verify.

## **2. Conceptual Framework**

### **2.1 Community Contributions**

Communities can be defined from the shared characteristics of members such as culture, language, tradition, law, geography, class, and race. Communities often display unity and homogeneity, but are also characterized by conflictive concerns and heterogeneity among members. Zenter (1964) discusses communities on the basis of three features. First, community is a group structure, whether formally or informally organized in which members play roles which are integrated around goals associated with the problem from collective occupation and utilization of habitation space. Second, members of the community have some degree of collective identification with the occupied spaces. Lastly, the community has a degree of local autonomy and responsibility.

Three different types of communities apply to this study. These include geographic communities – defined according to its members' place of residence such as a village, sub-division or district; ethnic, racial, and religious communities – those composed of people who identify each other on the basis of common ethnicity, race, or religious beliefs, and commonly cuts across membership based on geographic location; and communities based on shared family or educational concerns such as PTAs and similar bodies that are based on shared concern for the academic welfare of students (Bray, 1996). Community contributions therefore include inputs made to education by parents and other stakeholders as members of a geographic, ethnic, religious, or community based on shared educational concerns.

Community financing is based mainly on the philosophy of self-help and in many cases constitutes the use of locally generated resources to support educational services. It is very common in developing countries and especially in rural areas where there tend to be more solidarity and cohesion among community members partly because of kinship and other sociological reasons. Community financing can take the form of unpaid labour such as when mobilized by villagers to construct school buildings or clean school facilities, educational funds mobilized by cultural associations, community supply of land for the construction of schools, provision of building materials, direct cash payments, recruitment and provision of teacher accommodation, feeding, etc. Community funding can come through various mechanisms; some of which include PTAs as called in Cameroon and Nigeria, or School Development Association as called in Zimbabwe, or through community fund raising ceremonies.

While community financing is important as it increases the resources available for education and provides relief to governments of some educational responsibilities, it may contribute to inequalities in the distribution of educational resources as a result of the socioeconomic and cultural differences among communities which determines the what and how of members' giving. Also, in instances where communities are obliged to take much of the responsibility over educational institutions, such institutions are likely to suffer many problems including being poorly constructed (Theunynck, 2009) and ineffective. Mosha (2014) for instance agrees with Chapman et al. (2010) that in most secondary schools in Tanzania especially community based, the number of teachers is not sufficient to be able to assist the implementation of the increasing number of children that are currently enrolled thereby making the challenge even more acute. The issue here is that communities are unlikely to generate adequate resources that can ensure standard infrastructure and quality education. Consequently, their contributions should be viewed as complementary, rather than a substitute for public sources of finance.

## **2.2 Access to education**

Government officials, civil society individuals and organizations, educational researchers, policy makers and practitioners vary widely in their opinions about what constitute access to education. Many commonly perceive it to mean a measure of the proportion of the school age population that enroll or attend a given level of education

at a given time. Others define it from the perspective of inclusion as the ability of all people to have equal opportunity in education, regardless of their differences in social status, gender, ethnicity, beliefs, etc. While all these views appear to be meaningful, they are however limited in scope as they do not attempt to cover the complexity of issues which are embodied by access. Factors such as the educational environment, the physical conditions and psychological mindset of staff and students, curriculum relevance, the quantity and quality of materials and resource inputs, the availability of alternative educational choices, regular and punctual student attendance, school abilities to retain staff and students, examination pass rates and the number of years used by students to complete a given cycle must be considered in the conceptualization of access to any level of education. Good access to education means, for instance, the presence of an enabling educational environment in which students can conveniently learn. Such an environment must be safe, healthy, welcoming, friendly, and sensitive to the needs of children. This paper settled on the definition of access to education as a measure of the ability of all people to conveniently and effectively participate in quality educational programmes.

Mekolle and Fonkeng (2017) discuss two main indicators that must be examined when determining access to education. These include equity and quality. An educational system can be said to offer good accessibility only if it demonstrate sufficient presence of features that occur under these two indicators. Equity has to do with fairness in the distribution of available educational opportunities to all people. It implies equal access to education regardless of gender, socioeconomic background, or equal enjoyment of education outcomes such as cognitive achievement and higher economic returns (Psacharopoulos, 2006). Equitable educational system are those whose policies address social and economic imbalances that originally exist among groups in order to ensure that people from diverse backgrounds are exposed to more or less similar educational opportunities. Such policies include for instance, the allocation of more subsidies to the poor than to the already better-off rich people so as to enhance access to education for the poor and raise them to at least a minimum socioeconomically acceptable standard – what McMahon and Geske (1982) described as vertical equity in their threefold classification of equity. Quality on the other hand refers to the richness or resourcefulness of the education system, or its ability to provide all learners with the range of skills needed to enable them become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, and contribute to peaceful and democratic societies. While it is often not an easy task even for the most developed countries to operate inclusive and quality educational systems at all levels due to factors including individuals personal attitudes and dispositions towards education and certain sociocultural traditions, governments and educational authorities at all levels are nonetheless required to engage in meaningful actions geared towards enhancing access to education for all.



### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The Open System Theory (OST) constitutes the main theoretical framework on which this study was based. It was used in order to foster the needed cooperation between schools and communities vis-à-vis the education of children. A major postulation of the open system theory is that open systems are characterized by sets of interacting elements that acquire inputs from the outside or external environment; transform them in order to produce outputs for the environment (Daft, 2001). Open system theorists believe that organizations are strongly influenced by their environment which consists of other individuals, communities, groups and organizations that exert various forces of an economic, political, informational, or social nature. A system's survival and the effectiveness of its transformational processes is largely a function of the quantity and quality of resources acquired from the environment through the various interactive mechanisms that exist between both.

Schools are considered as perfect examples of open system. They basically use four kinds of inputs from the environment which include human resources, financial resources, physical resources, and information resources. Monetary inputs are of particular importance as they can be used to acquire the other forms of inputs. They include investment and recurrent capital and may come from the government through budgetary allocations, from communities in the form of school fees, PTA levies, donations, etc. (Mbua, 2003). Communities are an integral part of the school environment. Like the other stakeholders, they expect schools operating within them to adequately serve their interests, but often without corresponding resource support. The OST implies that school cannot adequately deliver such expectations while working in isolation, or relying on only few sources of finance. Rather, educational tasks must be approached from the division of labour perspective with the various actors viewing their actions as complementing each other towards more productive outcomes. This requires a change of community and staff perceptions from schools as social entities that are independent of communities, to ones whose survival depends on the goodwill of all and sundry.

#### **3.1 Literature Review**

The literature on educational financing reveals great differences in magnitude of community contributions vis-à-vis geographic settings and levels of education, with diverse implications on access to education.

Surveys of selected urban and rural primary school samples carried out in Cambodia in the months of August and September 1997 (Bray, 1997), and January and February 1998 (Bray, 1999) with head teachers and parents as subjects, and mainly questionnaire as data gathering instruments revealed the major sources of primary education financing in that country and the volume of inputs from each of them as follows: government (12.5%), politicians (10.4%), NGOs and external agencies (18.0%), households and communities (59.9%) and income generating activities carried out in schools (0.1%). Household and community financing – the largest, included direct

financial contributions made to schools, donations made by households, money contributed during fundraising and harvest festivals, labour and materials provided for school construction and maintenance, etc. Community inputs were noted to have major positive and negative implications on access to education. On the positive note, it constituted the main drive for some schools without which they would not have been able to function. On the other hand, it exacerbated inequity and inequality in the education system as schools in rich communities or urban areas received more inputs than those in poor communities or rural areas. Also, community financing did not improve the internal efficiency of education in the country as primary school dropout rate was reported in another study to be high (Asian Development Bank, 1996: 128).

A research report on the financing of education in Zambia (Kelly, 1991) notes the great importance of community and household inputs to the development and financing of the existing system of education in Zambia. Communities finance education mainly in kind, by way of self-help involvement in school construction, maintenance and development. Commendable of self-help projects is the fact that they have been instrumental in topping up and ensuring complete circle of primary schools by providing structures and facilities for the two higher grades – Grade 8 and 9. This initiative is said to have caused significant increase in the number of self-help basic education schools from a total of 7 in 1982 to 122 by the beginning of 1987.

At the secondary level, Verspoor and Bregman (2009) reported the vital role communities played in financing secondary education in Zimbabwe in the 1980s. In this case, the government had officially established education partnership with communities that empowered the latter to construct and manage own schools among others. Verspoor and Bregman notes that within a very short period of partnership between government and communities, the number of secondary schools expanded from less than 200 to more than 1,600 – the majority of them built by parents and communities (p.94).

Also, Ngware, Onsomu and Muthaka (2007) writes that in Kenya, during the period after independence, communities reacted strongly to high demands for secondary education in a context of limited school places and high cost of secondary education by establishing what is commonly referred to as “Harambee” or community schools. The existence of these schools had great impact on access to education: their proximity to homes enabled many children especially girls to attend. They also charged relatively low fees that suit the needs of disadvantaged households and children.

Lastly, the findings of a case study of Government Bilingual Secondary School Mutengene in Fako Division of the South West Region of Cameroon revealed that the school was sustained mainly by community financing. Of the 10 classrooms that existed for the school during the time of the study, 8 were built by the PTA and 2 by the broader community at the cost of 14,000,000 FCFA and 3.5,000,000 FCFA respectively. Before transferring to these buildings, the school was operating in rented premises (from 1998 when it started) for which the PTA paid the sum of 70,000 FCFA per month, summing up to 630,000 FCFA per school year (Mbua, 2002: 60).

The literature reviewed above highlights strong commitment by communities in educational financing. However, these and most previous studies on educational financing that assessed community inputs have not systematically shown the implication of such inputs on access to education. Also, educational research in recent years has inadvertently accorded very little attention to the role of communities especially at the level of secondary education. It was hoped that the focus and timing of the current study as well as the approach adopted would produce findings that might be more illuminating.

### **3.2 Methodology**

This survey was carried out in Fako Division of the South West Region of Cameroon. It covered a sample of 65 out of 113 secondary schools that existed in the district at the time of the study. Schools were drawn from areas that are typically urban and those that are typically rural and comprised a mix of public, denominational and lay private types. The study was set to determine the nature and volume of community contributions to secondary education vis-à-vis the other sources of financing so as to score the importance of such contributions on access to secondary education. To do this, the researcher came up with the following hypothesis stated in the null and alternative forms to guide the study: Ho – Community contributions have no significant influence on access to secondary education; Ha2 – Community contributions have significant influence on access to secondary education.

The survey team comprised the researcher and 5 assistants recruited for the purpose of data collection. Field work was done in the month of October 2016 and information collected was based on the situation during the 2015/2016 academic year. A Private Financing and Access to Secondary Education Questionnaire (PFASE-Q) was the main instruments used for data collection. It was administered on principals of the selected secondary schools who provided information on the nature of inputs their schools and students received from communities during the period under consideration, as well as the extent to which such inputs came in. Principals were also required to respond to statements related to the level of accessibility of secondary education including adequacy of school infrastructure and materials, availability of teachers, transition from primary to secondary schools, availability of school places, regular attendance by enrolled children, student academic performance, ability of graduates to adapt well in the society, etc. This category of respondents was judged to be in the best position to provide such information as they are the people who are directly involved in the receipt of funds and school management and operations. Interviews were also held with other categories of stakeholders (481 in total) among which were 378 parents, 27 community leaders, 5 councils and 10 religious organizations to inquire if they made any form of financial contributions to secondary education during the above school year, the monetary value of their contribution and whether they were willing to do more.

The data for this study was largely quantitative. It was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Standard version, Release 21.0 (IBM Inc.

2012) and presented in the form of frequencies and proportions. Multinomial Logistic Regression Model was used to appraise the predictive power of community contributions on access to secondary education. Computation of Likelihood Ratio Tests enabled the researcher to determine whether individual indicators had any influence on access to secondary education.

#### 4. Findings

Analysis of the nature of community contributions and the extent to which inputs were made revealed that most of the schools studied received little or nothing in terms of community contributions. Only 02(3%) out of the 65 schools reported that their children to a great or small extent received materials such as school uniforms, textbooks, etc. from communities. In a similar manner, only 03 or 4.6% of the schools received local community mobilized labour for building maintenance, campus cleaning, etc. 10 schools (15.4%) received community assistance in the areas of classroom/toilet construction and maintenance; 14 (21.5%) received offer of land from the community for classroom or school building construction; 17 or 26.2% of the schools received community mobilized financial support, while 24(36.9%) received monetary or material assistance from councils. However, a good number of the schools 32(49.2%) utilized the services of PTA recruited teachers, while majority of them 46(70.7%) received financial or material contributions from PTA – all to a great extent.

Findings based on principals' characterization of community contribution to secondary education by background indicators showed that principals' appreciation was not significantly dependent on gender, school setting and longevity in service ( $P>0.05$ ). Therefore, principals were almost uniform in their appreciation of community contributions to secondary education. However, it was significantly dependent on type of school ( $P<0.05$ ) as the proportion of principals (36.8%) from government schools that expressed satisfaction with community contribution to secondary education was significantly higher compared to 12.9% of the principals from lay private and 6.2% from denominational schools that expressed satisfaction with this source of funding.

With regard to access, findings revealed that in general, principals in their strong majority making a weight of 86.8% were satisfied with access to secondary education whereby 49.5% to a great extent and 37.3% to a small extent. For most of the indicators included, principals reported they were satisfied to a great extent. Accordingly, 51(78.5%) out of the 65 principals that participated in the study said all children who completed primary education in the locality were enrolled in secondary schools; 61(93.8%) said enrolled children are in good health conditions, with the same proportion accepting children attend school regularly and punctually. Many principals also agreed that their schools have enough didactic materials and that all students perform well in classroom and public examinations (59 or 90.8% principals in either case). In the same like, majority of the respondents said their school have adequate infrastructure (57 or 87.7%), enough teachers in all subject areas (53 or 81.5%), and that children enrolled had enough textbooks, exercise books and other basic learning

materials (53 or 81.5%). Finally, most of the subjects admitted that all children in their schools could demonstrate acquisition of socioeconomically required skills (55 or 84.6%); that all graduates could adapt well in the society or meet higher education admission criteria (57 or 87.7%), and the fact that their schools readily admit all children who come for admission in any of the grades (55 or 84.6%). Analysis also showed that principals' characterization of access to secondary education was not significantly dependent on any of the background indicators ( $P > 0.05$ ). Therefore, principals were almost homogenous in their appreciation of access to secondary education in their respective communities irrespective of differences in gender, school type, school setting and longevity in service.

Computation of Multinomial Logistic Regression Model revealed that the variability explained by the model was not significant (Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficient/Model fitting information: Likelihood Ratio Tests: Chi-Square=150.946;  $df=294$ ;  $P=1.000$ ;  $N=65$ ). The explanatory power of the model was very weak, 21.1% (Cox & Snell R Square =0.211). Pearson Goodness-of-fit test whereby the Deviance was not significant (Chi-Square=104.061;  $df=294$ ;  $P=1.000$ ) also confirmed the validity of the model. The null hypothesis (Community contributions have no significant influence on access to secondary education) was therefore accepted ( $P > 0.05$ ). The results of Likelihood Ratio Tests revealed that among the 8 predictors that made up the conceptual component – community contributions, only one, that is school receiving monetary or material assistance from councils significantly influenced access to secondary education ( $P < 0.05$ ).

Analysis of interview data revealed that 365(75.5%) of the respondents actually made some financial contribution to secondary education in 2015/2016 academic year, while 118(24.5%) did not contribute financially that year. Majority of those that contributed were parents of students who had to see their children through school by paying associated charges such as registration fees, tuition fee, PTA levies, supplementary tutoring, examination fee, boarding or accommodation fees, etc., as well as provide for learning materials, feeding and transportation. As such, the contributions made were mainly of obligatory nature and cannot be qualified in the context of this study as community contributions. However, almost all the stakeholders interviewed (446 or 92.7%) were willing to contribute or make further financial contribution to secondary education, with just 2.3% (11) of them responding in the negative, while, 5.0% (24) were undecided. It therefore implied that more were willing to support although less could effectively do so.

## 5. Discussion of Findings

This study made two major findings: communities contribute very little to secondary education in Fako Division as reflected by situation during the 2015/16 academic year, and access to secondary education does not significantly dependent on community contributions; it therefore does not count at the secondary level. These findings are at variance with reports regarding the situation in countries such as Cambodia (Bray,

1997), Zimbabwe (Verspoor & Bregman, 2009) and Kenya (Ngware, Onsomu & Muthaka, 2007) where community contributions to primary and secondary education development was profound, with significant influence on access, in terms of overall enrollment of children in schools. In fact, the tendency for communities to invest in education holds true for many developing countries especially in the years after independence. Lack of administrative capacities, inadequate public income and the need to evenly distribute scarce resources across all facets of the new nation states rendered governments incapable to fully finance the education sector even though they loved to do so. This caused communities to come to the conclusion that *“if they want education of a reasonable quality – and in some case if they want any education at all – then they must themselves provide much of the necessary resourcing”* (Bray, 1999).

Consistent with the above findings is the assertion that community contributions are more evident at the level of primary education, compared to secondary and higher education (Fonkeng, 2010). In Cameroon, this can be explained by the fact that primary schools are present in almost every village community in line with the policy of ‘ruralisation’ which encourages education, particularly primary education to be taken closer to the rural areas. Close proximity between homes and schools provides ease for community members acting as individuals or as groups to interact or mobilize valuable resources to support educational activities at the primary level, compared to secondary schools that are relatively far off. The expression of willingness by 92.7% of interviewees (mainly parents and other community members and organizations) to contribute more resources to secondary education suggests the existence of barriers that prevents them from effectively doing so. One such barrier could be that which is unconsciously mounted by schools themselves according to the clues provided by the findings of this study. Unlike public educational institutions that operate under semi open or open climates, denominational and lay private secondary schools in Cameroon (which also constituted the larger proportion of school sample for this study, 70.8%) operate with relatively closed climate and high level of autonomy. These schools often do not give room for community involvement in their activities and prefer to champion schooling issues on their own while parents of students only have to comply with fees and other related expenses. This probably explains the large differences in principals’ appreciation of community financing with regard to school type ( $P < 0.05$ ): the proportion of principals from government schools that expressed satisfaction with community contribution was significantly high (36.8%) compared to their counterpart from lay private schools (12.9%) and from denominational schools that reported same (6.2%).

Poverty, schools located far away from home and lack of effective communication between home and schools are some of the things parents in Fako Division most mentioned prevented them from participating in secondary school activities (Mekolle, 2012). Effective communication between schools and communities is a key to viable community financing. Therefore, in instances where communication links between the two are not strong enough to enable both parties determine how educational costs are shared at the decentralized levels, community financing cannot be

expected to be of any significant proportion. Poverty in particular remains a national challenge which efforts by the government have not been able to ameliorate. Rural areas are the most affected as they are often not represented in programs aimed at building the economic capacities of the population to enable them confront the multiple situations that affect their personal wellbeing and that of the society as a whole. The unavailability or deplorable nature of farm to market roads in most rural communities further exacerbate the problem as the agricultural based population often find it difficult to sell their produce. Available statistics show only meager decrease in poverty from 40% in 2001 to 37.5% in 2014. While urban poverty declined during this period from 18% to an estimated 9%, rural poverty on its part increased from 52% to 56.8% (World Bank, 2016).

## **6. Conclusion**

In decentralized political systems as purported to be the case in Cameroon, communities constitute a very important stakeholder of education whose realities and educational aspirations schools should seek to serve and who in turn must pull valuable resources together to close education funding gaps, or add to the stock of resources available for schools operations. Unfortunately and contrary to what prevails in other countries, this study found that community inputs to secondary education in Fako Division of Cameroon are both inconsiderable and inconsequential in relation to access to secondary education. These findings coupled with the strong expression of willingness to contribute or further contribute financially to secondary education suggest the lack of economic empowerment of impoverished communities by the central government which is a sine qua non to effective implementation of decentralization. The fact that the government prefer to finance schools directly through the education ministry concerned in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance rather than through regional, sub-regional and local community levels, and the existence of centrally defined process (control missions) to which schools are accounted as indicated by the World Bank (2012) gives the impression that only a minimum of community contributions including the mobilization of local resources is required.

### **6.1 Recommendations**

Secondary educations costs are significantly high and if not adequately shared may weigh heavily on one party or a group of financiers. In the context of this study, the poor nature of community financing of secondary education suggest heavy reliance on public financing and private obligatory contributions in the form of tuition fees, PTA levies, etc. Whatever the case might be, educational planners and administrators must bear in mind that all sources of financing are liable to depletion in the face of changing sociopolitical and economic circumstances. For instance, a state may cut the education budgets when it no longer prioritize educational development or in times of economic crisis as was the case in Cameroon in 1990s when the country suffered a serious macroeconomic slump that adversely affected public funding of not only education but

other sectors of the economy (see Lambert, 2004). Base on the literature reviewed and the findings of this study, the government which for many years has been pussyfooting on the effective implementation of the process of decentralization is urged to hasten the process and to adequately empower communities and other stakeholders at decentralized levels with finances and other resources needed to enhance the volume and quality of their participation in the achievement of state's development concerns. Because community financing can create inequality in educational opportunities available for children, the government is appealed to strive for equity in the distribution of educational budget by giving priority to schools in rural areas which are less likely to benefit from community inputs compared to those operating in rich urban centers. Principals need to be visibly present in the community and themselves sensitize members of the importance of education and their roles and responsibilities; they should seek to make communities understand that quality education and good schools trains citizens that will eventually act as development agents of the community, hence the need to complement government efforts with valued inputs.

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