

Improving Democratic Access To Drinking Water And Sanitation In The Decentralization Context In Cameroon : The Case Of The Municipality Of Fokoue

Hugues Benoit DJIONGO TAZO

PhD in Political Science, University of Dschang

General Secretary of the Fokoue municipality,

West-Cameroon

huguestazo@gmail.com

Abstract—Heiress of the sovereign missions of the State through the mechanism of the transfer of competences in the dynamics of decentralization, the municipality contributes, in the image of the central State, to the promotion of development, to democracy and to the good governance at local level in the area of its competence. In so doing, it stimulates a more or less effective participatory dynamic in participatory democracy or more specifically, in improving the living conditions of the grassroots populations. The interest of this work relates to the opportunities or the pretexts which are offered to the Decentralized Territorial Collectivities or which they seize to contribute to the local development and to the anchoring of the local democracy. The problem we are addressing lies at the very heart of the contribution of decentralization to local democracy through development projects, in this case those which aim to guarantee access to water and sanitation for all and to ensure sustainable management of water resources. The methodology which is essentially sociological and the empirical data which are drawn from the daily experience of the author in this municipality help to demonstrate that how decentralization offers local elected officials a window of opportunities in democratization through the association of beneficiaries in the selection of priority problems to be resolved for the well-being of the population as well as in the democratic institution of a Citizen Control mechanism of Public Action as a strategy for the sustainability of community projects.

Keywords — decentralization; democratization; project; development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Decentralization involves the transfer by the State of specific powers and appropriate resources to decentralized local authorities. It involves the devolution by the State to elected local authorities of the means and skills to implement public services. This means that local authorities, i.e. communes and regions, become fully responsible for decisions in their areas of competence.

Inheriting the State's missions through the mechanism of transferring competencies in the decentralization dynamic, the municipality contributes, in the image of the central State, to the promotion of development, democracy and good governance at local level in the territory under its jurisdiction. In so doing, it provides a more or less effective impetus for participatory democracy or, more specifically, for improving the living conditions of grassroots populations. The process of decentralization, which began in Africa in the 90s, has considerably altered the context of local development. It then led to a search for a link between local development projects and decentralization, with the implementation of development projects. The Constitution of January 18th, 1996 laid the foundations for decentralization in Cameroon by establishing a system of representation close to the people. The 2004 laws guiding decentralization in Cameroon were followed in 2010 by the first transfers of powers and resources to the Communes for economic, social, health and sports development. These local authorities are in a better position than a centralized administration to respond to the immediate concerns of the population, by taking better account of their needs and improving their living conditions. This expectation of decentralization has made it one of the most popular policies for public administration reform [1]. This popularity is largely due to the fact that this set of policies responds to the concerns and expectations of a large number of players. Central administrators hope, says Anton De Grauwe that decentralization will lighten their workloads and enable greater mobilization of resources. Local players see it as the beginning of greater autonomy and empowerment. The international community believes that this policy will result in more efficient and transparent management of financial and human resources.

What's more, the decentralization policy was already part of Cameroon's overall policy to achieve the MDGs, to which it subscribed and adapted to the

national context in 2003 through the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), and in 2009 [2] through the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP), in which it revised its development objectives downwards and extended the deadline for achieving the MDGs in Cameroon by 5 years, until 2020. However, Cameroon's failure to achieve the MDGs has not prevented it from joining the MDGs since 2015. Indeed, on August 2, 2015, 193 countries approved the 17 goals [3], including Cameroon. These SDGs must be achieved by all UN member states by 2030. Localizing the Agenda 2030 means not only integrating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the design, implementation and monitoring of local development policies and strategies, but above all ensuring that central Governments take into account the needs and expectations of Local Authorities during the development of these policies [4]. This means that all countries are jointly called upon to meet the planet's urgent challenges. The State of Cameroon is also called upon to achieve these objectives at national level. At local level, municipalities are not excluded from this vision, as we shall demonstrate here by taking the case of the Commune of Fokoue in West Cameroon. The point of this work is not to list all the municipalities in Cameroon, because although this would be more edifying, it would be tedious and would drown out the scope of the results. Instead, our focus is on the opportunities or pretexts that decentralized local authorities have or seize to contribute to local development and the establishment of local democracy. The population of Fokoue in the context of improving access to drinking water and sanitation, in interaction with the Commune of Fokoue, one of the 40 municipalities of West Cameroon, will serve as an illustration. With this in mind, the issue we are tackling lies at the very heart of decentralization's contribution to local democracy through development projects, in this case those aimed at guaranteeing access to water and sanitation for all, and ensuring sustainable management of water resources. It is based on the following question: How does a municipality such as Fokoue, in West Cameroon, contribute through development projects to the revitalization of local democracy?

The idea of a municipality's contribution to local democratization through development projects, such as improving access to water and sanitation, is at the heart of the analysis of public action taking place at local level that is so popular in some public policy analyses [5]. According to the tradition of the sociology of public problems, Hassenteufel [6], who structures our analysis in this way, envisages the involvement of project beneficiaries in the transition from a social problem to a public problem at the municipal level, through the labeling process that contributes to its construction and placing on the agenda [7]. The agenda-setting model and constructivist analysis are the approaches that structure this reflection. Our article is also based on a qualitative survey conducted in the municipality of Fokoue, from October 2017 to May

2023, to which we will associate our daily experience in that municipality as civil servant.

II. THE DEMOCRATIZATION THROUGH THE INVOLVEMENT OF BENEFICIARIES IN THE SELECTION OF THE PROBLEM OF ACCESS TO DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF FOKOUE

Understood as a political process of redistribution and relocation of power within society, successful decentralization requires a change in the way public affairs are managed and in the role of each player. One of the first tasks to be carried out to ensure the success of the decentralization process is to understand and make intelligible the interplay of actors, so as to better take it into account in the future distribution of powers [8].

This is the aim of this section. One of the expectations and strategies of the various social groups with regard to decentralization should make it possible to better define the framework of intervention of the public authorities and to create the conditions for a better exercise of local citizenship. At the same time, as part of the participatory governance dynamic, the evolving relationship between local authorities and these players, which may include the private sector, NGOs, various civil society associations, traditional structures and, of course, donors, needs to be better understood. Indeed, no problem is intrinsically public, due to specific properties: there is no "objective", measurable threshold (corresponding, for example, to a number n of people affected by a problem), above which a problem becomes a matter of collective concern. Public policy presupposes the existence of one (or more) problem(s) to be resolved. This rather trivial statement leads us to focus on the problems that are the starting point of a public policy, which in a way from its upstream component, and whose analysis ultimately proves indispensable for understanding the whole process of constructing the public action that is linked to it, and which leads to participatory and transparent governance as one of the conditions for the existence of local democracy. Thus, in the municipality of Fokoue, the definition of the problem of access to drinking water and sanitation in the municipality of Fokoue obeys a selection process, the materiality of which has been assessed by means of its municipal strategy for access to water and sanitation, drawn up in a concerted manner.

A. *The selection process for the problem of access to drinking water and sanitation in Fokoue: a participatory selection process.*

The first question for the analyst is how and why a problem becomes an object of attention for public authorities [6]. The first answer, proposed in particular by the policy sciences, stresses the collective nature of a problem and its socio-economic importance. From this perspective, the emphasis is on the identification of problems by public authorities and experts. This is

an “objectivist” conception, challenged by constructivist sociologists from the 1960s onwards, who emphasized that any problem is likely to become a public problem when actors define it as such.

In the case of the municipality of Fokoue, the identification of the problem can be analyzed in three stages. Firstly, the municipal development plan seems to have served as a lever for identifying the drinking water problem in Fokoue. In this document, all 22 villages in the municipality express a need for access to drinking water. The process of drawing up this document calls for a participatory approach in three diagnostic stages: the Diagnosis of the Communal Institution, the Diagnosis of the Communal Urban Space and the Participatory Diagnosis at Village Level. The latter requires a methodological approach to data collection that takes into account the need to listen to the entire population of a given community, regardless of political, ethnic, philosophical or religious considerations. The purpose of the diagnostic stage is to help the municipal council and local residents identify all the potentialities and constraints of their environment, and to give them a new vision of their community that encourages them to take action. In the following phases, the diagnosis leads to the identification and analysis of solutions, the formulation of actions to be undertaken and the proposal of priority actions. In many cases, the diagnosis is carried out under the aegis of the municipal council, in close consultation with the entire population of the commune and all the groups, NGOs and associations involved in the commune's economic and social life. The participatory methods chosen for the diagnosis are those that facilitate the involvement of the largest possible number of commune residents, including sensitive groups such as women, young people and the elderly. By listening to the beneficiaries and identifying their priority needs through this planning document, which is binding on the Mayor. Based on the strengths and weaknesses identified in the diagnostic phase, this participatory exercise consists of reaching a consensus in each village and sector on the strengths (assets) to be prioritized and the most urgent constraints to be overcome. This translates into the identification of projects to be included in the plan, which are prioritized according to the consensus reached and mentioned above.

The acceptance and rational use of this document becomes an indicator of respect for the will of the people, which leads us to think of democratic governance. In addition to this planning document, the second factor is the political context marked by the re-election of a mayor to head this municipality, whose electoral contours made it possible to gather the grievances of the population during the municipal campaign in October 2012, and again in January-February 2020. The tour to contact and thank the electorate in 2012 and the process of updating this document, launched in November 2019, have also renewed this concern of the people. The aggregation of all these requests enables the local elected official to continue to seek funding to solve this problem of access to drinking water. Thirdly, the Mayor of the Commune of Fokoue seized the opportunities that

presented themselves, including the offer made by the European Union and ERA-Cameroon to help the people of this commune gain access to drinking water and sanitation. It is this opportunity in particular that ultimately seems to have helped this municipality to better formulate its problem of access to drinking water and sanitation. Indeed, through this funding, the commune of Fokoue drew up an in-depth diagnosis of its potential and constraints in terms of access to drinking water and sanitation [9]. This study was reinforced by the Citizen Control of Public Action carried out by the commune with the support of the National Program for Participatory Development. These diagnoses show that the proportion of the population who are dissatisfied is 62.5%. The main causes of dissatisfaction are insufficient water supply points, poor water quality and the remoteness of water supply points. The lack or slowness of maintenance in the event of breakdown is also cited, but to a lesser extent. The areas for change arising from the above observations are improving the supply of drinking water and sustainable management of water infrastructures [10].

It is in the light of these challenges that the municipality of Fokoue is now better formulating its strategy for access to drinking water and sanitation. The willingness of a local elected official to offer citizens channels for expressing their needs, assessing the actions taken and formulating their expectations is an indicator of democratic management, as desired by the central government in its vision of a decentralized unitary state.

B. A drawing up a municipal strategy for access to drinking water and sanitation as an instrument of democratization through the promotion of participatory development

The implementation of decentralization must be conceived as a genuine policy for the development and enhancement of local potential, through the territorialization of public policies. To this end, article 5 paragraph 2 of law no. 2019/024 of December 24, 2019 on the General Code for Decentralized Territorial Authorities clearly states: “Decentralization constitutes the fundamental axis for promoting development, democracy and good governance at local level”.¹ The main challenges of this political strategy are: the entrenchment and deepening of local democracy, local development, good governance. The municipal strategy for access to drinking water and sanitation in the Commune of Fokoue is in line with this vision and contributes to the establishment of real democracy at local level.

Indeed, in response to the shortcomings identified in the existing equipment and infrastructure and the current operating system of the water and sanitation service, a municipal strategy was drawn up, taking into account all the available resources, stakeholders, opportunities and constraints of the locality and the

sectors concerned, to propose guidelines accompanied by an action plan covering the period 2018-2035 [9]. This strategy has provided the commune with a realistic and pragmatic programming document for the water and sanitation sector, clearly highlighting the various areas for improvement and actions to be taken to achieve sustainable development objectives at commune level.

The action plan drawn up is consistent with the Commune's development vision, as presented in the Commune de Fokoue's municipal development plan and the objectives set by the municipal team during their term of office. This strategy also takes into account the needs of the local population and stakeholders expressed during the consultation process carried out during the diagnosis. "Water is life" is a popular saying, but sanitation is dignity. This concerted municipal strategy for access to water and sanitation combines the actions to be implemented in the short, medium and long term to achieve the goal of universal access to drinking water in the commune of Fokoue, as well as household coverage, from public facilities to a sanitation service that takes into account all elements of the sanitation value chain at plot level.

The implementation of decentralization must be conceived as a genuine policy for the development and enhancement of territorial potential, through the territorialization of public policies. To this end, article 5 paragraph 2 of law no. 2019/024 of December 24, 2019 on the General Code for Decentralized Territorial Authorities clearly states: "Decentralization constitutes the fundamental axis for promoting development, democracy and good governance at local level." The main challenges of this political strategy are: the entrenchment and deepening of local democracy, local development and good governance. The municipal strategy for access to drinking water and sanitation in the Commune of Fokoue is in line with this vision and contributes to the establishment of real democracy at local level.

Indeed, in response to the shortcomings identified in the existing equipment and infrastructure and the current operating system of the water and sanitation service, a municipal strategy was drawn up, taking into account all the available resources, stakeholders, opportunities and constraints of the locality and the sectors concerned, to propose guidelines accompanied by an action plan covering the period 2018-2035 [9]. This strategy has provided the commune with a realistic and pragmatic programming document for the water and sanitation sector, clearly highlighting the various areas for improvement and actions to be taken to achieve sustainable development objectives at commune level.

The action plan drawn up is consistent with the Commune's development vision, as presented in the Fokoue's communal development plan (PCD) and the objectives set by the municipal team during their term of office. This strategy also takes into account the needs of the local population and stakeholders expressed during the consultation process carried out during the diagnosis. "Water is life" is a popular saying, but sanitation is dignity. This concerted municipal

strategy for access to water and sanitation combines the actions to be implemented in the short, medium and long term to achieve the goal of universal access to drinking water in the commune of Fokoue, as well as household coverage, from public facilities to a sanitation service that takes into account all elements of the sanitation value chain at the plot level.

This strategy is broken down into 03 phases, starting from an initial situation in 2018, with deadlines for the 2018-2023 period in the short term, the 2023-2028 period in the medium term, and 2028-2035 in the long term.

In reality, the history of decentralization, both as a movement and as an institution, creates particular constraints, practices and references among local players. This history should not, however, be studied for its own sake: it only makes sense in terms of the link between "the logics of constitution" and the analysis of "contemporary public policies" [11]. What's more, while historical study - however modest - enables us to highlight practices, we must not underestimate the ability of actors to *reconstruct* history in order to justify their present. In this respect, references to the past are a vital reservoir of meaning for legitimizing - or denying - current political actions.

We need to distinguish between the English and French models if we are to understand the basis on which more recent models have been built. This distinction does not invalidate the fact that it is oversimplifying if used alone. Unlike the Anglo-Saxon colonies, which have implemented the "*autonomous model*", France has preferred an "integrating" model of central-local relations. In the autonomous model, central and local government are seen, simply put, as relatively autonomous units of government. The state drives and arbitrates local activities, but does not interfere in their management. The "*British-African style of government*" is not an imitation of the British local model, but an adaptation of its principles: representative councils, separate budgets, local financing laws. In the integration model, central and local government are seen as parts of the same whole: the state. There is constant adjustment and flexibility between the two. In particular, taxes are raised by the central State and redistributed to local authorities. The State is therefore much more interventionist than in the previous model. In the face of decentralization, English-speaking countries may have seemed better equipped, as they had fewer legal and mental barriers to overcome. For example, local constituencies are larger in English-speaking countries than in French-speaking ones.

Facing to decentralization, English-speaking countries may have seemed better equipped, as they had fewer legal and mental barriers to overcome. For example, local constituencies are larger in English-speaking countries than in French-speaking countries, which are more marked by small communes. As a result, English-speaking countries have had more viable local units from the outset, as they are potentially more autonomous. On the other hand, the flexibility of the relationship between the central state and local units has led to an analysis of the French

model in terms of "center-periphery" relations, which is difficult to shake off.

This ambiguous relationship led French "notables" to adopt a defensive attitude towards the "center". This reaction was particularly strong because these actors felt more or less clearly that any change in the organization of the territory was a challenge to the powers of influence of elected representatives. This theme of "powers of influence" is very often taken up in connection with political games in Africa, to stigmatize the excessive clientelist relations between central, economic and local players, and to deplore the latter's lack of autonomy. But in all cases, the powers of influence are as much constraints as they are resources, and they also provide opportunities for restructuring the field.

III. THE DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTION OF A MECHANISM FOR CITIZEN CONTROL OF PUBLIC ACTION AS A STRATEGY TO PERPETUATE THE LOCAL POLICY OF ACCESS TO DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION IN FOKOUE.

Around the world, there are considerable variations in the scope of responsibilities devolved to decentralized authorities. Responsibilities for programming, planning and managing facilities and services that are the responsibility of the state or the municipality vary considerably from one country to another. Nevertheless, it can be said that local services in the fields of education (nursery and primary education) and health (primary health care, dispensaries, health centers) are very often devolved to municipalities.

As far as Cameroon is concerned, the devolution of powers to municipalities can be compared with practices elsewhere, contrary to an idea once put forward by Finken and Lafforte [8]. Today, many public services which, in other countries, are the domain of municipalities, are also or no longer the exclusive domain of the State, but of shared competences. But, on the other hand, opportunities for initiative are often blocked by insufficient resources, both material and human. In this context, the decentralization process has tended to concentrate the bulk of public resources in the hands of the central government, despite the option of sharing or complementing competences, resulting in a relative mismatch between the resources allocated to municipalities and the responsibilities passed on to them.

This overall observation raises questions about the adequacy between human and financial resources and municipal responsibilities induced by decentralization processes. In the face of this inadequacy, municipalities are attempting, within the limits of their human and financial capacities, to meet the population's social service needs. With this in mind, one way out is to involve the population in the evaluation or assessment of the services provided, in order to do the maximum with the minimum on the one hand, and to ensure their sustainability on the other. Citizen control of public action is part of this trend.

Indeed, public action is anchored in territories whose inhabitants recognize themselves and live together. It must therefore be adapted to the realities and challenges at hand. In this respect, it is becoming increasingly necessary to evaluate the effects, performance and effectiveness of public action in relation to the resources deployed. The implementation of a Citizen Control of Public Action (CCAP) mechanism in the Commune of Fokoue is illustrative in this respect, especially as it aims to improve performance in the provision of water services in the municipality in a participative and concerted manner.

The value of citizen control of public action (CCAP) in a municipality lies in the fact that it helps to strengthen local public finance management and participatory development processes within the municipality, in order to guarantee the provision of sustainable, high-quality hydraulic infrastructure and services. However, the sustainability of this mechanism, and the strategy behind it, remains questionable, given the unpredictability of the socio-political future.

A. *The process of establishing Citizen Control of Public Action around drinking water and sanitation*

The "Mayor and Municipal Council Guide" [12] highlights the performance of municipal services as a requirement strongly dependent on the organization of services and the people who compose them. In fact, a good organization of services should be based on the mastery of the missions and competences of the municipality, and on the knowledge of all personnel, their profiles and skills in relation to the missions to be accomplished. Also, the lack of formalization of organizational methods, as well as poorly defined or undefined organizational methods, can constitute an obstacle to performance. However, the missions of municipalities have greatly increased since the promulgation of the decentralization laws of July 2004, even though they were already very important before the constitutional revision of 1996. Indeed, Law No. 74/23 of December 5, 1974 defined the municipality as a school of democracy and a basic development unit. Thus, the municipality was intended to undertake everything it deemed useful for local development. It could implement on its territory anything that seemed useful for the development and flourishing of the local populations. The State did not seem to want to impose a defined domain for the municipality's actions. The decentralization laws of 2004 condensed and reformulated by the law of December 24, 2019 have had the merit of bringing clarification and greater rationality in the missions of municipalities. Without restricting their previous competences, this legal framework lists a range of transferred competences. These concern economic, social, educational, health, cultural, sports fields, as well as the promotion of national languages. The new fields of competence of municipalities are clearly defined, even if some

attributions are concurrently exercised by the State or the region, without indicating the level of incompetence of the municipality. It is therefore important to propose appropriate organizational structures, as well as suitable personnel capacities to ensure effective management.

Decentralization thus constitutes the fundamental axis for promoting development, democracy, and good governance at the local level, with the inclusion of populations being a requirement by development partners in communities. It is in this perspective that citizen control seems to have been established and allows for a strong enthusiasm among populations to give their opinions on the development of their localities through surveys. On occasion, areas for improvement are identified, prompting sectorial authorities and mayors to make improvements for better management of their localities.

In the specific case of the Municipality of Fokoue, the institutionalized nature of citizen control is evident on a triple level: technical, procedural, and normative.

On the technical-procedural level, the sensitive nature of this operation requires that sampling and data analysis be rigorous and follow a methodology based on scientific principles. The coordination of the operation, data collection, analysis, report production, results dissemination, and implementation of changes resulting from the operation are all activities of the operation that incur significant costs, sometimes beyond the capacities of certain municipalities.

The financing of the operation is therefore a factor to consider when establishing such mechanisms, especially considering that initially, some mayors may be resistant to such evaluation. In an environment where communal management policies increasingly require citizen involvement for an effective improvement in the living conditions of populations, the success of the operation requires an independent committee to ensure that the results reflect the genuine perceptions of beneficiaries, and it should also be strong enough to support the municipality in implementing the changes suggested by the evaluation. This not only helps territorial communities gradually establish themselves as essential actors in achieving Sustainable Development Goals but also expands the pathways for citizen participation in local arenas.

In the case of the municipality of Fokoue, in order to have reliable information for this operation, it was decided for the PNDP III to conduct a survey among households to capture their perceptions on service delivery in the sectors of water, health, education, and municipal services. The operation took place in 159 municipalities in Cameroon with financial support from the PNDP. The technical implementation of the operation was entrusted to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) for their independence and knowledge of the environment. The technical support from the National Institute of Statistics (INS) was also crucial both in

terms of design and implementation. From a normative point of view, control was established in Fokoue with the enactment of legal framework similar to Communal Order No. 110/AC/C_Fe/M of December 17, 2018 establishing the roles, responsibilities, and composition of the monitoring and evaluation committee responsible for overseeing, assisting, monitoring, and regularly evaluating the implementation of the action plan developed following the study on Citizen Control of Public Action in the municipality of Fokoue. This order empowers a control team whose missions are to familiarize themselves with the Action Plan for implementing Citizen Control of Public Action, ensure the implementation of actions planned by various actors, encourage community participation in projects implemented through awareness sessions, bring to the attention of the municipal executive any challenges related to the implementation of the action plan, and contribute to the implementation of the Action Plan by mobilizing human, material, and financial resources.

B. Constraints to ensuring the sustainability of local democracy around access to clean water and sanitation

Now that the Municipality of Fokoue has a document listing the current problems in some basic social services such as water, the current challenge is to implement the proposed action plan to address the various issues identified by the population. The communal development plan of the municipality of Fokoue carried out in 2013 notes that there is a general difficulty in accessing clean water. By 2020, data collected as part of the CCAP assess the levels of knowledge and satisfaction of the populations regarding this issue based on the availability and use rates of services, their quality, satisfaction with expressed needs, reasons for dissatisfaction if any, and expectations expressed by the populations. Overall, the populations of Fokoue acknowledge that the water is of good quality and accessible at a low cost.

However, there is still a minority, not to be neglected, that finds it to be of poor quality and expensive based on their assessment. The cost and quality of the water used by the populations are determining factors in assessing water supply. In the Municipality of Fokoue, the quality of drinking water is concerning. 32.4% of the population believe that the water they consume is of poor quality. In principle, the percentages of characteristics indicating poor water quality should not exceed 32.4%. However, 41.4% of households say that the water from their main source of supply has a taste, and 33.2% say it has a color. It is undoubtedly this poor water quality that could be the cause of waterborne diseases.

In reality, the challenge of water management and supply remains significant in Fokoue and probably in

all other municipalities. The major problem hindering the guarantee of sustainable access to clean water and sanitation is the under-qualification of service providers. Municipalities should surround themselves with specialized technicians in this area. This implies either recruiting experienced technicians or enhancing the capacities of their staff assigned to water or hygiene services.

In any case, a democratic assumption is spontaneously attached to the local level, conceived as the "natural" home of democracy and citizen participation. The expression "local democracy" is sometimes used to refer to the local space, the local political system, or local politics, as if they were synonymous expressions. Decentralization projects rely on this equivalence: giving more power to local authorities means giving more power to citizens. Indeed, local government is the level of public authority to which citizens first turn to solve their immediate social problems. It is also the level of democracy in which the citizen has the most effective opportunities to participate actively and directly in decisions concerning the general interest. Local governance, due to its smaller scale and focus on local issues, offers broader perspectives for the exercise of direct democracy. Direct democracy here reflects the citizen's commitment to all issues affecting the community, while representative democracy naturally refers to the fact that citizens choose their representatives from among candidates or political parties, who make decisions that are authoritative for the entire community, aiming to promote good relationships between citizens, thus building a relatively autonomous community with a sense of the general interest. In doing so, a continuous reflection is created, that is, a dialogue, a meaningful discussion and debate in the interest of solving the problems facing the community. It is this citizen participation that allows citizens to be informed about community affairs that would otherwise remain in the hands of elected leaders: this is what we qualify as local democracy.

However, the developments in this section show, in various ways, that the assimilation between "local" and "democracy" is not straightforward. It is true that decentralization strengthens elected bodies, while local governments are potential counter-powers to central power and their reinforcement ensures a greater sharing of governmental power. However, the functioning of local political institutions, as well as the making of local public action, questions the myth of local democracy.

Local democracy seems to differ from one municipality to another. Although it can be related to four principles: participatory (encouraging citizen involvement); deliberative (promoting a contradictory and informed public debate); competitive (ensuring transparent and competitive elite selection processes); limiting (controlling and separating powers)...., the municipality needs to be reassured and supported, both humanely

and financially, in its role. Indeed, in a crisis context like ours, democratizing decision-making processes at the local level requires the transfer to local authorities of the authority and resources needed for their new functions. Strengthening their capacities is essential so that they can function as true participatory, sensitive, and responsible institutions towards the concerns and needs of all citizens. Such governance implies the participation of populations, NGOs, and grassroots organizations in decision-making processes. In addition, specific financing tools for local development must also accompany these processes. However, it is clear that local actors still suffer today from a lack of capacity that hinders the governance of territories. Local authorities are still young and their resources, whether human or financial, remain very weak, civil society is poorly organized, and state services lack means and human resources.

IV. CONCLUSION

In seeking ways and means to effectively implement development projects, municipalities are leading to a better democratic well-being. The development of the water sector, which is an illustration of this, faces many obstacles in Cameroon, the most important of which are: problems related to the institutional environment; lack of clarity of objectives; lack of decision-making autonomy and accountability; and financial problems (control of water production and distribution costs) [17]. The objective of the PNDP Development Goal in its third phase is to strengthen the management of local public finances as well as participatory development processes within the Municipalities in order to ensure the provision of sustainable and quality socio-economic infrastructure and services. The development of a citizen control mechanism of public action in the communal territories requires conducting a survey on the perception of the population in the communal area regarding the provision of public services and municipal services.

This survey, initiated by the PNDP in partnership with civil society organizations in the Fokoue Commune, aimed to capture, from a sample of 320 households, the population's perception of the satisfaction of public services in four sectors: education, health, hydraulics, and municipal services. In the perspective of establishing a citizen control mechanism of public action to be carried out in the communal territory, the surveys conducted have led to the development of a local governance tool through which significant changes can be capitalized on to improve the living conditions of the population. However, it should be recognized that the relevance of this tool depends on the synergy of action between the actors involved. This synergy is also crucial for local democracy. While some authors have argued that multi-actor partnerships are necessary for achieving the SDGs [18], the same may apply to democracy and good governance at the local level.

It is important to note that, in the context of participatory development, it would be important to involve all actors in the implementation of this strategy-solution, which would also facilitate its adoption and sustainability by the beneficiaries.

Moreover, the dysfunctions and weaknesses identified can also find solutions in the strengths and opportunities that potentially exist in the Commune and that can be implemented to further enhance the involvement of the population in the management of local public affairs through participatory budgeting, citizen dialogue, and public consultation.

REFERENCES

- [1] A. De Grauwe, "Implementation of decentralization: observations from Asia and elsewhere", *International Journal of Education from Sèvres* [Online], Conference: Education in Asia in 2014: What global challenges?, published on May 22, 2014, accessed on October 20, 2024. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ries/3791>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ries.3791>. Translate by the author.
- [2] C. Cazabat, *The role of civil society organizations in achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Cameroon*, PhD Thesis, University Paris-Sorbonne, 2015. Translate by the author.
- [3] A-United Nations, "[« Consensus Reached on New Sustainable Development Agenda to be adopted by World Leaders in September »](#) [archive]", 2019.
B-United Nations, "[« Open Working Group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals »](#) [archive]", on UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, 2019.
- [4] AIMF and European Union, strategic partnership AIMF - European Commission SGA n°DCI-NSAPVD/2015/356-788, *Study on the localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Cameroon. Advocacy for the consideration of the positions of Local Authorities*. Final Report, October 2017. Translate by the author.
- [5] J. Keutcheu, *The "curse of Motorbike Taxis". How to build a public problem in Cameroon*. *African Studies Papers* 219, *Journals.openedition.org*, 2015, pp.509-534. Translate by the author.
- [6] P. Hassenteufel, *Political Sociology: public action*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2011. Translate by the author.
- [7] D. Cefaï, C. Terzi, (Eds), *The experience of public problems*, *Practical Reasons*, 22, 2012. Translate by the author.
- [8] M. Finken and D. Lafforte, *Decentralization, local actors and social services in Africa: The impact of decentralization on health and education services in West and Central Africa*, IDRC, 1999. Translate by the author.
- [9] ERA-Cameroon, Municipality of Fokoue and European Union, *Improving Access to Water and Sanitation in the Municipality of Fokoue (ASEAF), Concerted Municipal Strategy for Water and Sanitation in the municipality of Fokoue*, 2018. Translate by the author.
- [10] PNDP, Municipality of Fokoue and OSC AMCODE, *Citizen Control Report of Public Action in Fokoue*, 2018. Translate by the author.
- [11] P. LABORIER, "Historicity and sociology of public action", in P. LABORIER & D. TROM, eds., *Historicities of public action*, Paris, PUF, CURAPP, p. 434 and following, 2003. Translate by the author.
- [12] L. Ngono Tsimi and N. Ephritikhine, "The Mayor and Municipal Councilor's Guide", p. 61-62, 2007. Translate by the author.
- [13] J. Tousse Djou, J., "Crossed perspectives of citizen appropriation of participatory budgeting in Cameroon: Case study in the Mfoundi department", In *the State facing its transformations, Thematic Section Citizens towards democratic innovations, Seventh triennial congress of the Francophone Belgian Association of Political Science (ABSP)*, Catholic University of Louvain - Mons site, April 3 and 4, 2017. Translate by the author.
- [14] R. Dantec, "Local authorities, key actors for the success of COP21", *Annals of the Mines - Responsibility and Environment*, No. 77, 2015, available at <https://www.cairn.info/revue-responsabilite-et-environnement-2015-1-page-65.htm>. Translate by the author.
- [15] C. Minfegue, "Citizen participation in local context in Cameroon: Between demand for legitimacy, versatile efficiency and political tensions", *African Sociological Review*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 61-88, 2016. Translate by the author.
- [16] A-C. Douillet, R. Lefebvre, "Conclusion. What kind of local democracy?", *Political sociology of local power. under the direction of Douillet Anne-Cécile, Lefebvre Rémi*. Paris, Armand Colin, "U", pp. 237-240, 2017, available at. DOI: 10.3917/arco.douil.2017.01.0237. URL: <https://www.cairn.info/sociologie-politique-du-pouvoir-local--9782200603793-page-237.htm>. Translate by the author.
- [17] B.M. Kamgho Tezanou, "Access to drinking water and sanitation in Cameroon: current situation, constraints, challenges and issues for the achievement of MDG 7" In *Crossed Perspectives on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): poverty, education, health and natural resources* "Review of Economics and Management No.10, University of Tlemcen, Algeria, April 2010. Translate by the author.
- [18] C. Brohier, "Multi-stakeholder partnerships, a necessity for achieving the SDGs?", www.RSE-et-PED.info, September 17, 2015. Translate by the author.