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**Grassroots Initiative Dynamism and its Strength for
Rural Development in Nkum, Bui Division, North West
Region, Cameroon.**

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Grassroots Initiative Dynamism and its Strength for Rural Development in Nkum, Bui Division, North West Region, Cameroon.

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Abstract

Purpose: Grassroots institutions and organisations use collective actions at the local level to effect developmental changes. This study brings to focus the contributions of grassroots initiative dynamism and the strength for rural development in the Nkum Subdivision.

Methodology: The data were gotten from secondary and primary sources. Secondary sources came from peer reviewed journals, published and unpublished dissertations and institutional reports. Primary sources included field surveys, field observations, and interviews. Semi closed questionnaires were imputed into an Excel page and the data transformed into charts and tables, while quantitative data was sorted manually. The descriptive statistics method was to analyse the data.

Findings: Findings showed a plethora of interrelated grassroots institutions for rural development in Nkum grouped under local NGOs, local associations, and other institutions with activities cutting across road maintenance, education, electrification, and enhancement of portable water supply. Findings also indicated a wide range of challenges faced by the grassroots initiative institutions including difficulties in accessing the areas of exact needs, lack of relevant information about precise areas of need, an inability to finish started-up projects and non-proper integration of some stakeholders in project management.

Recommendation: It is recommended that, there is need for measures of proper negotiations among the stakeholders, reinforce collective actions spirit, and endure involvement of community heads into all developmental projects. This will surely improve the existing rural development prowess in Nkum Subdivision by different stakeholders.

Keywords: *Grassroots initiative, dynamics, rural development, participation, Nkum subdivision*

Introduction

Grassroots Initiative Groups' working on equitable and sustainable development worldwide in the wake of government inability to overcome problems of inequity and environmental degradation are on the rise today. These groups have supported traditionally marginalized communities in their efforts to improve the economic, social, ecological, infrastructural and political conditions under which people live. These Grassroots action takes different forms, from furniture-recycling social enterprises to organic gardening, low impact housing developments, farmers' markets, and community composting schemes Mukete (2004). Then, grassroots institutions have also improved through innovations in the development process, acted as agents of change, channels for development assistance, and have provided impetus within civil society through partnership with the state and relations with local communities (Yemelong, 2007).

Grassroots initiatives for rural development (GRIDs) are simultaneously regarded as important constituents and boosters of civil society in Africa. It is also argued that the empowering and participatory nature of GRIDs, as well as their ability to encourage the poor to articulate their political and social needs, ultimately facilitate the emergence of a stronger civil society Tanga et al., (2009). Elsewhere, GRIDs are considered as fundamental linchpin in civil society's response to the development concerns of local communities. Grassroots movements and organizations use collective actions from the local level to effect change at the, regional, national, and international level. The idea of grassroots is often confronted with participatory democracy. The growth in the GRIDs sector is inherently associated with the rise of an influential consensus spearheaded by international financial institutions (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) over the need for political democracy, and good governance on the one hand, and on the other hand, economic liberalization, and the encouragement of the private sector to step into the gap Tanga (2009).

In Cameroon, according to Law No 90-053 of December 19, 1990 on the freedom of association from the Ministries of Territorial Administration and External Relations (1990), "everyone is free to set up an association and has the right to belong to any association". The self-reliant concepts in the grass fields of Cameroon state clearly that, it is not a new phenomenon (Yemelong Temgoua, 2007; Kengne Fodouop, 2003; Mbanga, 2003; Kuete, 2001). Community participation through these initiatives is an important aspect of the rural development process in Cameroon. Rural development principles and strategies vary from one region to another as a result of cultural diversities, disparities in resources and landscapes, time, legislation and policies, and grassroots initiatives Mukete (2004)

In Bui Division of the North West Region, GRIDs constitute an important basis for rural development in terms of sanitation facilities, education of farmers, infrastructural development, and provision of farm equipment in some communities of the area (Shumas-Cameroon, 2014). Investments from GRIDs have touched every sector of activity, especially the non-farm socio economic infrastructure (Yemelong, 2007; Mbanga, 2003). In this regard, the presence of GRIDs has impacted positively on rural development in Nkum Sub Division.

Statement of the Problem

Grassroots initiatives have remained the kingpin of community-based approaches created to address local problems. Nkum Sub Division has quickly gained trust at the local level from these initiatives because they are generally set up by local actors. These grassroots institutions for rural development in Nkum have remained dynamic in social and infrastructural development projects. They have realized projects ranging from community

water supply schemes, community halls improvement, maintenance of earth roads, rural electrification, and the construction of schools' classroom (Nkum Council CDP, 2011). However, the actions of these grassroots institutions have not totally matched with the rate of expectations from the population due to poor access to infrastructures including housing requirements, meagre access to water and sanitation facilities, transport systems issues, as well as no veritable technological advancement through the projects. Grassroots institutions understand the multifaceted contexts and issues which could deter progress or stall innovative solutions while also creating a sense of trust in a community by authenticating the potential benefits of an innovation as well as identifying flaws and iterations required Mbanga (2003).

The challenge then is how to develop participatory structures that will best serve the goal of enhancing the capacity of local communities in the study area. Against this backdrop, this study attempts to investigate the role that Grassroots institutions play in the local development of Nkum Sub Division. Recognizing their reputations as potential avenues through which socio-economic changes can be accomplished is worth customizing. In this light, this work explores the extent to which Grassroots initiative groups have contributed to local development and also makes efforts to find out why development in Nkum Sub Division has slowed down.

Study Area and Research Method

Nkum Sub Division is one of the six Administrative Units that make up the Bui Division in the North West Region of Cameroon. It lies between latitudes 6.00' and 6.35' north of the Equator between longitudes 10°30' and 11.00' East of the Greenwich Meridian (Figure 1).

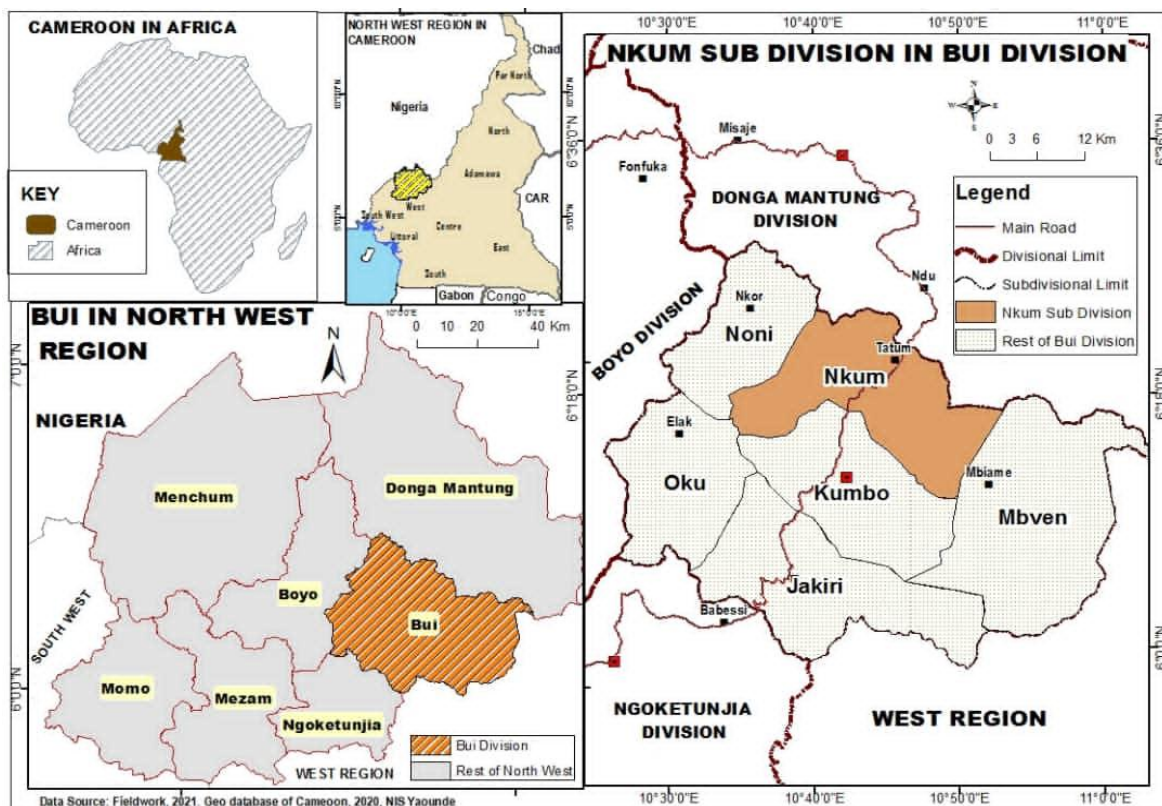


Figure 1: Location of Nkum in the Bui Division

Nkum is bounded by five sub-divisions, namely; Ndu to the North, Mbven to the East, Kumbo to the South, Oku to the South West, and Noni to the North West. According to the

CDP (2011), the surface area of Nkum is estimated at 705.63 km² giving a population density of about 70.58/km². A purposeful review of published and unpublished documents on Grassroots initiative dynamism for rural development was carried out to develop the contextual background and the discussion sections of this study. Nkum Council Development Plan provided background information on the study area. The past Masters dissertations in the Department of Geography and Planning of the University of Bamenda, all linked to the theme of the study, also provided much on secondary data for the study.

Primary data for the study came from field interviews, questionnaires results, and field observations. Field observations led to a general appreciation of the physical landscape and structures put in place thanks to the grassroots initiative development. The questionnaires administered consisted of open-ended and closed-ended questions administered to 80 households which were chosen randomly. Interviews were conducted with, local community leaders, council authorities, leaders of village associations, and the non-governmental organizations in Tatum, Takijah, Kishong, Mah, and Ngondzen all in Nkum area in order to get the different views on how Grassroots initiative vitality has influenced rural development. These groups of people were identified because they were seen as the main stakeholders' groups in community development processes in the study area. Quantitative data collected was analysed with descriptive analysis with the help of Excel and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 20 (SPSS₂₀) software, while qualitative data from the interview guides was developed through content analysis. Results were further presented using frequency tables, bar and pie charts.

Results and Discussion

Types of Grassroots Initiative Institutions in Nkum Area

Grassroots initiative institutions in the study area varied and including NGOs, Village Development Associations, Youth Development Associations, Women Development Associations, micro financial institutions, Common Initiative Groups (CIGs), and Health Institutions as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Category of the Grassroots Institutions in Nkum Subdivision

Category	Type
Local NGOs	Afoni Children of Hope Foundation (ACOHOF)
Associations	Village Development Associations (VDAs) of Tatum Development Association (TADA) Mah Youths Development Association (MAYA) Youth Development Association Women Association (Nso Batti Women) Mbororo Adult Association
Other Institutions	Government Councils Local community

Source: Fieldwork (2021) & Nkum CDP (2011)

Ensuing from field study, these existing institutions served as a cornerstone liaison between the local population, external NGOs and other Organisations. The missions of grassroots Institutions in Nkum are reveal to be in threefold as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Goals of Grassroots Institutions in Nkum Area

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Rural development	17	21.3
Improve living conditions	37	46.3
Poverty alleviation	26	32.5
Total	80	100

Source: Fieldwork (2021)

In rural development context, grassroots institutions exist to improve the basic social amenities to meet the needs of the rural population (Mbanga, 2003). In Nkum Subdivision, these have been achieved through direct investment from the state or by the people themselves, with or without external aids, through community joint improvised activities. This consists of identifying problems and how to solve them and collecting the necessary financial materials and technical resources for realisation. Improving on living conditions was another ultimate goal of these grassroots institutions as 46.3% of the sampled population affirmed its accomplishments. Some drift of improved living conditions has been observed through the provision of health care facilities to people living with muscular dystrophy and educational support for non-farm people especially for those into petty businesses. In addition, poverty alleviation in Nkum was observed through the issuance of low interest loans by local financial institution to members of the community either for small business or purchase of farm inputs, thereby improving the standard of living.

Grassroots Initiative Institutions Role Played in the Study Area

At the level of NGOs, Afoni Children of Hope Foundation (ACOHOF) works with orphans and vulnerable children in Tatum, Tahkija, Mah, and Kishong. This NGO has as its objective to educate the population on how to use solar radiation to disinfect and purify water (Photo 1). The idea of water purification came due to the fact that, over 80% of diseases in Nkum area resulted from water borne diseases.



Figure 1: Solar radiation water disinfecting process in Tatum

Source: Fieldwork, (2021)

Field study indicated that, the Solar Disinfection (SODIS) method helps to decontaminate water by filling water into transparent plastic bottles and exposing to sunlight for six hours. During exposure, the pathogens are killed and the water becomes good for drinking. It was also revealed that the duration of the water exposure to light depends on the weather conditions with 6 hours being the least recommended duration in good weather. When the sky is more than 50% cloudy, the bottles are exposed for two conservative days. Moreover, ACOHOF also assisted people with HIV/AIDS and those suffering from muscular diseases with funds to obtain their medications. Before the outbreak of the socio-political crisis in the two English speaking regions of Cameroon, ACOHOF had signed a partnership agreement with a Swedish NGO and Engineers without Borders (EWB) to provide large solar panels that would supply electricity in Mbamsong, Mbam Ngendzen, and other nearby villages in Nkum. From all the indication, it is deduced that ACOHOF is a veritable Grassroots companion in Nkum.

More success stories about ACOHOF are observed on the partnership with MTN Cameroon Company from 2012-2017, where they gave didactic materials to the students of primary and secondary schools in Nkum sub Division. These didactic materials included mathematic sets, exercise and text books, bags, pencils, and pens. In 2014 also, ACOHOF started the ACOHOF Family Farm School (AFFS) in Kishong; a boarding school with the aim of preparing children between the ages of 12 and 20 years old for self-employment and entrepreneurship throughout a 3-years educational plan. This initiative motivated ACOHOF who signed a memorandum of understanding with St. Rita College Nkambe, so that students who had completed three years in the AFFS could complete two years in their school and obtain their ordinary level. ACOHOF also worked with the commudos computers, and through them, a network of computers was assembled in AFFS wherein, students studying in these institutions was gradually moving into the world of technology. ACOHOF also carried out programmes in Nkum Sub Division, like the adult literacy programme on the education of farmers on new farm techniques, giving loans at low interest rates of 1% to the farmers. In addition, some supports were offered to musical talents in Nkum area with the aid to promote upcoming artists who are joining the musical world.

With regard to Associations contribution to rural development, the Tatum Development Association (TADA) set the pace for the construction of community water supply in the Village of Tatum. This water was tapped from a locality known as *West Indies* around Memfu Village in the 1990's and it was observed that it relieved the local population from the water stress to an extent. In addition to the above strives, TADA also constructed a village community hall for fund-raising and meeting sessions. It is worth noting that most of these developmental projects were realised with the use of available local resources such as stones (Photo 2) and community labour force.



Figure 2: A stand tap constructed in Presbyterian Quarter

Source: Fieldwork, (2021)

In the domain of road maintenance, the Takijah All Youths Student Association (TAYDA) was very instrumental in that, they enhanced the construction and the co-maintenance of most village roads with the local community. TAYDA also manifested its commitment to rural development by better management of failed water projected in Dui Quarter donated by the elite. Through TAYDA, Takijah manages its own water supply through elected local leaders. Besides TAYDA, the Mbororo Adult Association has also impacted on the development of the area by opening workshops equipped with machines for young Mbororo girls. This Mbororo Association also supports arable and livestock farmers with insecticides, fertilizers, and seeds. Another grassroots development association in the study area is the Ngondzen Community Development Association (NDACA) that has initiated the construction of a water catchment in Ngondzen, Ntung quarter. In the religious domain, there is construction of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Ngondzen for church activities.

Among youth Association, Mah All Student Union (MADU) are the improvement and maintenance of village roads especially the roads linking the market square to the Catholic-Baptists quarters and the road linking Kai towards Biyamen. These is ample evidence of self-sponsored projects in the study area. Kishong Youth Development Association (KIDA) has also contributed enormously to the development of Nkum village. KIDA has made efforts by providing benches in the Government Nursery School Kishong, beds and mattresses to the health centres, and supported the construction of the Government Technical College Nkum with zinc and moulded bricks. In the domain of rural electrification, KIDA bought electric poles and a private meter to ease electrification in the health centre, canopies and chairs are given out on rent to any village member that has a celebration.

Apart from the local NGOs and Associations grassroots institutions leading local development in the study area, the local Council, the Community and varied state institutions were not left out as indicated in figure 2.

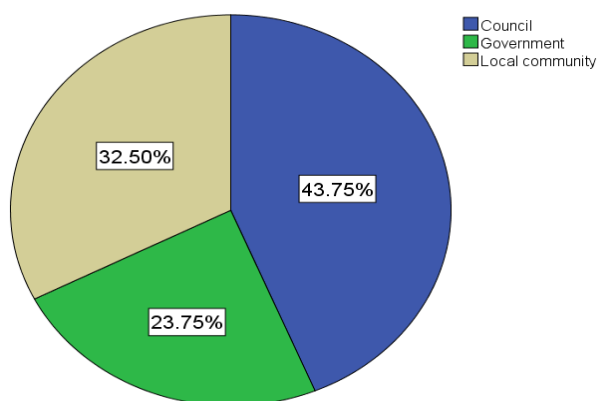


Figure 3: Other stakeholders in the study area

Source: Fieldwork (2021)

Figure 3 depicts accomplishments by other stakeholders through numerous development projects done by the Council, government and local community in the social and economic domains. The community here refers to a group of networking people living in this environment where they influenced development projects through public road maintenance and those financing particular projects (Nkum CDP 2011). The various achievements are vividly indicated in table 3.

Table 3: Attainments of other local Stakeholders in the study area

S/N	Institution	Projects realized	Beneficial
1	Council	Disabled School	Tatum Community
2	Council	60 Benches	Government Primary School Tatum
3	Council	Didactic Materials	Catholic School Ngondzen,
4	Council	Extension of Pipe born water	Mah, Yekwa, and Kishong
5	Council	Formation of a Health Committee	Mah
6	Council	Renovation of Health Centre	Kishong
7	Council	Created sales Point	Kishong
8	Council	Constructed Market	Mah,
9	Council	Constructed Market Sheds	Tatum
10	Government	Renovation	Government Primary School Kishong
11	Government	Extension of Electricity and water supplied	Government Primary School Dui (Takijah)
12	Government	Construction of two Classrooms and water point	Ngondzen Village
13	Government	Construction of a district Hospital	Tatum
14	Community	Maintenance of Roads	Mah, Kishong and Tatum
15	Community	Construction of a Community Halls	Mah, Kishong and Tatum

Source: Fieldwork (2020)

The study accentuates that the relationship among the council, government, and grassroots institutions is that which influence absolute rural development. It has become so unwavering and comment that grassroots institutions source their funds from foreign donors, members of association, charges from defaulters and freewill contributions. It should be recalled that the interventions of the grassroots initiative institutions in the study area were spatially displayed and it can be captured in Figure 3.

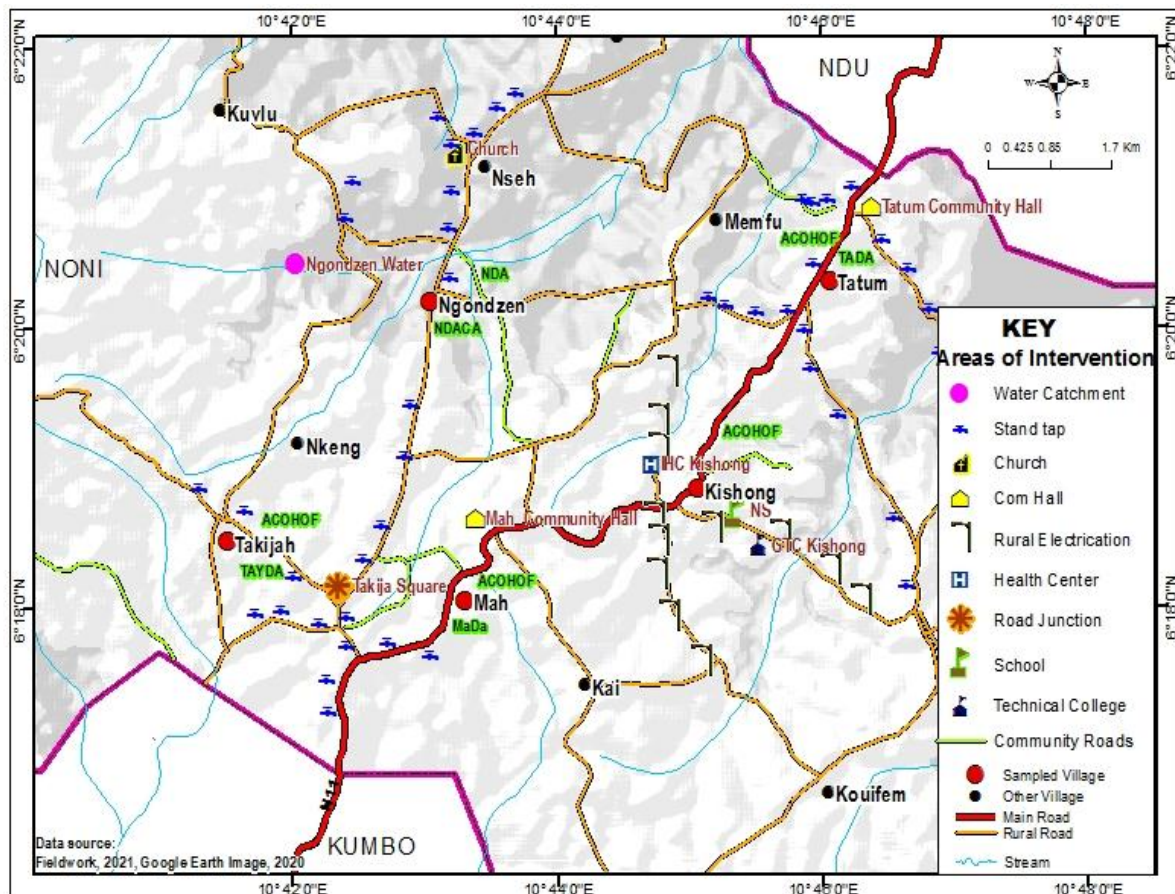


Figure 4: Spatial display of Grassroots Institution projects in Nkum area

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

From figure 4, the grassroots initiative projects in Nkum range from water infrastructure, health, road construction and maintenance, education and rural electrification projects. A bird eye view from the map portrays an integrated spirit of local development in Nkum as opposed to other rural areas.

Strength of Grassroots Initiative Dynamism in Nkum Subdivision

Field results indicate that grassroots institutions have varying development strengths in the study area. The institutions are known to have developed strategies to solve specific local problems by using both local government institutions and community organs. Furthermore, insights indicate that projects backed by local grassroots institutions quickly gain thrust at a local level because they are generally initiated by local actors, hence they constitute a powerful strength to sustain the community. In addition, grassroots institutions in Nkum posed a strong spirit of partnership which is able to identify local problems and attempt suitable solutions. Besides, it is thanks to increasing awareness and grassroots institutions

initiative progress that many people no longer depend on the government for all projects. The Nkum people have resorted to promote their developmental issues without necessarily relying on the government totally. This is thanks to the communal spirit of self-reliance, and capacity building endeavours. The community members often come together and undertake collective development actions in line with set objectives.

This paper holds that, the communal concept in the Nkum area through grassroots institutions has largely improved the cultural, social, and economic fabric of the society worth rivalling in others areas.

Challenges faced by the grassroots initiative Institutions

In every action there are pros and cons. These are indications that grassroots institutions faced enormous challenges in relation to rural development issues in the study area table 4.

Table 4: Problems faced by Grassroots Institutions in Nkum area

Category	Indicators	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Physical	-Seasonality variation		
	-Difficult terrain	34	42.5
	-Climate change		
Socio-Cultural	-Poor transport and communication	9	11.3
	-Land tenure conflict		
	-Conflict of interest and land use		
	-Inability to finish started projects		
	-Internal disputes(leadership)		
	-Hesitancies to contribution		
Economic and Political	-Inadequate financial resources		
	-Inaccessibility to credit	37	46.5
	-Political instability		
Total		80	100

Source: Field work 2021

From Table 4, economic and political challenges stand tall as far as rural development is concerned in the study area despite the existence of financial institutions. This is owing to the fact that loans are only given to members of the micro-financial bodies to accomplish their projects not the contrary. With regard to peace and stability in the study area, this aspect exposed another hard challenge. The incessant instability manifested through insecurity due to the ongoing socio-political crisis perturbed earmarked projects and some are abandoned while some already existing ones have been destroyed. Consequently, fear has gripped a cross section of the local population to continue with development initiative. In addition, inadequate modern farming tools and inputs remain a great challenge to rural dwellers. Lack of sufficient knowledge about areas of need can be seen in the complex operational structures of the village development associations. In all, the record of earlier community development and cooperative efforts largely posed failed history stories. This generally strengthened the

position of traditional leaders than integrating poorer elements in the development process. This lack of sufficient knowledge about areas of need in the study area is due to the multifaceted operational structure of the local institutions.

Discussions

Substantial literature reveals that, the dynamism of rural development activities was linked to the attendance of grassroots initiative groups and other existing institutions. In most cases, the grassroots initiative institutions ranged from local NGOs, village development associations to institutions with specific and diverse activities. The grassroots institutions in the Nkum subdivision fall within this operation and have been observed to facilitate the provision of many community infrastructure or services through accurate information on the need, priorities, and capacity building and collective community mobilization of the local population at any time. These findings are not quite different from those of the World Bank (2000), Mbanga (2003), and Yemelong Temgoua (2007) whose results state that grassroots institutions provide the basis on which external development agents can build and influence participation. By so doing, members of communities take full advantage of participating in any project they feel that the elite and donors have their interest or their interest are safeguarded. Grassroots institutions at the community level foster and motivate people to be involved in development and well organized towards accomplishing sustainable rural development. Through it, the rural people participate in planning or decision making for projects that would be beneficial to them, a situation which neatly fits into the present study at Nkum Sub Division. The study also identifies socio-economic and political challenges which delay the success of grassroots initiative activities. This significantly differs from limited resources and the non-involvement of local communities during conception, design, and implementation of local projects Odo (2012). Therefore, the collectivism concept in the study area once more showcases the identity of this locality in the western highlands of Cameroon.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nkum Subdivision displays different types of grassroots initiative institutions for rural development. These varied institutions have erected successful stories on projects realisation and played a role in rural development through the operation of blending the collective efforts and growth to cause socio economic and environmental development. However, there has been inability to get the best development situation owing to security challenges plaguing the region as a whole. Away from that, the lack of insufficient knowledge about exact areas in need is disturbing. This is because of the complex operational structure of the village development associations, conflicts of opinion/interest between the grassroots institutions and community heads and lastly, the leadership problem. This paper opines that, a continuous capacity building of committee members in charge of project implementation and management could enhance a more fruitful rural development activities given that the spirit of collectivism has been already embedded in the local population of Nkum Subdivision.

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