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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

School of Social Sciences

Women's Empowerment and Community Development in Cameroon. A case study of NGOs and Women's Organisations in the Northwest Province.

By

Akogutuh. A. Alasah

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON
ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Doctor of Philosophy

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN
CAMEROON. A CASE STUDY OF NGOs AND WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS IN THE
NORTHWEST PROVINCE.

By Akogutuh A. Alasah

This thesis investigates a contemporary issue in developing countries within the context of the Cameroon North-West Region. It seeks to understand how government policy and development organisations in Cameroon are empowering women and promoting their role in the community development (CD) process. It investigates and analyses the causes of gaps between policy implementation at the grassroots level which prevents women benefiting fully from the programmes initiated by government at the central level. The research is an empirical study which employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, informed by feminist paradigms and guided by the Interpretivists epistemological stand point. The case is the North-West Region of Cameroon, with particular focus on women's development Non-Governmental Organisations and Women's Groups. Semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, focus groups and documentary analysis were the main methods of data generation.

In seeking to understand why women's role in the process of CD is still limited to basic activities at the household and local community levels it has become necessary to examine gender roles within the Cameroon socio-cultural milieu to observe how these are affecting the overall development process. The Government's initiative to empower women all over Cameroon and promote their influence in the community is in recognition of the pivotal role they play in uplifting living standards and alleviating poverty particularly in the rural communities, which also falls within the government's overall development plan for the nation. The research has found that recent efforts to promote this through policy and targeted programmes for women at the grassroots have been thwarted by a severe deficiency in financial and human resources, poor communication networks, high rates of illiteracy among women, corruption, politics of ethno-regional segregation and the lack of a mechanism for enforcing legislation. The thesis has thus, unpacked the rhetoric of government initiated programmes and the gaps between policy and implementation at the grassroots level. A new understanding or perception to the concept of empowerment which focuses on economic and welfare needs, different from the conventional meaning has been brought out through this research. This suggests that definitions of concepts such as empowerment must be brought within a specific socio-cultural and political context. The thesis has made recommendations for what is required to be done if women are to be in the driving seat for rural development in Cameroon and the North-West Region in particular.

The thesis concludes that Community Development and Women's Empowerment are two complementary processes in Cameroon. While Community Development has a long history in the country and has been hailed as the total approach to development especially in the North-West Region, women's empowerment on the other hand is generally considered a secular concept from the West which still has no place yet in any of Cameroon's sub-cultural groups not least in the North-West Region. Local perceptions are that women should be empowered if only this means increasing their economic opportunities to earn and bring more money into the family and community and not more.

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Acronyms

ALD	Association for Local Development
ACUW	Association of Cameroon University Women
APW	Akum Progress Women
BACUDA	Bambui Cultural and development Association
BYO	Bambui Youth Organisation
BHC	British High Commission
BWEC	Batibo Women's Empowerment Centre
CAR	Central African Republic
CATTU	Cameroon Teachers Trade Union
CBO	Community Based Organisations
CDA	Community Development Agents
CD	Community Development
CDF	Community Development Foundation
CDP	Community Development Project
CDX	Community development Exchange
CEADAW	Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEAC	Community Education Action centre
CGT	Cameroon Gateway Trust
CIG	Common Initiative Group
COMINSUD	Community Initiative for Sustainable Development
CWA	Catholic Women Association
CWF	Christian Women Fellowship
DED	German Development Service

DFID	Department for International Development
ESRC	Economic and Social research Council
FADCR	Rural Community Support Fund
FIDA	International Federation of Female Lawyers
FIMAC	Investment Fund for Agriculture
GAD	Gender and Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
GHAPE	Grounded and Holistic Approach to People's Empowerment
GOC	Government of Cameroon
IACD	International Association for Community Development
ICT	Information and Communication technology
IRAD	Institute of Agronomy and Development Research
MBOSCUDA	Mbororo Social and Cultural Association Of Cameroon
MDG	Millennium development Goals
MINADER	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MINPROFF	Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the
MLB	Harmony Ladies Bambui
MOWOCUDA	Moghamo Women Cultural and Development Association
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NCDDP	National Community Driven Development Programme

NOWEFOR	North-West Farmers Organisation
NOWEBA	Northwest Bee Farmers Association
NWP	Northwest Province
NDCP	New Deal Community Programme
NOWEA	Northwest Elites Association
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PACD	Community Development Support Programme
PNVFA	National Project for Extension and Agricultural Training
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
RCA	Rotatory Credit Association
SNV	Netherlands Development Association
TUCUDA	Tubah Cultural and Development Association
UBW	Union of Bafut Women
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United nations Children's Emergency Fund
UN	United nations
USA	United States of America
VDA	Village Development Associations
VDC	Village development Committees
WID	Women in Development
WINHEECAM	Women's Initiative for Health Education and Economic Development

WEC	Women's Empowerment Centre
WE	Women's Empowerment
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development.

Author's Declaration

I **AKOGUTUH ALPHONSIUS ALASAH** solemnly declare that the thesis entitled:

Women's Empowerment and Community Development in Cameroon. A case study of NGOs and Women's organisations in the Northwest Province.

and the work presented in the thesis is both my own work and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that

- ❖ This work was done wholly while in candidature for a research degree at this University
- ❖ Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this university or other institution, this has been clearly stated
- ❖ Where I have consulted the published work of others this is always clearly attributed
- ❖ Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations this thesis is entirely my own work.
- ❖ I have acknowledged all main sources of help.
- ❖ Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I contributed myself.
- ❖ None of this work has been published before submission.

Signed.....

Date.....

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‘One hand cannot tie a bundle’, is a Bambui proverb basically meaning any great achievement is always the work of many hands. This achievement has seen the support of many people across continents and I would like to seize this opportunity to thank everyone who has assisted in which ever ways to enable me attain academic glory.

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Chapter One

General Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the background, the problem under investigation and a general overview of key themes in the thesis. This involves providing a comprehensive picture of the problem the research seeks to address as well as articulating the theoretical framework and key research questions. An overview of the socio-economic situation of Cameroon women and those of the North-West Region in particular has been presented to throw more light on the problem under investigation, which has provoked the research initiative in the first place. The concepts of women's empowerment and community development have also been taken up in this chapter to show how these are related to the framework of the thesis although these are explored in more detail in the literature review chapters.

I have had to answer questions time and again all through this research project about what interests me in this area of research which specifically concerns women and I suppose this question will continue to arise from those who will be reading this thesis in the future. Therefore, as part of this chapter, I have provided an explanation for what has motivated me in pursuing this area of research. A sketch map showing the position of Cameroon in Africa and that of the North-West in Cameroon is provided with a brief profile for anyone who does not know Cameroon. Finally as part of this chapter, I have provided a structure for the thesis to enable the reader to know from the beginning what follows in the rest of the thesis.

1.2 Statement of the Problem:

Globally, women 'represent an increasing share of the world's labour force-over a third in most regions except Southern and Western Asia and North Africa'(UN MDGs 2006). In Cameroon women constitute about 51% of the population and therefore, by sheer numbers, are a force to be reckoned with in the overall development process of the nation. Although referred to as the 'backbone' of the Cameroon's rural economy, the womenfolk in Cameroon are still largely marginalised, without power and influence and left at the margin of society

shouldering all the burdens of household maintenance, child care, health and education of the family with little opportunity to advance their status.

Historically women have been restricted to household chores, and to early and sometimes forced marriages which have consequently limited their chances of pursuing formal education like their male counterparts and participating fully in the nations' economic and political life. They remain disadvantaged in securing paid jobs, suffer from wage differentials, occupational segregation, and higher unemployment rates. Their disproportionate representation in the informal and subsistence sectors limits their economic advancement. The literacy rate among women aged 15-24 is 77.2% which is below the global rate of 82.3% (MDGs 2006). The girl-boy literacy ratio also decreases from primary through secondary to higher education.

In the 1980s the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) imposed by the IMF and World Bank on developing countries including Cameroon saw a further shrinking in social services like education and health. The period of SAP also coincided with the beginning of the economic crisis in Cameroon which reached its peak in the late eighties and the government and some private employers responded to it by slashing salaries by up to two thirds. Women were the greatest losers from all these as their numbers in education at all levels generally dropped and poverty levels increased (Due and Gladwin).

Cameroon's rural women are among the poorest of the poor in society. Despite legislation which guarantees everyone the right to property ownership, few have control over property. Most do not have access to formal credit facilities. Rural women are very hard working, industrious and ready to learn and work even harder to improve their livelihoods. This effort has been recognised by the Cameroon Government and the many development partners working in Cameroon. This is why women have been described as the 'backbone' of the rural economy in Cameroon. In spite of this, the government and the other development partners do not seem to be doing enough to encourage and promote the many grassroots level initiatives by these women which are beginning to enrich lives in many rural communities in Cameroon. The Government of Cameroon (GOC) and many of these organisations have policies and programmes

in place to foster the economic activities of rural women and help them come out of poverty. However, these policies and programmes are not making significant changes in the lives of rural women particularly those of the North-West who have on their own become very instrumental in the community.

Before the 1990s, the role of North-West women in the economic activities of the province was very minimal. They were mainly involved in the food production sector which was not contributing a lot to cash income for the family. The 1990 laws of freedom of association in Cameroon, e.g (law N0 90/053/19/12/1990) were an impetus to the formation of women's groups whose activities now have become the bedrock of rural livelihoods. 'Women's work in the food sector is a major source of rural family welfare. Furthermore, women's sales of surplus food represent by far the major source of the local regional and national commercial food supply' (Goheen 1996:137).

At the start of the new Millennium the UN has made clear its development agenda summarized in the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Put bluntly, the MDGs are the 'the world's time-bound and quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty in its many dimensions and ramifications-income poverty, hunger, diseases, lack of adequate shelter and exclusion, while promoting gender equality, education and environmental sustainability (The UN MDGS 2006). Goal three of the MDGs emphasises the need to promote gender equality and empower women. The empowerment of women in Cameroon is the requisite for meeting all other MDGs. This research is concerned to investigate the measures being taken by the GOC and other development partners to put women into the mainstream development process so as to facilitate the attainment of the MDGs in Cameroon and also to find out what is the contribution of the different partners including women in achieving the targets. Reforming and enforcing legislation guaranteeing women and girls' property and inheritance rights, and empowering women to play a central role in formulating policies especially at the local level is crucial to achieving this. The UN MDGs Report (2005) recommends that for the MDGs to be met the central focus of government should be to strengthen the operational capacity of local government, NGOs and women's organisations and to include them in the formulation of relevant national policy. Specific intervention to address gender inequality and

ensure women's equal access to economic assets such as land and housing, labour market opportunities, credit facilities and increased representation at all levels of government should be an intrinsic part of all efforts of government (MDG Project Report 2005). Improving the socio-legal status of women, improving their education and living conditions through the extension of assistance programmes that would increase their economic role and influence especially in the rural areas remain the main challenges about which this research is concerned. It is crucially important that these be addressed in order to give the Cameroon women the chance to develop their potential to the full and be proud in contributing to their nation building. The main questions therefore are **(i) what are the gaps between government policy and its implementation, and (ii) what are the factors preventing government programmes from being translated into action for the benefit of rural women in the Northwest Province?**

This would be investigated further by looking at the following three questions:

- ❖ To what extent and how are the policies of Government and development NGOs promoting the role of women in community development in Cameroon North-West Region?
- ❖ Why is women's empowerment important for community development in Cameroon Northwest province?
- ❖ How can the capacity of North-West women be enhanced to enable them to contribute and benefit more from their community development activities?

The first question targets official sources from the central government and seeks to understand the main policy framework of government towards women's advancement in general and rural women in particular. The answer provides data about the different programmes of government and how they are being delivered to the women at the grassroots level. This forms the basis for analysis *vis a vis* data collected from women at the grassroots level.

The second question is addressed to all categories of respondents including rural women. It seeks to understand how empowerment is understood at local and national levels and why the empowerment of women is important in the process of community development. It gives women the opportunity to comment and give

their own views and understanding of what they consider women's empowerment to be and why it is crucially important for them to be empowered.

The third question brings together multiple views from all stakeholders especially the women on what they think are the appropriate measures to be taken to enhance their situation. It is crucially important to elicit grassroots women's views on this because the overall aim of the research is to make recommendations to improve women's life at the grassroots level.

1.3 The Theoretical Framework of the study.

The government of Cameroon has expressed its general goodwill to advance the status of women throughout the country and to improve the livelihoods of rural women in particular. This is seen in the recent policy framework and programme of government directed towards women (MINADER 2006). For example, in 2004, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Protection of the Family was created and a woman was appointed at its head to handle specific women's issues. Key offices of this Ministry at the central level and in the provincial and divisional levels are held by women. There are programmes designed to empower rural women in various ways, such as by providing adult female education, eradicating poverty and improving health conditions. Other Ministries such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development also have specialised women's units and specific programmes designed to improve life for rural women.

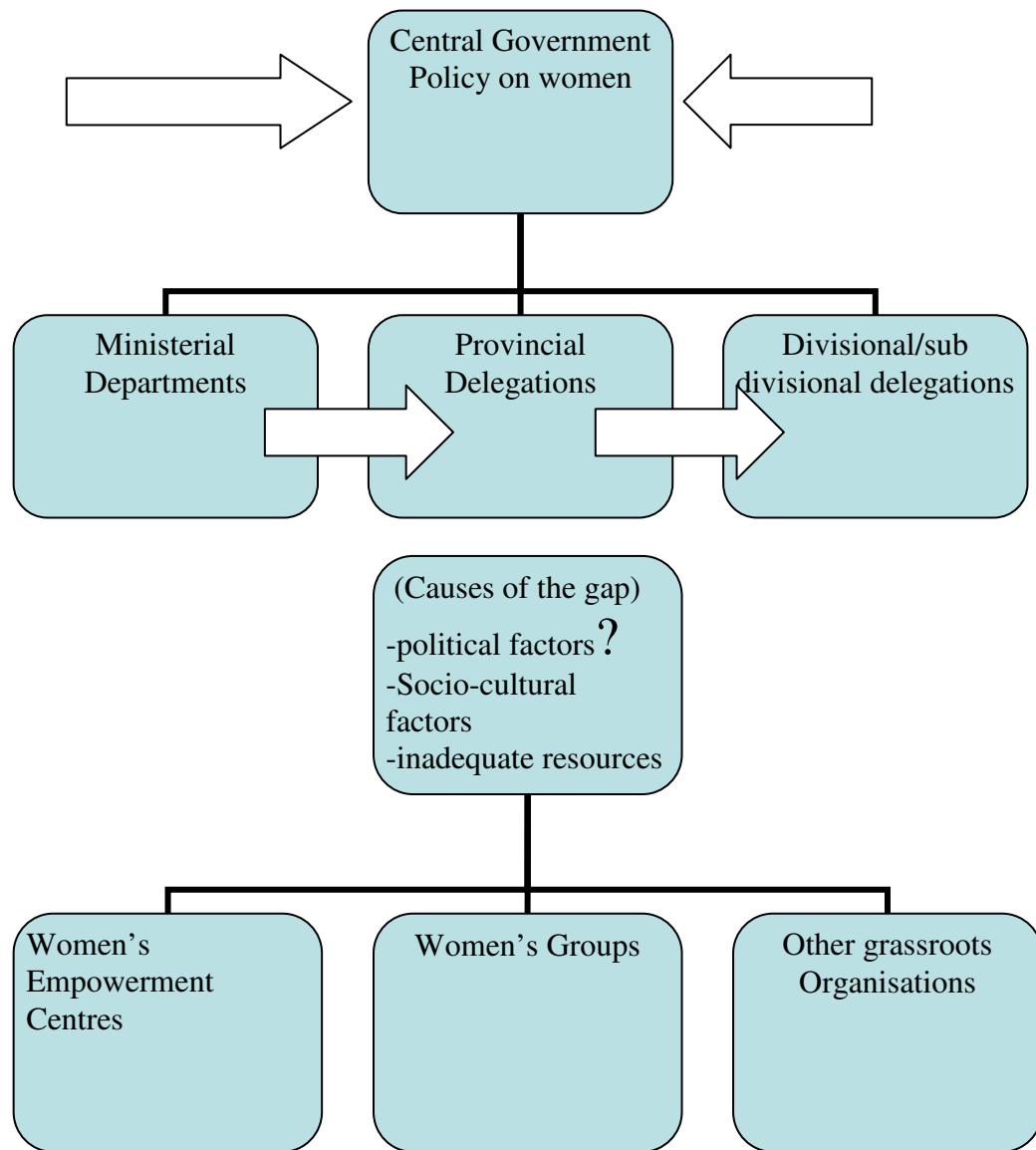
Looking at the policies and programmes *per se* one might be tempted to believe that this is a system that is working well and everyone including the very poor at the grassroots are benefiting, but this may not necessarily be the case due to a mix of factors that will be discussed in chapter seven. The literature on policy and gaps in implementation will be reviewed in chapter two and its application to the Cameroon context in chapter three.

While the government has expressed its intention to advance the status of women in Cameroon through policy and to improve lives in the rural areas in particular, this ambition seems to be thwarted by the lack of adequate human and financial resources to effective implementation. In addition, political factors and bureaucratic bottlenecks and customs and traditions that continue to favour

male domination prevent policies from being translated into action. Cameroon's politics is characterised by decrees that have little impact on the lives of those they are meant to affect. Some bureaucrats often seem to wear masks which hide the fact that they have private agendas different from those of government. These together appear to be the main underpinnings of the government's inability to succeed in its efforts to advance the status of women throughout Cameroon.

Understanding more about women's role in Community Development and how government policy and other development partners are promoting this also requires an understanding of the issues that interact to constrain women from being more effective at the community level. At the very centre of all these issues is the empowerment of Cameroon women. Women's empowerment is an essential element in the promotion of women's role in the community. Viewed in terms of conventional or western definitions of empowerment, it could be argued that Cameroon's women in general are still without power. However, empowerment in Cameroon has been defined variously by government sources and local women who both see it as a means to allow women to take part in the life of the community not necessarily by challenging men's position or changing traditional roles. Therefore, this understanding of empowerment hangs on the rhetoric of government policy in the promotion of women's role in the community and the notion of empowerment as a key element in the promotion of women's role in the community development process. It is these principles that guide the process of data collection and form the basis for analysis in this thesis.

Fig 1 The framework for the focus of the thesis illustrated diagram



The diagram explains the focus of the study. In Cameroon the central government makes policies on all aspects of national life including policy on women's advancement. These policies are then handed down through various ministerial departments to the provincial and divisional levels for implementation. In the case of policy on women, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Protection of the Family and its provincial and divisional delegations are hugely involved in the implementation. Grassroots level women therefore, benefit from government programmes through the Women's Empowerment Centre (WEC), the women's groups and other grassroots organisations. This research aims to investigate the missing link in the middle or causes of the gap which might be inadequate capital and financial resources, and socio-political factors that prevent women from benefiting from government's ambitious programmes.

1.4 Women's Empowerment as a necessary condition for community development

Since the 1960s, the development debate has advanced through many stages. After failing to achieve the 'trickle down' effect as the main approach to reducing poverty the move to gender equality was next considered as a key element of development. Before the 1970s, issues of gender and development had been hugely ignored within development theory. Women's concerns were first integrated into the development agenda only later in the 1970s partly triggered by Boserup's publication of Women Role in Economic Development (Parpart et al 2000), coinciding with the UN international decade of women 1975-1985. The concepts of Women in Development (WID) and later Gender and Development (GAD) became developed to emphasise the need to integrate women into the mainstream development process in which they had been missing in the past.

By the end of the 1980s, the language of empowerment began gaining prominence. Many aid agencies including the World Bank, the Washington-based Association for Women in Development and feminist groups began talking about empowering women. Empowerment is a very controversial concept and will be examined in greater detail in chapters three and four. In the ordinary sense, empowerment is about people taking control of their lives, gaining the ability to do things, to set their own agendas and change things in ways previously lacking

(Nalini 2006). However, for radical feminism empowerment means much more than just this. It involves the radical alteration of the historical processes and structures that create women's subordination in the first place. Viewed from this perspective empowerment is a collective process not an individual one.

With collective empowerment of women, the direction and processes of development would be shifted to respond to women's needs and their vision. Collective empowerment would of course bring with it individual empowerment but not merely for individual advancement

(Nalini et al 2007).

It is now widely recognised within development circles that economic growth and social advancement are best achieved when a mass of the population are involved in the aims and planning of development. Without the empowerment of members of the community they would be unlikely to make the contribution which they should make for the development of the community. The empowerment of women in Cameroon is linked with their role in the community development process because empowerment determines the position held in the community and the degree of influence. Thus, the research seeks to understand the strategies set by government to empower the women in Cameroon and why the empowerment of women is so important at this point in time. Along with this the research will also be seeking to understand why women themselves think that empowerment is a prerequisite for the advancement of their socio-economic and political status and how they conceive empowerment.

1.5 The Socio-economic status of women in Cameroon

Understanding the socio-economic status of women in Cameroon generally and in particular of rural women of the North-West Region is fundamental to understanding their role in the Community Development (CD) process and why this needs attention in the first place. Despite having been recognised officially as the 'backbone' of the rural economy, their role in the overall development process of the country is still minimal. Their efforts at the local level to advance their statuses and contribute more to national development is thwarted by the lack of support from government and other development partners, poor legislation and a tradition and custom that continues to marginalise women. 'Traditionally, in all of Cameroon's indigenous cultures, the public space is considered to be a male domain. Women have little say in public matters and, therefore, virtually no decision-making powers in respect of resource distribution at the communal level

Despite having ratified most international conventions on the protection of women including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEADAW) the situation of women in Cameroon remains poor.

Having said this, it still remains a difficult subject when we come to talk about the socio-economic status of women in Cameroon as this seems to be putting all women in the same platform. There are many categories and types of women in Cameroon whose statuses are determined by a mix of complex factors including their social origin, education and training, profession and marital status among others. The Cameroon law recognises the equality of all human beings without distinction based on race, sex, religion, belief, political affiliation but does not contain any specific statement regarding sex discrimination. According to women's human rights activists the unequal status of women and girls in Cameroon continues to manifest in all spheres of socio-economic life and there is no evidence that the government is taking appropriate measures to improve their status (Cameroon CESCR 2006). In higher education and employment women are still struggling to catch up. Although their enrolment has increased over the last decade this is not fairly reflected in employment and especially in senior administrative and decision making positions in the country (Ibid).

The present Cameroon Government with its 46 cabinet ministers has only six women, with only four as full ministers. There has never been a woman Governor or Senior Divisional Officer or Mayor. Their absence in the decision-making process limits their access to the resources that cater for their interest (Ntongho 1999). Overall, women in ministerial positions and parliament in Cameroon make up a startling 11.1% of the total which is well below the world average of 15.7 (UN Human Development Indicator 2006). What this brings out clearly is that Cameroon is typically a male dominated society. Male hegemony is manifested in all fabrics of society from the socio-cultural to the political domain. The control of resources is mostly in the hands of men. Even though national policy tries to guarantee equality between men and women for the ownership of property, cultural barriers continue to hinder women from full access and control over key resources. Ajaga Nji buttressed the point in the following words:

In all Cameroon sub-cultures, women are considered subject to male

authority. Male characteristics are considered central to the decision-making process at family, community and national levels. Cultural prescriptions that subject women to men include rules of inheritances, births, deaths, work, child care, sex and reproduction and a host of Traditional Rites (2000: 213)

However, there are clearly a growing number of Cameroonian women who are ready to challenge the status quo. Articles continue to appear in national newspapers in reaction to the criticisms against women wanting to seize powers and pointing to their absence in political life in decision-making and administration. The Cameroon chapter of the International Federation of Female Lawyers (FIDA), the Cameroon Legal Women, and The Association of Cameroon University Women (ACUW) are some of the elite women's pressure groups that are fighting to advance the status of women throughout Cameroon.

Although men have maintained power over land and other resources that power has not gone uncontested. For example, Elite women have been successful in filing for title to urban properties and even with the prejudice against women owning land a few elite women have been able to acquire access through development programmes (Goheen 1996).Cameroon's women are largely defined by their socio-anthropological status which places emphasis on their social status and roles. Their biological status is important only for specific purposes. This research has considered women across various categories and statuses but it is rural women who stand at the heart of this study. Women have always been on the downside of the Cameroon society but are also recognized as key actors in the community because of their multiple roles as mothers, housewives, house mangers and family carers.

1.6 Community Development (CD) as the best approach to local development.

Development in the past decades has been dominated by a pursuit of economic growth which has been achieved with a huge social cost. Deepening poverty affecting more than one fifth of the world's population, social disintegration and environmental destruction which have all been referred to as the threefold human crisis (Korten, 1995:21) are all problems emanating from past development efforts which the world today has to deal with. In the face of all this the greatest question being asked is whether there is any alternative to this kind

of development? The notion generally held among some development thinkers is that as long as the rich and the powerful continue to hold power, they will continue to control things in ways that will only benefit them and so there appears to be little hope that development will ever benefit the poor or less privileged. Community Development (CD) arguably has been seen as an alternative to this form of development because it seeks to empower and is community-driven based on a community spirit of solidarity and the common good.

In the 1950s and 1960s Community Development (CD) was promoted by government, the UN and its affiliated institutions as part of the independence and decolonization movement in Africa and Asia and also as part of attempts to modernize the underdeveloped, backward and largely agricultural societies and regions of the developed countries (Campfens 1999:4). Over the last three decades relations between the state and civil society has changed as a result of global restructuring and changing ideologies. This change has brought new actors into the scene who now practice CD in ways that are different from its earlier practice. Since the 1980s, there has been a proliferation of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and voluntary sectors agencies in the field of CD that was previously dominated by government programmes. In what is commonly referred to as the global South alone, the number has soared to hundreds of thousands, many of which are linked to the thousands of international NGOs based mainly in the countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Campfens 1999:4).

According to Korten (1995b) there has been a significant growth in what he calls second generation NGOs which emphasize development strategies rather than the traditional charity and welfare activities while some that he categorised as third generation NGOs have adopted a more catalytic role striving to achieve reforms at the regional and national level that support people-centred and sustainable development at the local level. This appears to be the type of NGOs that are common in Cameroon. Further to this are the fourth generation NGOs that align themselves with social movements such as environmental, human rights and women's movements for the purpose of mobilizing around a people-centred development vision (Korten 1995:128). Within these however, are the

myriads of local, rural, urban self-supporting organisations spontaneously emerging everyday seeking to address different social needs as well as promoting their cultural identities and supporting member's survival and ideologies. What these other groups called, Community Based Organisations (CBO) or Locally Based Associations (LBA) are doing is redirecting the economy towards the community as an alternative to the centralized top-down, and institutionalized structure of decision-making which has dominated development in the past fifty years. The general aim of these organisations which is the aim of CD is to create and support a pattern of social relationship that promotes solidarity, empowers the community, create networks for building social capital and improves the life chances and well-being of the residents. (Campfens 1999). The goal of community development is best captured in the following words by Gary Craig:

What community development strives for is to give ordinary people a voice for expressing and acting on their extraordinary needs and desires in opposition to the vested interests of global economic and political power, to counter the increasing commodification of human welfare and human beings themselves. (Craig 1998:15)

Viewed from this perspective, community development is therefore seen as the approach to development which focuses on the people and their needs capable of avoiding social dislocation and ensuring the benefits go to the poor because it is community-driven or bottom-up. This vision accords with that earlier discussed by Schumacher (1973) in his famous book 'Small is Beautiful' where he has stated that 'The really helpful things will not be done from the centre; they cannot be done by the big organisations; but they can be done by the people themselves' (in Allen and Thomas 2001:35). CD is the approach to development that targets the basic needs of those intended to benefit. Consequently, what has to count as development must be locally determined (Preston 2000). Sachs (2005) postulates that:

The key to ending poverty is to create a global network of connections that reach from impoverished communities to the very centres of the world power and wealth and back again. The starting point of that chain are the poor themselves, They are ready to act both individually and collectively, They are already hard working, prepared to struggle and stay afloat and to get ahead... (2005:242).

These words emphasize the key role that communities can play in the process of identifying and meeting their own needs and in eradicating world poverty. In recent times when debt reduction has led to the shrinking of state responsibilities

in the provision of social welfare, many governments have turned to community initiatives that promote alternative forms of development, especially those that create employment, generate income and deliver social services less expensively. This is what CD has achieved at the grassroots in the North-West Region (NWR) and is increasingly doing so at the regional and national level. This research will therefore be seeking to understand the various ways by which the GOC is responding to local initiative that has embraced CD in the NWR in particular. This will be examined in detail in chapters four and five.

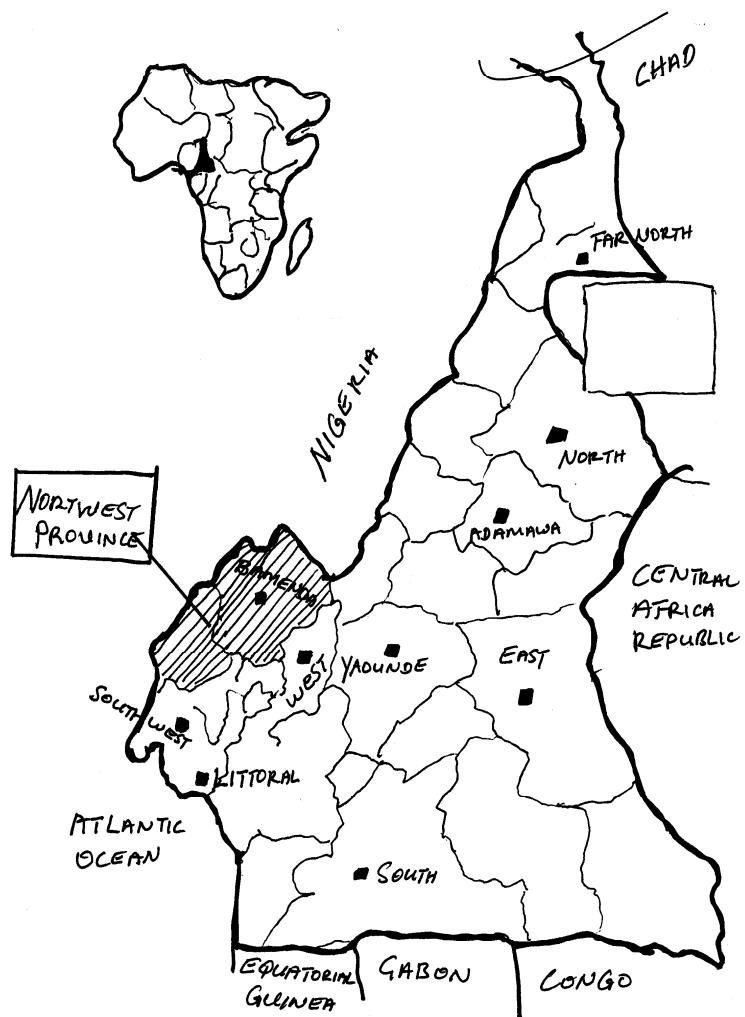
1.7 Personal motivations and connections to the area of study

I have a personal connection with the topic of this study. Firstly, I come from a natural family of five, all women except me. From the very beginning I have seen and taken part in the struggles and difficulties of rural women such as poverty, abuse and domination by men, their triple burden as housewives, mothers and undertaking community duties. When I read about women and their difficulties in the literature I understand much better what it means. Charity begins at home, as I am concerned about the general human condition and welfare and committed to doing something to better it, it is only natural that I should begin this at home with those whose condition I know very well.

Therefore, my personal motivation and commitment to study women and their role in community development comes from my knowledge and understanding of their conditions as the poorest of the world's poor and my belief in their huge potential and ability to improve the world, if given the opportunity. Nothing ever worries me on a daily basis more than the huge inequality that exists between the sexes in basic human rights issues like education, decision making, ownership and control of essential resources and the violence and abuse which many women in different societies still suffer today just because they are women. How to use my education to promote the welfare of rural women is what has driven me into this research. I believe this research will enhance my understanding of women's issues and how to help them get their foothold on the first step of the ladder of economic development which is the hardest part of the beginning of the eradication of poverty. (Sachs 2005). This research will give me some authority in the area to influence change in policy and practice which could change for the better, the lives of some women in my part of the country and perhaps even in the whole world. Also, the thought that this area of study is

currently attracting employment in international development and the NGO sector has also motivated me as these are my targeted areas of professional practice.

1.8 Country profile- The Republic of Cameroon



Cameroon is officially known as The Republic of Cameroon or 'la Republique du Cameroun' in French. It is a unitary republican state situated along the Atlantic West Coast of Africa. It has boundaries with Nigeria in the west, the Atlantic Ocean, Equatorial Guinea, Congo and Gabon in the south and south east, Central African Republic in the east and Chad in the north. The country has aptly been referred to as 'Africa in miniature' partly because of its biodiversity nature, natural resources, cultural diversity and historical uniqueness (Alasah 2003). Almost all the major colonial powers of Europe have had something to do with Cameroon. The Germans colonized Cameroon permanently in 1884 and gave it the name Kamerun and after their defeat in the First World War Cameroon became a League of Nations mandated territory between the British and French and was known as Cameroun by the French and Cameroon by the British. All of these colonial powers have left their footprints in the country somehow (Nuza 2005).

Administratively, Cameroon is divided into Regions, of which the North-West is one, each headed by a governor appointed by the head of state. After independence from the British and French in 1960, the country was ruled by a single party until 1992 when President Paul Biya granted multi-partism under pressure. Paul Biya has been in power since 1982 but does not seem prepared to give up power in the foreseeable future. Cameroon enjoys relatively social, economic and political tranquillity compared with other African countries, with excellent diplomatic relations with major developed countries like the UK, USA, Japan, and a special relation with France. It is also a member of both the Commonwealth of Nations and the Francophonie and has signed up to most international treaties like the Kyoto protocol and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Cameroon Gateway Trust 2005).

Cameroon's economy is mainly agriculturally based with over 70% of the population engaged in that sector. Agriculture contributes about 40% of the total GDP. Main agriculture exports include cocoa, timber, coffee, cotton, rubber, banana and crude oil. (Alasah 2003). Two systems of education operate in Cameroon based on the British (Anglo-Saxon) and French models. There are six state universities with three different ministries to cater for education. But all

these do not seem to be what has put Cameroon on the world stage as many people seem to know the country basically because of its good football team.

The population of Cameroon by Regions

Region	Abr.	Capital	Area- (km2)	1976	1987	2007
Adamawa	ADA	Ngaoundéré	63,691	359,334	495,185	723,600
Central	CEN	Yagoua	68,926	1,176,743	1,651,600	2,501,200
East	EST	Bertoua	109,011	366,235	517,198	755,100
Extreme North	EXN	Maroua	34,246	1,394,765	1,855,695	2,721,500
Littoral	LIT	Douala	20,239	935,166	1,352,833	2,202,300
North	NOR	Garoua	65,576	479,158	832,165	1,227,000
North West	NOU	Bamenda	17,810	980,531	1,237,348	1,840,500
West	OUE	Bafoussam	13,872	1,035,597	1,339,791	1,982,100
South	SUD	Ebolowa	47,110	315,202	373,798	534,900
South West	SOU	Buéa	24,471	620,515	838,042	1,242,700
Cameroon	CMR	Yaoundé	464,952	7,663,246	10,493,655	15,731,000

- Source: Cameroon National Institute of Statistics. 2007

1.9 The North-West Region and rural women

The North-West Region of Cameroon is one of the only two English speaking regions of Cameroon administered by the British as a League of Nations mandated territory from 1922 and as UN trusteeship from 1945 to 1960. The population is estimated at about 1.9 million people. (NIS, 2007). The capital is Bamenda which is also known to its inhabitants as Abakwa. Bamenda is arguably Cameroon's fourth largest city with over 300,000 inhabitants although it must be noted that population statistics in Cameroon are not wholly reliable due to political influence. It is located some 360Km (227 miles) northwest of Yaoundé the capital. It is well linked to other parts of the country like Bafoussam, Douala and Yaoundé through good tarred roads. Bamenda is the main economic centre of the North-West. It has big shops, markets, hotels, restaurants, banks, cash machines and other financial institutions where you can

carry out financial transactions to any part of the world. The main economic activity of the population is agriculture both for export and subsistence.

There are many agricultural institutions in the province such as Regional College of Agriculture Bambili, The Institute of Agronomy and Development Research (IRAD) Bambui, farmers organizations such as the North-West Farmers Organization (NOWEFOR), the North-West Bee Farmers Association (NOWEBA) the Integrated Young Farmers Group in Bambui, individual farmers and gardeners and many NGOs devoted to support agriculture in the region.

The regime in power has been reluctant for political reasons to bring development to the region and for many years the people through Community Based Organisations (CBO) have taken the challenge to develop it. The North-West has some of the best constructed schools and well equipped hospitals in the country but all these are the result of people's efforts through common initiative. This is one reason why CD is very important for this region and why it offers an example that could be applied for the rest of the country and thus the reason why it was chosen for the case study. In a nutshell, people of North-West believe in common initiative and collective effort which are some of the principles of community development. There are many community development institutions such as the Community Development Specialization Training College Santa, the Cooperative College Bamenda, the community social centres in all divisional headquarters, the Women Empowerment Centre (WEC) in Bamenda and Batibo ,all of which train the people in various skills for income generating projects, community leadership and management of community projects for development. The North-West (NW) has produced some of the country's top intellectuals in people such as the late professor Bernard Fonlon, Professor Anoma Ngu, a veteran in the field of Medicine and one time member of the Queen's medical team in the UK, first Cameroon Cardinal Christian Tumi, Professors across Universities in the world, and others in top UN jobs around the world.

The dominant symbolic framework in most rural areas in the NW is that which gives powers to titled men through their associations with the ancestors and

various societies like the ‘Kwifoh’¹. Women are branded as the backbone of the society through their multiple roles as producers and reproducers. This in a way only limits them to these roles and does not allow them to move further. As producers they have limited access but no control over the land on which they grow the crops to feed the society and as reproducers they give birth and raise children but technically do not own them. This appears similar to the situation in Savilli village in Burkina Faso where ‘women must obey their husbands and first wives and have no influence over their children’ (Gainotten et al 1994). Today rural women in the NW are working harder and longer than they did before in order to fulfil new demands in an economy that is purely cash and increasingly becoming globalized and competitive. Throughout the NW rural women are increasingly taking up most of the burden for family healthcare, education and living standards. Goheen postulates *inter alia* ‘The privatization of land has undermined their formerly guaranteed rights to lineage land’ (1996:185). Most younger women now don’t just want to get married and depend on their husbands, they want to have something of their own before making a decision for marriage because ‘once you get married and set you foot on your husbands’ compound, that is all for you, meaning your life will be circumscribed by childbearing, farm work and cooking with no freedom to work and accumulate enough social and economic capital. (Goheen 1996).

There is a catalogue of problems facing the North-West women but most acute of them is abject poverty in a large scale. Poverty is exacerbated by the general lack of access to resources and credit facilities, the lack of education and basic training skills to gain paid employment and manage available resources. A majority of women who do business can only manage small scale businesses like ‘Bayam Sellam’². Most development organizations and NGOs working in the region point to this as the key factor affecting their work with women. Also the instinctive attachment to custom and tradition that continues to see the woman as the property of a man remains the greatest plight of the NW woman. Some customs still continue to suppress women in various forms. The treatment of

¹ Kwifoh is a secret society for men and the main governing body in most Northwest Chiefdoms and Fondoms. Members within it belong to various ranks similar to the house of common and house of Lords in the UK

² This is a term used to refer to women who are mostly based in the urban centres but regularly travel to remote village areas to buy food stuff which they in turn sell in the urban centres for a small profit. This is the most popular form of business for women in the Northwest province

widows is one such example. In some of the customs widows are not allowed to inherit their husband's property which usually goes to the man's family. Sometimes they are forced to marry their husband's relatives and are forced into dehumanizing traditional rites as part of their husband's funerals. However, some elite women, groups and other NGOs are currently lobbying through traditional councils to reduce this burden of unchanging custom and tradition with success being reported in some areas (Al-Chris-Wov 2005).

1.10 The Structure of this thesis

The structure of a thesis is important as it reflects the layout of the record of one's research. Marshal and Green (2004) postulate that there is an orthodox structure to a thesis although this is not usually found in any of the rule books. This structure normally covers the following headings: Introduction, Literature review, Methodology, Findings, Discussions and Conclusion. However, this thesis will be structured in a similar but not exactly the same way as follows:

Chapter one sets the tone by stating the problem under investigation, articulating the theoretical framework and the key questions that would help in investigating the problem and a general overview of key themes. Chapter two explains the methodology and design used in the research. It also describes the process of fieldwork and how this was actually conducted and the problems encountered in the field. Chapter three reviews literature related to the concept of women's empowerment, community development and gaps in policy implementation. Chapter four looks at how the concepts are applicable to the Cameroon context. Chapter five begins an analysis of data from the wider context within which the case has been drawn. This refers to the formal and informal institutions that interact and influences women's role in CD in one way or the other. Chapter six contains the presentation and analysis of data from the formal and informal organisations in the NW that make up what has been referred to as the case study in this research. Chapter seven is an analysis of research findings. Finally, chapter eight contains discussions, recommendations and conclusion. The appendices and references follow these.

1.11 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has introduced this thesis by stating the problem under investigation and the key questions that the research is seeking to answer. The problem is that women are still largely marginalised throughout Cameroon and occupy only subordinate positions in the community despite their huge contributions to the rural economy and development of the country. The GOC and its development partners are beginning to respond to women's efforts and are trying to promote their role in the community in various ways but are faced with numerous constraints. Given the importance of empowering women and increasing their influence in the community, the benefit of which will accrue not only to the community but to the entire country, this research aims to investigate the stumbling blocks that continue to foil government's efforts at achieving this goal at the grassroots level. The main focus of the research has been articulated and I have presented an overview of key themes in the thesis. An examination of the socio-economic situation of the Cameroon women is followed by why women's empowerment is a categorical imperative if they are to play a role in building the Cameroon nation. I have discussed briefly why community development has come to be seen as the best approach to local development and why this should be encouraged. A statement about my personal motivations and connections with the topic of study has been presented and a profile of Cameroon and the NW region has been provided in the form of an outline for those who do not know Cameroon or know it very little. The next chapter discusses the methodology and field work encounters for this research.

Chapter Two

Philosophy and Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the methodology and methods for this research. I begin by taking a look at the philosophical perspective on what constitutes valid knowledge from two conventional epistemological positions; positivism and interpretivism. I have taken the interpretivists side of the argument that knowledge is a social construction and not a reality out there to be captured by one single method. This argument is consistent with my methodology discussed in the rest of this chapter. The chapter critiques the quantitative/qualitative divide underscoring the fact that both methodologies are suitable in the social science and cannot be completely divorced from each other. This argument is substantiated in this research in that although the main methods of generating and collecting data are qualitative, it was necessary at some points to collect quantitative data which has been used to strengthen some of the arguments without laying claims to a purely quantitative approach. Due to the fact that the research is conducted for women and mostly about women, a methodological approach that complies with the feminist research paradigms has been employed but without laying claims to a purely feminist approach. This research is an empirical study of the situation of women in Cameroon with a particular focus on those of the North-West with regard to their struggle to empower and improve their quality of life though their community engagement and how government and other development partners are helping to promote this. The approach therefore has been more of an exploration of the situation using different methods and the obstacles faced in the process rather than a more in-depth theorisation of the concepts of CD and women's empowerment although some conceptual implications have been discussed.

The preference of qualitative over quantitative methodology depends on the nature of one's research and the type of research questions to be answered. My choice of qualitative methods with a case study approach which will be fully discussed in this chapter is suitable to the kind of question that I am seeking to address in this research. In this chapter the whole process of my research

activities beginning from the preparatory stage in the UK right through to all my activities in Cameroon will be discussed. I will also discuss the ethical issues raised by the research. The chapter ends with a summary and a conclusion that prepares the reader for the next chapter.

2.2 Epistemological considerations

How do we come to know what we know? What is knowledge? What is truth? What is reality? Whether we see knowledge as absolute, separate from the knower and corresponding to a knowable, external reality or whether we see it as part of the knower and relative to the individual's experiences with his environment has far-reaching implications (Von 1987). Epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with knowledge and endeavours to answer questions about the distinction between true and adequate knowledge and false and inadequate knowledge. Epistemology has evolved from a notion of permanent absolute knowledge to a more adaptive knowledge-in-context position which is the position adopted by this thesis. The debate now is sometimes represented by a spectrum ranging between positivists and interpretivists. Broadly speaking, it is the latter which the thesis adopts although it is acknowledged that the debate is complex and nuanced.

Epistemology explores and in a way justifies the bases of our claims to what we consider as objective knowledge or truth that can be relied on. A particularly central issue in this context is the debate about whether the social sciences can be studied according to the same principles, procedures, and ethos as the natural sciences (Bryman 2004). There are many conventional epistemological positions to this debate including realism, constructionism, phenomenologism, positivism and post positivism or interpretivism. Although most of these terms are used interchangeably and are quite similar in meaning they do have their origins from different disciplines (Le Compte and Schensul 1999). Marsh and Stoker (2002) have also confirmed that the 'distinction between the positions and more especially between interpretivism and realism are not clear-cut' (2002:22).

I shall dwell in this chapter on two of the most popular positions; positivism and interpretivism. The positivist's position holds that in both the natural and social sciences, sense experiences and their logical and mathematical treatment are the

exclusive source of all worthwhile knowledge (Bryman 2004.). Positivists hold the view that the goal of knowledge is simply to describe the phenomena that we experience (Trochim 2005). Knowledge of anything beyond this is believed to be impossible. Positivism is, therefore a rejection of metaphysics. An alternative to the positivist orthodoxy is interpretivism which argues that social behaviour cannot be investigated by the same method as the natural sciences. Human behaviour is completely different from the phenomenon studied by the physical sciences and, therefore, demands a completely different kind of investigating approach (Hammersley et al 2003). Interpretivists critique the positivist's ability to know reality with certainty because they believe that all observation is fallible and subject to error and all theory is subject to being revisable (Trochim 2005). Positivists further believe that objectivity is a characteristic that rests with the individual scientist and that scientists are responsible for putting aside biases and beliefs and seeing the world as it really is. Again, interpretivists reject this position stressing that we are all biased and all our observations are affected (theory-laden).

Thus, objectivity is not a characteristic of an individual; it is inherently a social phenomenon. It is what multiple individuals are trying to achieve when they criticise each other's work. 'We never achieve objectivity perfectly, but we can approach it' (Trochim 2005). In the positivist version, it is contended that there is a reality out there to be studied, captured and understood whereas the interpretivists argue that reality can never be fully apprehended but only approximated (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Interpretivists, therefore, tend to rely on a multiple of methods as a way of trying to capture as much reality as is possible. Very crucial to interpretivists is the "social construction of reality" which means that, unlike positivists who assume that reality has some tangible referent and that agreement can be achieved on its nature given sufficient time and careful research, interpretivists believe that what people know and believe to be true of the world is constructed or simply made up as people interact with one another over time in specific social settings (LeCompte and Schensul 1999). The central tenets of interpretivism rest on the view that a strategy is required that respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore, requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action.

The interpretivist's position is very important and consistent with my methodology for this research which relied heavily on the views of participants in generating naturally occurring data. As a study on women and with women the methodology employed was qualitative, drawing upon women's viewpoints in order to enable the needs and experiences of women to be better felt and expressed. Klein (1983) argues that research with women is one that tries to take women's needs, interests and experiences into account and aims at being instrumental in improving women's lives in one way or the other'. Feminist researchers have embraced qualitative methodology as the approach which permits women to express themselves fully on their own terms as they argue that an individual woman understands, emotions and actions in the world must be explored in her own terms. This has been applied in this research through methods such as open questionnaires, interviews, and focused group discussions all of which have not simply extracted information from the participants but have also given them the opportunity to express their own feelings and emotions in their terms and language.

2.3 The Research Strategy/design and Method.

A research methodology whether quantitative or qualitative is based on some underlying assumptions about what constitutes valid research and which one is the best or most appropriate method. The status of this distinction is ambiguous because it is regarded by some writers as a fundamental contrast and by others as no longer useful or even simply as false (Bryman 2004). However the most obvious distinction between the two types of research methodologies is that quantitative method usually deals with large data sets and employs statistical data while qualitative research deals with smaller sample sizes but more in-depth analysis of verbal accounts in natural language produced by the researcher or informants and full and edited transcripts from audio or video recording of events (Hammersley 2001).

Arguments about which of the two research methods is better were common in the past and many researchers used to believe that there is an absolute distinction between the two. Most authors today agree that there is no such dichotomy between the two methods. 'Both qualitative and quantitative methods

can be used effectively in the same research project. For example a research study might use large survey samples as in opinion polls or household incomes which involves statistical data but would analyse this qualitatively. However, most projects and researchers place their emphasis on one form or another, partly out of conviction but also because of training and the nature of problem studied' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 18). In this research quantitative data has been used where necessary to substantiate arguments and points made by some respondents. Further to this both types have the same claim to knowledge of something worth informing society about. Both qualitative and quantitative researchers 'think they know something about society worth telling others and they use a variety of forms, media and means to communicate their ideas and findings' (Becker 1986:122).

Qualitative research 'can refer to research about persons' lives, stories behaviours, but also about organizational functions, social movements, or interactional relationships. Some of the data may be quantified. The procedure results in findings derived from data gathered by a variety of means. These include observations and interviews, but might include documents, books, videotapes, and even data that have been quantified for other purposes such as census data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:9.17). Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials-case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artefacts; cultural texts and productions; observational; historical; interactional and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individual lives (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:3). The qualitative approach takes into consideration the global picture, including the context and the different social groups acting in the process. It goes beyond the collection of quantitative data into the critical facts and real behaviours related to the social situation being studied, with emphasis on respect for the people, open dialogue and understanding without the imposition of preconceived ideas and without treating people as passive objects (Amungwa 1999:27). However, it must be acknowledged that this position is still highly contested.

Qualitative research is broadly interpretative in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, experienced, produced or constituted. It

is based on research methods that are flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data are produced (Mason (2002:3). It is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world consisting of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). The qualitative approach itself is an embodiment of a variety of other methods including questionnaires, interviews, and observations etc all of which have been employed in this project. But in general the quantitative approach aligns with the approach of the positivists who believe the world to be made up of observable measurable facts, while qualitative fits in with the interpretivists or constructivists who see the world as a place where reality is socially constructed, as complex and ever changing (Thomas 2003). This is the position adopted in this research project.

2.4 The Case study as a chosen research design

A case study is one of several approaches that fall under the general heading of qualitative methodology. A case can be an individual, it can be a group such as a family or class, it can be a community or an office, or a hospital ward, it can be an institution such as school...A case study is one which studies the above to answer specific research questions (Woods 2006). Case study research can provide an effective basis for readers themselves to draw conclusions about other cases and it can do this better than alternative sources of vicarious experiences such as practitioners report or their experiences and frictional accounts as Denscombe postulates:

The logic behind concentrating efforts to one case rather than many is that there may be insights to be gained from looking at the individual case that can have wider implications and importantly that would not have come to light through the use of a research strategy that tried to cover a large number of instances- the survey strategy.

The aim is to illuminate the general from the particular (Denscombe 2000:30).

As a research strategy, the case study is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individuals, groups, organizational, social, political and related phenomena. The case study is one of the most widely used methods in social research. In general, the case study is the preferred method when 'how' and 'why' questions are being posed, (Yin 2003:1) which is the case with this research. It is widely believed that the case study is useful in the study of human affairs because it is down-to-earth and attention holding but not a suitable basis for

generalization (Stake, R.E in Gomme, R et al 2001). This view has remained the main criticism against the case study. For example, how can the study of rural women in the North-West of Cameroon be more generally applied to rural women in other communities in Cameroon? What I hope to offer is a conceptualization and a critical framework which can be drawn upon and tested in apparently similar contexts. Cameroon is a unitary republican state with a centralized system of government; as a whole it has an identical culture with only minor regional differences. The general perception about women and their position within society is the same across the country. The marginalization and subordinate position of women are everywhere in Cameroon and, therefore, their problems, their struggles and aspirations are the same. This therefore, gives this research ample grounds for insights of the result to be applied or tested in other rural areas of Cameroon. The common notion that Cameroon is Africa in miniature also provides a further argument as to why the findings of this research could be tested, replicated in other parts of Africa. Well known case study researchers such as Helen Simons (1980), Robert E. Stake (1995), and Robert K. Yin (2003) have proposed a number of steps that characterize every case study thereby distinguishing it from other research designs which include:

2.4.1 The choice of the North-West as the case location

Determining what the case is going to be involves deciding whether it will focus on an individual, group, institution or a community as is the case with this research. The case being studied in this research is the network of women's groups and development organisations in the North-West region of Cameroon. My choice of this case was influenced by my personal connection and knowledge of the area which facilitated my access into data sources. In addition, my previous knowledge and familiarity with the case region helped me to understand behaviours related to the social situations being studied with emphasis on respect for the respondent, open dialogue and understanding without the imposition of preconceived ideas and without treating people like passive objects (Amungwa 1999).

Establishing 'the case' is complex. I have argued that the case is the network of relevant organisations in North-West Cameroon. I acknowledge that I might have studied three quarters of these organisations as 'cases' in themselves. It was

not possible to compare cases between two different regions of the country because of various constraints including time and resources. My argument, however, is that the ‘sub group’ of ‘the cases’ represent sufficient diversity as to enrich my data. I acknowledge that Cameroon itself is an incredibly heterogeneous society with French influence in most of the regions. Community development is traditionally not something that the French are keen to do. The North-West region is atypical in that it is far more advanced than the other regions of the country in the practice of CD. The GOC has been trying to spread the practice throughout Cameroon and to inculcate in every Cameroonian a strong sense of community involvement. The North-West region was chosen as one case location because of its diversity and strong tradition and commitment to CD. It was chosen not to be representative of Cameroon but to give insight of what might be applicable to other regions because of their socio-cultural and ecological similarities. I argue therefore, that the findings about women’s empowerment and community development in the North-West of Cameroon are may provide a mirror to the future in the other regions of Cameroon and other developing countries. This case study of the North-West may therefore, afford learning particularly about issues in introducing women’s empowerment and community development in traditional context which will be applicable to other developing countries.

2.4.2 The research question

A research question is one that the research is designed to address as distinguished from a question that an interviewer may ask an interviewee during the research process. A research question or questions form the backbone of the research (Mason 2002). They provide the basis or framework for further exploration during the research. Yin (2003) has emphasized that the one thing that distinguishes the case study from other forms of research designs is the types of research questions posed which normally focused on “how”, “what” and “why”. Although how, what and why questions are not only asked in qualitative research it is the case that almost all qualitative researches questions begin in this way, thus my argument about the chosen methodology is also based on this.

2.4.3 A mix of methods

The use of multiple sources of evidence or triangulation allows an investigator to

address a broader range of historical, attitudinal and behavioural issues (Yin 2003). Data for case study research can come from many sources including documentations, various types of interviews and questionnaires. All of these have been used in this research project and I have explained why they were chosen and how they have been used later in this chapter. One of the advantages of multiple methods or triangulation is that it allows for cross-checking findings or data from other methods. (Bryman 2004). Mixed methods can ‘simultaneously address a range of confirmatory and exploratory questions, provide a better stronger inferences and the opportunity for a greater assortment of divergent views’ (Teddie & Tashakkori 2009:33). Furthermore, Greene et al have highlighted the advantages of mixed-method to include the ‘complementarity which clarifies and illustrates results from one method with the use of another, initiation which stimulates new research questions or challenges results obtained through one method and expansion which provides richness and detail to the study exploring specific features of each method’ (Greene et al 1989). The argument therefore, is that a research strategy integrating multiple methods as used in this research produces better results in terms of quality and scope. A mix method approach was necessary for this research for the purpose of complementing the other data sources. Difficulties in obtaining data from other sources such as interviews also gave reasons to use multiple methods just in case one method did not work well.

2.4.4 Collection of data in the field and technique for analysis

The case study approach involves the collection of data using different methods and a technique for analysis. The methods that are used in this research such as semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, questionnaires and documentary analysis are fully discussed in this chapter as well as the technique for the data analysis. The collection of data itself is one of the most difficult stages in the research process. Mason (2002) has argued that it is more appropriate to talk of data generation rather than data collection because ‘as a researcher you do not simply walk out there to find data which exists in a collectable form. Instead you work out how best to generate data from your chosen sources’ (2002:52). Obstacles to the collection of data for this research included the difficult terrain in which the research was conducted and the socio-cultural, economic and political environment as well. Failed or cancelled

appointments were common as were long distance travels and the possibility of respondents hesitating to cooperate on initial contact.

2.4.5 The final report and presentation of theoretical proposal

The final report of the case study, in this case the final thesis, is by far the most challenging aspect of the study. Most case studies tend to have more diverse audiences such as policymakers, community leaders, practitioners and other professionals and Yin (2003) recommends that it is an idea to give a thought to the likely audiences before reporting any case study. The intended audience for this case study include policymakers, community leaders, academicians and development professionals in the areas of community development and women's empowerment. Le Compte and Schensul (1999) have further stated that "dissemination of research results concerns responsibility to the various "communities" to which the researcher owes allegiance. These include people in the setting in which the research is conducted and those who are involved as participants, respondents, informants and partners in the research, other professionals, colleagues and funders. (1999:201). In fact, before I left the field, I already had many requests from some of these to be given a copy of my thesis when the research would be completed.

2.5 Chosen Methods in the Case Study Design

Under the case study design, I have used two types of interviews, semi-structured and focus group. Finally I have used documentary analysis and open-ended questionnaires administered by the researcher. The question about which method is best in collecting data is always a very crucial one in the process of any research project. Bell argues that 'decisions have to be made about which methods are best for particular purposes and then data-collecting instruments must be designed to do the job' (1999:101).

A multi-method approach also known as 'triangulation' was used to generate the data for this research project. Mason (2002) has made a distinction between data sources and methods of generating data. He states that 'your data sources are those places or phenomena from or through which you believe data can be generated, your data generation methods are the techniques and strategies which you used to do this' (2002:51). Three main methods were used to generate the

data for this research project. These were chosen to be consistent with the statement of the research problem and to ensure that they provided sufficient data for the analysis of the key research questions. These were interviews, questionnaires and the analysis of documents. I shall now discuss each of these and how they were used below.

2.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The interview is probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research (Bryman 2001). I found it the most suitable method for my research because of its flexibility and more so because it 'gives voice to the voiceless'. (Bryman 2004). The semi-structured interview method that I used throughout is suitable for this research as it established:

A high level of rapport between interviewer and interviewee, a high degree of reciprocity on the part of the interviewer the perceptions of women being interviewed and a non-hierarchical relationship' (Bryman 2004:336).

'Any interview constitutes a social interaction between two individuals; it is a process of continuous spiral interaction in which one person's response to the stimulation of another becomes the stimulation of another response' (Vivien Palmer in canonical 1928 text, as quoted in Warren and Hackney 2000:37). This quote basically explains the way that my interviews were designed. To begin I had a few guiding questions that I had discussed with my supervisor (See Appendix). These questions covered specific topics. As I went on I picked up on things said by the interviewee and asked further questions that were not on the list. This made the interviews flexible 'responding to the direction in which the interviewee takes the interview' (Bryman 2004). Much greater interest was placed on the interviewee's point of view giving insight to what the interviewee sees as relevant and important to be said. However, I was able to ensure that key questions directly relating to the problem under investigation were asked so that in the end I had answers to the key research questions for analysis. My experiences were quite similar to those described below by a social science researcher on field work.

I remember that for the first interview, I had a very detailed question guideline set up after the focus group, but in the end I only asked a few questions from it. I then decided not to use it at all because I found that if I followed the question guide mechanically, it ruined my relationship with the interviewee and the flow of conversation...

so I still had a set of questions at the back of mind but these questions were free-flowing and open ended and I tried to follow the interviewee direction as it went (Darlington and Scott 2002:65).

Most of the interviews were face-to-face and took place in various settings such as in busy offices, in locked up offices, in relaxed airy outside spaces and in homes. All these venues and the various times were decided by the interviewees. Although initially designed to last between forty five minutes to one hour, some lasted more than that depending on the environment. Interviews that took place during office hours were often interrupted by people coming in and out. One particular interview lasted four hours because the interviewee was constantly being interrupted by telephone calls and people coming in and out of the office for various reasons. As he was very interested in my research topic, he did not want to end the interview prematurely and so kept asking for my patience which I exercised. Some interviews were video-taped or voice recorded but I took written notes for all the interviews. It was the interviewee's choice as to whether I should video tape, voice-record or simply take notes. All interviewees signed a consent form to acknowledge that they fully understood the purpose of the research and their acceptance for being interviewed was a voluntary act which they could terminate at any point. All together (38) thirty eight face-to face interviews were conducted across all categories of respondents with 27 of these being with women. Most individual interviews were conducted with directors of government offices in Yaoundé, Provincial Delegates, Coordinators of NGOs and Women group leaders.

2.5.2 Focus Groups Interviews

The focus group interview is a qualitative interview method which involves several participants usually with the same or similar experience on a topic of research. There is usually a moderator or facilitator involved. In this case I as the researcher and my two assistants played this role.

During the discussions a small group of persons or informants (theoretically between 6 and 12) are guided by a facilitator or moderator and made to express themselves freely and spontaneously on a subject important for research (Nkwi et al 2001:28).

The group setting and the facilitators can encourage participants to discuss their behaviours and reveal their attitudes thereby presenting important data that

would not have been consciously revealed in normal situations of one to one interviews (Nkwi et al 2001). This statement explains the rationale for which the focus group was used as a method in this research. In all of them there was evidence of important data collected which was missing from the face-to-face interview previously conducted with the group leaders. All my focus group interviews were very lively and were video-taped according to the wishes of the participants. There were a few guiding questions at the start to cover topics of interest and the main problem under investigation. For example 'when was this group formed? What are your main activities? What would you say have been some of your achievements over the years? How are the government and the NGOs supporting your activities? When a question was asked anyone could put up their hand to answer and after that any one else could comment on the answer. There was no time limit for any one speaking. Every participant in the focus group was encouraged to speak and give an opinion on the subject. The focus group took place in well organized settings usually the meeting house of the women's group. I conducted six focus group interviews or discussions throughout this research project. All of them were groups of women belonging to one of the other women's groups I worked with. The following is an example of a focus group discussion made up of representatives from some of the women's groups, NGOs and government. I called it a research workshop.

2.5.3 The Research workshops as an example of a Focus Group

Towards the end of my fieldwork in Bamenda I brought together representatives of all the women's groups, NGOs and other institutions that I had worked with during my fieldwork. The main rationale for this was to give back something to my participants by disseminating my preliminary findings and getting their feedback. The purpose was also to bring together representatives of the different development groups, organisations and government services in the province to begin the process of meeting, networking and building strong links and bridges for social capital. I sent out letters of invitation to each one of them stating the purpose of the workshop. I consulted with the Provincial Delegate for Women's Empowerment and the Protection of the Family and she very kindly accepted that I could use the conference hall of that delegation for the workshop for free. The invitation letters gave directions to this venue. I provided transport to and from the hall for those coming outside Bamenda as a form of encouragement. The

programme was to start at 09.00hrs and end at 13.00hrs with lunch to be provided by me. On the day it actually started at 09.45 due to the late arrival of some delegates. In all, sixteen people attended out of twenty who were given invitations representing an 80% attendance rate. The first part of the workshop took the form of short presentations lasting five to ten minutes by the various government delegates who talked about their services and what they offered to women. This was followed by questions from the audience. The presentations tended to be more detailed and contained more information than I had acquired during my initial interview with them. Then each group representative had the chance to talk briefly about their group, its activities, achievements, problems and what solutions or help they were looking for from government and NGOs. This again revealed further data that appeared hidden or not accessed during my initial contacts with the groups.

After I had talked briefly about what hitherto had been the result of my research in the province, a forum for general interaction was opened up and participants asked questions to anyone in the group about anything they were interested in about the topic. It was at this point that I found a growing interest in the discussions and real sense of appreciation from the participants. Some participants personally came up and thanked me for organizing the workshop. They had clearly benefited from the discussions more than they had thought they would. With this I felt satisfied that I did not merely take but also gave back something to my participants.

Throughout, I was interested in the way that people responded to each other's contributions which helped me to build up a view out of the interaction that took place within the group (Bryman 2001). This research workshop also became one of the ways in which my research contributed to networking and enhancing social capital which is a vital element for community development. Contact addresses were exchanged between many groups and participants and I could see a genuine determination to continue meeting and networking. The Provincial Delegate of Women's Empowerment and the Family was particularly impressed as she was able to meet some women for the first time whom she had wanted to meet and got information on how to contact some other groups of women through this workshop.

Fig. 2 Participants at the Research Workshop (photos by Alasah 2006)



2.5.4 Questionnaires

The use of questionnaires was also employed for the collection of data for this research project. Bell (1999) has argued that before you reach a decision to use questionnaires, you must ask yourself whether there are likely to be better ways of collecting information than interviews and if it is so you must produce a well-designed questionnaire that will give you the information you need. In this case, my purpose was to use questionnaires to provide additional information which could not easily be gathered from the interviews and focus groups. Its purpose was to:

- a) Collect basic data. Questions requiring short precise answers were easily answered through questionnaires with less ambiguity
- b) Collect data which may have been missed out using interviews and focus groups.

Questionnaires gave respondents the opportunity to write down what they know about a question in their own terms. These were often short and precise, thereby proving some bits of missing information from the interviews. The questionnaires were designed to elicit information from respondents around the main question under investigation. Questions were asked on topics such as the role of government in promoting women's participation in community development and the empowerment of women, the role of NGOs for the same purpose and how women themselves view their positions and how this could be ameliorated. These provided me with direct answers for analysis. Questionnaires were designed for six different categories of respondents described further below.

All questionnaires were open-ended with ample space provided to give respondents the freedom to express their knowledge, experience and feelings on the subject. The opened-ended questionnaires were used because of the advantages which they have over structured or closed questionnaires as Bryman (2004) has buttressed the point in these words 'the questions do not suggest certain kinds of answers to the respondents and therefore, the respondents' level of knowledge and understanding of issues can be tapped. They are useful for exploring new ideas or ones in which the researcher has limited knowledge. Questionnaires were an additional ingredient of my data' (Bryman 2004:145).

The questionnaires were prepared in a booklet form to fit into an A5 size envelope and mostly administered personally by myself or my research assistants. In some cases an agreement was reached on how they would be returned to me while in other cases, my research assistants went round and collected them. In a few cases, I provided self-addressed envelopes for them to be returned by post which worked out well. I did not send questionnaires by post. I realized that the response rate for questionnaires that were administered by me personally to the respondents was higher than for those that were administered by my research assistants perhaps because my presence and the way I explained my research and the importance of completing the questionnaires had an impact on the respondents. In most cases they preferred to complete them in my presence and return them to me. Bell (1999) confirms that better cooperation occurs if you can establish personal contact with respondents. All together, a hundred and sixty two (162) questionnaires were administered to the various categories of respondents and a hundred and eighteen were returned (118) representing a response rate of about 74%.

2.5.5 Documentary Analysis

We normally think of a document as a fixed and static text but Prior (2003) has argued that:

Paintings, tapestries, monuments, diaries, shopping lists, stage plays, adverts, rail tickets, films, photographs, videos, engineering drawings, the content of human tissue archives and World Wide Web (WWW) pages can all stand as documents in one frame or another (Prior 2003:2)

However, the use of documents in this research refers to written texts as opposed to pictures, drawings or paintings. These are mainly standard text books, other publications on women's empowerment and community development in Cameroon, policy documents from government sources relevant to the subject, NGOs working documents and official publications of the UN and World Bank dealing with the subject of women's empowerment and community development. I also consulted other national publications, group or organization reports and constitutions, and journals. It was particularly necessary for me to consult some national documents to obtain quantitative data in the form of figures showing government allocation of budgets to the two Ministries under study. These would be used for analysis in chapter seven. This form of data could not be collected

from interviews or questionnaires. Bechhofer and Paterson (2000) have commented that the analysis of documents and other kinds of texts in already published or otherwise available forms can be immensely rewarding. The use of documents as described above for analysis in this research was meant to add to the facts or evidences already collected from the other methods. Guba et al (1990) argue that 'many of the claims, concerns and issues that emerged during an interview can be further illuminated by reference to existing documents and records' (1990:209). It was particularly necessary to obtain official statistic from government documents as they offer valuable data that could not be obtained from other sources or through other methods such as interviews. Official statistics constitute one of the unobtrusive methods of social research (Bryman 2004).

Yin has made the point that documents as a source of evidence for the research process have the following strength: 'They are stable and can be reviewed repeatedly, unobtrusive-not created as a result of the case study, exact contents and exact names with references and details of an event...' (Yin 2003:86). Mason (2003) recognizes that diaries, written accounts, and stories... pictures, charts tables and lists are all types of documents which can be generated through the research process. This research has produced a number of these which have been used for illustration and deeper analysis. The University of Southampton Library has been a valuable source of documents for this research. During fieldwork in Cameroon, other sources of documents included the British Council Library in Bamenda, The St Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary Library in Bambui and the Library of the University of Buea where I also accessed some past dissertations, encyclopaedias, and other relevant text books.

2.5.6 Data Analysis.

'Analysis is about the search for explanation and understanding in the course of which concepts and theories will probably be advanced, considered and developed' (Blaxter et al 2004:206). The process of analysis begins with the data collection and continues till the final stages of the research process. McNabb (2004) has stated that the phase of actual data analysis includes three activities (1) data reduction (2) data display and (3) drawing conclusions. I have gone through these stages. Without these it would have been very difficult to

understand anything from data that is presented raw in the form of notes, quotes, audio or video tapes transcripts or even photographs. I used a simple coding method in the form of abbreviations by which I gave codes to major themes. (For example CP stands for communication problem and IWE stands for importance of women's empowerment).

After the interviews were conducted and transcribed these codes were used to help identify the major themes that emerged from each interview. A grounded theory approach was also used in many instances. This is the method of analysis most often used in qualitative research whereby theoretical propositions and explanations are developed out of the emerging data collected as the research goes on. This was found to be useful during fieldwork as it enabled the analysis and interpretation of data from the source of collection. 'Grounded theory has been defined as theory that was derived from data systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process. Its two central features are that it is concerned with the development of theory out of data and the approach is iterative or recursive meaning that data collection and analysis occur in tandem, repeatedly referring to each other' (Bryman 2004). I have argued evidentially where the relevant evidence is available and also interpretively in cases where the interpretation of my narratives is meaningful or reasonable. I based my argument on the data that has been presented with references to what is commonly known. I have also tried to be ethically and morally balanced in my arguments and explanation taking into consideration the wider audience and the political and cultural sensitivity of the issues dealt with in the research.

2.5.7 Ethical Issues

Social sciences research at first may seem an activity that is morally and ethically neutral but a close examination will actually reveal that on the contrary social sciences research raises ethical issues that clearly distinguish the social sciences from nearly all the other academic disciplines. At the time of my field work the requirement for going through an ethics committee was not yet in place in my department at the University of Southampton. Hence my main guide in the field was the code of ethics for Social Workers and the guidelines of the British Sociological Association (BSA).

The principles of research ethics have been clearly summarized as follows:

Research ethics is about being clear about the nature of the

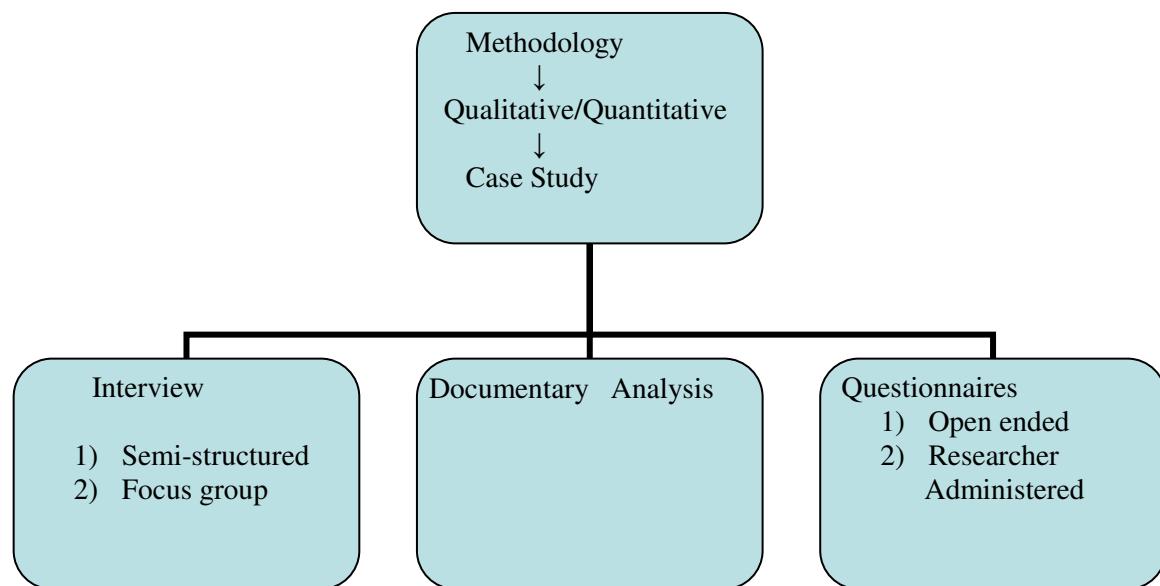
agreement you have entered into with your research subjects or contacts. Ethical research involves getting the informed consent of those you are going to interview, observe or take materials from... it involves reaching agreement on the use of data and how its analysis will be reported (Bell 1999:39)

The informed consent of all those involved in this research was sought in accordance with the guidelines of the British Sociological Association which states *inter alia*:

As far as possible sociological research should be based on the freely given informed consent of those studied. This implies a responsibility on the Sociologist to explain as fully as possible and in terms meaningful to the participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken and how it is to be disseminated. (BSA 1993:2)

I personally contacted and explained my research, how the information would be used to all those interviewed during the study. They all read and signed the consent form which I have retained. Some agreed to have the interviews videotaped or voice-recorded. For all these I explained how the tapes would be used and they agreed to this. However, many respondents felt free to include their names and contacts at the end of the questionnaire which was not a requirement and they requested to be contacted if I thought they could be of further help. However, each research environment is different and although there may be general ethical guidelines that cut across cultures, each culture has its own ethical norms that need to be respected by all researchers working in the area. My knowledge of the culture of the people that I researched with enabled me to cope with various cultural expectations such as respect for authority and power or simply hierarchy, approaches and greetings to various categories of people and answers to some questions. The figure below summarises my main methodology and methods for the research as examined in the preceding pages.

Fig 3 Summary of methodology and methods used for the research



2.6 The Fieldwork and its challenges

The thought of having to embark on fieldwork as part of this research project was rather scary at the beginning. Most literature on fieldwork experience does not suggest that this is an easy part of the research process by any means. ‘You are likely to find the process more challenging and exhausting than conducting interviews because settings and situations can be notoriously messy and complicated with lots of things happening at once...’(Mason 2002:87). However, I had both positive and negative expectations. ‘Field-workers cannot predict in detail the range and depth of feelings they will come to experience in the field but often some educated guesses can be made’ (Warren and Hackney 2000:58). I thought for instance that access to individuals and institutions for data generation and collection was not going to be a problem considering my status as a male researcher coming from a world class university in a developed country. Not only that, but I am a Cameroon citizen and an indigene of the community I went to study. Things did not quite work out that way as I had real challenging moments in negotiating access to individuals and groups, some of which I have described in this chapter. My other expectations which caused anxiety before fieldwork were about the difficult terrain I was going into. Stories about bribery and corruption in Cameroon in both the public and private sectors and about how people in offices all expect to be bribed for any service can be off-putting. This

again was not the case as I found most people helpful and cooperative in providing me with the data. In fact, many felt rather privileged to be participants in this study which is highly regarded.

Although I was encouraged by the fact that Cameroonian are generally welcoming and hospitable people, I was not altogether confident that gaining access into individual women's groups was going to be without challenges. But as I had to do it, I had to prepare for it and it turned out to be the most exciting part of this research project so far. Clearly the place, the people involved and the time can all make a difference in a research project. I went to the field with already a very good knowledge of the culture of the people I was going to deal with. Apart from a working experience and a good knowledge of the geography and history of the study area I also had intimate personal experience because I was born, bred and educated for many years in Bambui, a village in the North-West, some ten kilometres north of Bamenda town. This means that I was not by any means a stranger in the area of my study and this facilitated both my travelling to various places and identification of places I did not know. This confirms with what Warren and Hackney (2000) postulates that when researchers are already members of the setting they choose to study, entry is unproblematic-they are already there. What may become problematic is not entry and finding a place but 'keeping' their place or negotiating a new one' (2000:12).

Fieldwork in Cameroon presented special challenges in terms of organization and foresight. It involved good planning which began in the UK months before I ever arrived in Cameroon. Advanced planning was done with many collaborators in Cameroon some of whom set the scene before my coming. In the UK I budgeted for living with my family for six months and for my travelling expenses, throughout the period, remuneration for my research assistants, incentives to groups and individuals and miscellaneous expenditures. I also prepared the equipment that I would need in the field for collecting data. These included a mini DV video camcorder with many spare tapes, an acer laptop, a Lexmark all-in one printer, a digital camera, digital voice recorder, note books and pens, paper files, spare CDs and extra memory sticks. I also prepared data collection instruments with my supervisor. These included interview questions, focus group

plans, questionnaires and consent forms. Fieldwork in this context presented a particular challenge.

2.6.1 The Research Assistants

I selected two people to assist me during my fieldwork period in Cameroon. The role of the assistants were first to assist in taking notes during interviews and focus group discussions to ensure that nothing was missed out. They assisted at times in administering the questionnaires and facilitating discussions during focus groups. The female assistant also facilitated my access into women's groups. They also helped in translating some interviews from French to English. I conducted all the interviews and also took notes in all cases except where I had to video tape or audio record.

My first assistant was a lady³. We knew each other in high school after which she went on to obtain an honours degree in Economics and Natural Resources Management from the University of Yaoundé II. She has teaching experience and over three years experience of working closely with women's groups and organizations as manager of a national NGO. Through this position she has better knowledge of the women's groups in the North-West and therefore was the best person for me to work with. She is very fluent in English, French and Pidgin English as well. At the time of my fieldwork she was president of one of the well-established women's organization in Bambui. She did not only help me gain easy access into this group but also assisted in directing me to some of the groups I researched. My main rationale for choosing a female research assistant was to have someone who would facilitate my entrance into the world of women. This rationale is supported by feminist writers such as Mies et al (1983) who postulates that men often do not have the experiential knowledge and lack empathy in dealing with women. She assisted in organising entry into women's groups and in focus group discussions as well as notes-taking during interviews. Her assistance was thus both invaluable in gaining access to participants and in facilitating the actual data collection process.

³ Generally females in Cameroon preferred to be addressed as ladies rather than women. Woman or women can be accepted for those much older but not for females in their prime of life.

My second assistant was a man. We became friends in high school and he later studied in the University of Yaoundé II where he graduated with an honours degree in Political Sciences. He is well-trained in interview techniques and surveys and has in the past five years been working with the National Office of Statistics. He is very fluent in English, French and Pidgin English. He assisted in most group interviews, took notes and helped to transcribe most of the interviews in French. My first contact with my assistants was in December 2004 while in Cameroon. We met briefly and I explained my research topic to them and formally requested that I would like them to be my assistants when I came to do the fieldwork. I again met with them in April 2005 when I went to Cameroon to attend the International Association of Community Development Conference (IACD). We stayed in touch through emails regularly until my return in October 2005 for the actual fieldwork. Before returning I had proposed to them how much I will be able to pay as remuneration for the assistance they would give me. This amount was confirmed on my arrival at seventy five thousand Francs each (75.000 FRS) the equivalent of £80, which was paid in two instalments at the start and end of the fieldwork period. Apart from this, I provided them with all the stationery and equipment for the work, transport to and from field trips, and refreshment when necessary. On arrival in Bamenda I had sessions with them during which I coached them on the ethics of social research and their responsibilities as research assistants and their right to withdraw at any point if they wished. One of them had a full-time job and finishes at 13.30 hours. Thus, it became necessary to arrange our programme of work to begin from 15.00 hours.

2.6.2 Research Participants.

Participants for this research fall into six categories as follows:

(R1) Senior Government Officers in Yaoundé

This group of participants includes directors and directresses of major departments of ministries such as the Department of Community and Local Development, the Department for the Promotion of Women's Rights and Gender, chiefs of bureaus and project directors/directresses.

(R2) Representatives of Bilateral organisations and diplomatic missions

This category of participants includes projects coordinators within organisations such as UNDP and the British High Commission.

(R3) Provincial/ Divisional Delegates and NGOs Coordinators

This group includes all Provincial and Divisional Delegates, and Provincial Coordinators of NGOs.

(R4) Members of Women's Groups and their leaders

(R5) Community leaders/General public

(R6) Graduates of the Department of Women's Studies Buea University

2.6.3 Negotiating access into groups, institutions, and individuals for data generation.

Gaining access into various sources of data was by far the most challenging part of my fieldwork. Bell (1999) has remarked 'No researcher can demand access to an organization or to material. People will be doing a favour if they agree to help...' (1999:37). My earlier experience of going round to collect information from people and institutions for academic purpose in 1997 when I was writing a term paper for my Grade 1 Teachers Certificate was daunting and frustrating. But this time it was a different experience perhaps due to my new status as a PhD student from a world class university in a developed country. Probably this was a contributing factor to the overwhelming reception and collaboration I received from people in most places. In fact nearly all of those I met in senior positions had a UK education background. This says one thing about Cameroon. Level of education is presumably important in gaining access to various sources and people.

To begin with, I used the people and places I knew to get to those I did not know. This is what is known as snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is simply a sample method whereby the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contact with others. (Bryman 2004). In my case the initial contact was my first assistant who was also the president of a women's group. Through her I was able to establish contacts with similar groups throughout the province. Generally, Cameroonians are not used to the culture of only coming to see someone in the office by appointment. If someone knows where an office is located or someone who works there and they need their help, they can just go to see them. If they are available they will attend to you. An appointment will only be necessary if

the person comes and the individual they wanted to see is truly busy and cannot see them that day.

I started negotiating access into groups in Bamenda by going first to the Provincial Service of Community and Local Development which also has a register of all Common Initiative Groups (CIGs) and NGOs and other organizations in the province. Among the list of organizations I got was the German Development Service (DED). When I visited DED I was further given a list of the NGOs in the province whose work focuses on women's issues, their locations in town and the contact persons and their mobile telephone numbers. With this I was able to walk into the offices during working hours and introduce myself at reception with the letter from my supervisor which stated clearly who I was and the topic of my research. From reception I was directed to see the office manager or coordinator if she or he was available that day. In the case where I had to come back, I left a copy of the letter from my supervisor and my compliment card to be given to the manager or coordinator so they would know who I was before my return. This is how I got myself into the NGOs and other organizations that I worked with during my fieldwork in Bamenda. Most people I met in offices were ready to talk with me immediately instead of making an appointment. Most did not want to fill questionnaires and return them to me on a later date. Also they all remarked that my study was of interest and they would like a copy of my completed thesis for their organization.

A slightly different approach was taken to reach the women's groups which are based outside of Bamenda town. I wrote a letter to the groups accompanied by a copy of the letter from my supervisor, introducing myself and the topic of my research and requesting to have access into the group to know more about its activities. This was followed by a phone call to the president of the group and a brief chat to familiarize myself with them. The approach to gaining access into people and places in Yaoundé was again different. I researched with two ministries in Yaoundé. The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Protection of the Family and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. For the latter I had one link person, a personal friend and senior member of staff of that Ministry who also is a UK scholar. By some chance he happened to be an expert in the field of agriculture and rural development. He knew exactly who

and where to direct me to and was himself a valuable resource person throughout my entire fieldwork period. In the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family, I knew no one. Thus, I simply presented myself at reception and struggled to express myself in French. Without fully understanding me I was first taken to the library room to see if I could find the material I needed. I came back after looking round in the library and noticing that all the books were in French and no title related to my topic and I was taken this time to the right person. She was the chief of bureau in charge of the implementation of women's rights. She spoke English very well and was able to understand my needs and helped to direct me to the other services of the Ministry that were of help to me.

One of the offices she referred me to was headed by a woman from the North-West Province and my expectations were that I would be received more warmly since we come from the same province and speak the same language. My expectations were wrong. It turned out to be the only office where I was poorly received throughout my research activities in the country. This is what Nkwi et al (2001) are talking about when they say that 'during the period of initial contact, researchers are filled with a high degree of euphoria...this initial excitement, however, rarely last through the entire fieldwork experience' (2001:18) I got over it and still succeeded in getting someone else in that Ministry to talk to who gave me the information I required. This incident could easily have bogged me down but I soon realized that no one had an obligation to help me. For the other organizations in Yaoundé and diplomatic missions such as the British High Commission, I simply walked into reception introduced myself and made an appointment to see the project officer whenever they were available to see me.

2.6.4 The Access problem.

Context presented its own difficulties. There are major factors special to the Cameroon culture which influenced my access. This includes the manner in which Cameroonian do business in general, their work culture and bureaucracy. For example, late coming to offices is evident in the Cameroon public service. The greater part of my research was done from November up to early January which happens to be the busiest period of the year. The traffic in the Yaoundé and Bamenda streets was frustrating. On one occasion I trekked a distance of 5km climbing hills under the hot sun to and from the project site of the Bafut women

because there was no taxi available for that direction. It happened to be the day out for the secondary school in that local area and all taxis were busy transporting students to Bamenda town. You can only get a taxi to an unpopular destination when there are no passengers going to the popular destination. Talking about the Bafut women, I recall that this was the last group of women I contacted and one that I had difficulty getting access into. They are a group that has been over-researched and they are obviously frustrated because no organization has given them support for their palm oil project which they are now not able to continue to sustain even though it has not been fully realized. Thus, I had to call several times and explain myself very clearly before gaining their approval to work with them.

2.6.5 A reflection of my position as a male insider-outsider researcher

Cameroon is a society where status matters quite a lot and can determine or influence what you get or deserve to get. Marital status is obviously important but academic, economic, and political statuses tend to count most. I was initially not worried about status as a factor that would have any influence on my fieldwork activities. Now I believe my status as a male researcher coming from a university in a developed country might have had some influence on my respondents and that they might not have responded to me in the same way if I was female or any one from a local institution. It is hard to say the extent to which this might have affected my data but that possibility is always there. I had an overwhelming response from my educated participants such as directors, delegates and chiefs of bureaus which also facilitated access and the establishment of rapport, but this also might have had a down side to it. There is the possibility that some of these were suspicious of my real intentions for the research and saw it as another way by which I was trying to criticise and expose their system. Some might have simply been threatened by my position as a researcher of higher status all of which could have affected the type of data I got.

Being a man researching with women did not appear to be a problem for me in the first instance. I have grown up in a family of all women and even my present family is made up of a wife and three daughters. Perhaps also my earlier training as a teacher with several years teaching experience and dealing with both sexes contributed to my confidence in relating to women. I acknowledge that confidence

not notwithstanding the mere fact of my status as a male and coming from abroad might have affected the way I was seen, interpreted or taken to be.

More importantly, my position as an insider-outsider researcher might also have had some implications on the way my respondents related with me and the kind of information they provided. There was the possibility in this situation of being seen as an outsider coming to tap knowledge away for self benefit and not as an insider doing something to improve the status quo. Either way there were advantages and disadvantages. Rosaldo (1993) commenting on the experience of a Japanese American woman researching in Japan talks of 'tensions between identifying as both an American researcher and Japanese woman all of which conferred privileges and restrictions' (1993:180).

Living within a society or visiting one as a fieldworker,
presupposes a gendered interaction, gendered conversation
and a gendered interpretation. Just as all knowledge even
language itself is political reflecting power relations, all
knowledge is gendered' (Warren 1988:10)

Two main issues might have been possible here; a male outsider researcher in the world of women. Not notwithstanding my confidence in relating well with women I still found it hard in certain instances to pose the right kind of questions in the exact words when I was sitting face to face with a group of older women. For example the use of certain words in the local language such as sex is quite absurd and I wouldn't ask a question using that word to older women but can do so to more educated women speaking in English or French. 'Being a man or women is at the core of our social lives and inner selves' (Warren 1988:10) I was quite conscious of this and made the choice of a female research assistant, to bridge the gap where I was unable to do it and this went very well. My female assistant knew the dynamics of the whole business of research with women and in some instances I was only following the rules. I realized that most women with whom I had difficulties in accessing were the older women in most of the village based groups because I had to use the local language to approach them. With educated women in higher positions such as the Provincial Delegates, I could more easily find a way of talking to them, and expressed myself much better because I had to do this in English or French. There were difficulties at times in understanding local elderly women who spoke in strong proverbial language and

for them understanding some of my explanations. Thus, my female assistant carried out most of the focus group interviews with village women's groups while I conducted those with the more educated women. I acknowledge that this also could have had some effect on the type of data that I obtained, or how I interpreted it. For instance, it may have been easier for me to interpret the data from the more educated women, as my own social position was more similar to theirs.

Gender and sex issues and their role in fieldwork dynamics remain a huge debatable problem in the social sciences. The argument mostly is about whether there is any advantage which male and female researchers have over each other during fieldwork. How do gender and sexuality impact on fieldwork? Controversially Cressey (1986) believes that women researcher find it harder than their male counterparts in establishing rapport as he says that: 'Men are more likely to achieve rapport with respondents than women' (Cressey 1986:112). This is highly contested and depends largely on context and individuals. A further argument states that 'although women may sometimes be prevented from entering male social worlds, they are depicted nevertheless as encountering more willingness from both females and males to be allowed access to the inner worlds of feelings and thoughts (Warren 1988:42).

2.6.6 Limitations of the Study

The main limitations of this study have been time and financial resources. Being an academic project that had to be submitted for evaluation and the award of a degree this was limited within time. I could not afford to keep going for as long as I wished. Given more time the quality might have been improved. Most research projects at this level are usually funded by a public body or government but this has not been the case with this one which is entirely the effort of the researcher supported by the kindness of some individuals. Limited financial resources could not permit me to spend more time in the field and get more experiences from many women's groups and organizations. I only had four months to conduct my fieldwork from my time of arrival in Cameroon to the time of my departure back to the UK. The groups studied cover mainly two of the seven divisions of the North-West Region and I would have loved to be in direct contact with at least one group from each of the divisions. Although this may seem not to be a big

sample for broad generalization, it does reasonably represent the entire province in that data collected from provincial offices covered the entire region and the only thing lacking was direct contact with the groups. Throughout my field work period in Cameroon I created contacts with many groups and individuals who were happy to continue contact with me after and to keep furnishing me with any further information I required for this study, but financial and time constraints did not enable me to continue to do so.

2.6.7 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the methods that I have used in generating and collecting the data for this research project. I began with an epistemological consideration which confirmed my broadly interpretivists position. This research is for the benefit of women and I have tried to account for the process of self-reflection and changing perspectives this has presented me with. I am a male researcher working in a particular context and I mirror that context in my experience and thinking. I have therefore, tried to develop a critical and self-challenging framework informed by feminist research theory and I have tried to employ it in my fieldwork and subsequently applied it in data analysis. A qualitative methodology with a case study approach has been employed. The rationale for choosing this approach and the selection of the North-West as my single case location has also been made clear. I have explained the research process beginning from my preparation for fieldwork in the UK through to the step-by -step process taken to generate and collect data for the research for over four months in Cameroon. Included in this process is the importance of the relationship which I have created with many people in Cameroon, my research assistants and participants, some of whom have continued to be of valuable help to me throughout this research project. A reflective account of my position as an insider-outsider researcher and the potential for biases that this might have had on the data and findings has been presented. What follows in the next chapter is a review of literature on concepts relevant to the topic of this thesis.

Chapter Three

The Concepts of Community Development, Women's Empowerment and gaps in Policy implementation

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will critically review literature on the key concepts that constitute the theoretical base of this research. It will draw from a wide range of sources including standard texts dealing with the subject of community development, women in development and women's empowerment. The literature will draw also from UN and World Bank sources, Community Development Journal (CDJ) and other journal, articles, internet sources relating to the subjects. There is a substantial amount of literature from the West particularly the UK in this and the next chapters and this is primarily due to the fact that the UK has much in common with the North-West of Cameroon which is part of West Cameroon, a British colony from 1922 to 1961. Modern CD in North-West Cameroon is believed to have been introduced by the British as part of preparing the colony for self reliance and self rule although it is argued that no such act was purely intended to help the colonies but rather just to enhance its primary objective of economic exploitation (Gary 1989).

The thesis focuses on women, seeking to understand how government policy is empowering them and promoting their role and contribution to community development in Cameroon, with a case study of rural women's groups and development organisations in the North-West region also known as the Grassfields. It seeks to understand in one respect the importance of this role and whether this is being recognised by the government and other development organisations and adequately being supported. Success or failure depends largely on the effective implementation of programmes and policies that have been designed to meet women's needs. To this effect, this chapter will review the issue of gaps between policy and implementation in developing countries and will relate this to the Cameroon situation in chapter four. The chapter would also review among others the concepts of community and community development, and a brief history of community development in the UK in order to show how the principles of CD are similar in both countries although the practice and main area of focus are different. The concept of empowerment and women's

empowerment, Women in Development and Gender and Development globalisation and community development will all be reviewed.

Blaxter et al (2004), postulates that a literature review is the systematic, explicit, and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating and interpreting the existing body of recorded work produced by researchers, scholars and practitioners. Without it one would not acquire an understanding of the topic under study and get an idea of what research has already been done on it. However, there does not seem to be any agreed limit on the literature review or the nature it should take; it depends on the particular topic of research. ‘Since your topic is by definition unique, you are the person best placed to decide what is relevant and what is irrelevant’ (Marshal and Green 2004:49-50). Therefore, what I have reviewed in this and the next chapter is what I consider literature relevant to the topic of this thesis and applicable to the Cameroon context. In order to explain why the role of rural women remains limited in the community development process, it is important to examine the issue of women’s empowerment, to understand how far Cameroonian women in general and those of the North-West in particular have been empowered and how this affects our understanding of factors preventing women from benefiting from government programmes.

3.2 Gaps between policy and its implementation in developing countries

Policy is an important process in the life of every nation. Writers such as (Stirrat 2001) have argued that policy is a positivist epistemological framework which means it can be measured with a coherent set of policy objectives. ‘The whole life of policy is a chaos of purposes and accidents. It is not a matter of the rational implementation of the so called decisions through selected strategies’ (Edward Clay 1984, quoted in Court and Young 2006). World leaders like George W. Bush have argued that to succeed in policy you ‘need to demonstrate success and dissociate yourself from failure’ (Associated Press 18 January 2001, quoted in Rap 2005:1303).

It is one thing to set down a law or policy which states what needs to be done and quite another to ensure this policy is actually having the required positive impact on society. ‘The success of legal instruments lies in their respectability,

excludability and the sanction that they carry. An effective sanctioning mechanism depends on the strength of the judiciary' (Nasong and Gabsa 2001:97). 'Policy analysis is typically based on the description of a gap between a desired and an actual state of affairs' (Rap 2005:1301). Politics in most developing countries is characterised by policies and laws most of which never get to be implemented and consequently never get to have any effect on those it is intended for. 'Policy links are dramatically shaped by the political context. The policy process and the production of research are in themselves political processes from start to finish' (Court and Young 2005:86). Government and leaders in most developing countries are good at creating public policies or duplicating successful programmes in other countries which are never put into practice.

Indeed personal rule in Africa is characterised by the seeming paradox of relative autonomy or freedom for the ruler and his Clique to make policies but great constraint and incapacity to implement and enforce them' (Jackson and Rosenberg 1982:13)

Most existing regulations in developing countries tend to be replicates of past regulations in developed countries or are intended to satisfy certain western demands and therefore, lack groundings in local realities. There is therefore the total neglect of customary communities which constitute a severe handicap in their implementation (Nasong and Gabsa 2001:97).

The villagization programme in Tanzania in the 1970s is a typical example of this top bottom policy. It failed because there was a total neglect of local people's knowledge and experiences. Central control and administrative convenience not ecological or any other consideration governed the decision of the government who believed that villagization was after all for the benefit of the villagers. (Scott 1998). 'In India government-sponsored programmes designed to increase rural women's economic production outside the home are generally designed by outsiders for rural women without taking into account their views, attitudes and abilities...' such focus on project implementation without beneficiary involvement in policy planning is likely to make women's basic needs peripheral to the main thrust of policies...(Dutt and Samanta 2002:137).

Many governments have commendable goals and policies regarding economic growth and development, promotion of equity and caring for the needs of the poor and disadvantaged. 'In translating these policies into programmes and projects during the implementation phase there are often gaps between promise and performance' (Smith 2007). Many policies tend to remain only symbolic statements expressing the intentions of political leaders stock piled in shelves and files in government offices for years which never get implemented. Many policies and programmes intended to achieve development objectives often end in failure bringing disappointment to those intended to benefit usually the poor at the grassroots level, suspicion, lost of trust and confidence for the politicians and government.

3.2.1 Causes of Gaps in the implementation of policy.

'As the political decision to pursue a policy is taken, the usual concern of policy analysis is how to implement the policy and how to realise institutional models in practice' (Rap 2005; 1302). In most developing countries, policy gaps are created by a web of factors which might be socio-cultural, economic, political or democratic. A profound weakness exists in most state administrative machinery including the executive, the judiciary and the legislature which seriously undermines programme implementation (Smith 2007:56). This simply means there are significant loopholes in all these hierarchies which affect both the policy process and its implementation. One of these is corruption. Corruption is a notable evil affecting the working systems in many developing countries in various ways and constitutes a major impediment to the implementation of programmes and policies of government. Corruption delays the disbursement of budgets allocated for government programmes and sometimes misdirects the budget.

Failures to use a significant proportion of the available funds, reallocation of funds between line items and weak procurement systems at local level and delays in disbursement of funds at the central level create gaps between policies objectives and policy implementation (Glenngard and Maina 2007:1-2).

A further cause of the gap is the lack of adequate resources to facilitate the process of policy implementation. A severe lack of resources has been identified

as a major constituent cause of the failure of policy in many countries including more developed countries. According to the UN, one of the greatest challenges facing many countries in the area of development policy is the lack of adequate resources (UN 2002). Although poor implementation of policy is often blamed on inadequate resources, 'the lack of a strong political will is believed to be the real culprit. States are limited not only by financial resources but also by shortages of skills and social capital' (Ibid). In addition to this, unrealistic policy targets and the lack of means to evaluate implementation of policy all lead to gaps (Glenngard and Gabsa 2007). However Michael Winter (2000) commenting on the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union has argued that:

Policy might also be weak in implementation terms because of its own inadequate design or indeed because the policy process itself may involve compromise and contestation which blurs and even sets internal contradictions within the particular policy initiative (Winter 2000:47).

In many developing countries the political systems are authoritarian without a competitive political opposition that allows for freedom of expression, free media and criticisms of programmes and policies. 'The established modalities of most governments are generally top-down (Ibid). Policy making is by command and the political system is centralised and secretive with regulated citizen participation, control, censored media and harassment of opposition (Ibid). However the argument has also been made that 'Notions of strong and weak policy borne of policy implementation studies do not necessarily imply that policy weakness derives solely from a top-down model of implementation' (Winter 2000:47)

Generally it is believed that without a political environment that is free and encourages policy and programme evaluation by citizens, groups, the media and opposition there can be no transparency and seriousness by the government and political leaders to implement policies. Asamaoh has noted that:

In Africa, political stability and /or perceived political vulnerability encourage caution by government regarding social programs. Government decision-makers respond to immediate political or social pressures from a variety of constituencies. Empirical findings perceived as adding more complications to the decision making process or as embarrassment because they contradict decisions already taken may be filed away for later consideration or dismissed as too academic (Asamaoh 1988).

The failure of development in Africa is partly due to poor implementation of policy in most countries. 'We need to translate commitments on paper to investment on the ground if children are to access food and education and if their parents are to achieve sustainable livelihoods' (ESRC, 2007:4). Economic development is likely to be successful if countries follow the right economic and political policies and adopt an effective mechanism for implementation which provides maximum freedom to individuals (Allen and Thomas 2001). In the case of Africa in particular, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC 2007:5) postulates that they need partnerships across boundaries and in communities of thought and practice that include policy and practitioners as well as poor people.

Generally it has been argued that the socio-political environment in most developing countries characterised by a single party authoritarian regime does not support the tradition of evaluating government policies and programmes which is a common practice in developed economies. What usually happens when policy gets much ahead of social practice and opinion is that large discrepancies emerge between what the laws says or the president specifies should happen and the actual practice.

One of the major characteristic features of many developing countries is a weak legal system and the lacks of expert personnel as well as an institutional mechanism for the implementation of policy. These are major contributing factors to the gap between policy and implementation. Socio-cultural factors such as the male perception about women and their place in society may also help in delaying the implementations of women focused programmes. Furthermore, the policy process itself in most developing countries constitutes a major setback. Sometimes, for policy to become law ready to be enforced it has to undergo many processes through the system requiring the signature and approval of different government officials which can sometimes take years. Poor planning due to lack of experience and individual vested interest may sometimes be responsible for slowing the implementation process. 'The link between research and policy is tenuous and difficult to understand, and sometimes the policy process is complex and chaotic and much research is not really policy relevant' (Young 2005).

To recapitulate the main points here, this section has argued that policy is an important process in every country. Developing countries in particular tend to have very good policies which clearly outline what the government intends to achieve for its people. But gaps between policies and what is actually achieved are created by factors such as the lack of adequate resources, corruption of government officials compounded by the centralised and top-down administrative systems common in most developing countries, unrealistic policy targets and poor policy designs as well as the lack of a strong political will and an implementation mechanism. All these factors create gaps between development policies and programmes of government and their implementation for the benefit of the people, especially the poor.

3.3 The Concepts of Community and Community Development.

There is a widely held view in the West that 'communities' no longer exist (Green and Haines 2002). Even in some developing countries like Cameroon people are now talking about cultural decadence and the breakdown of good neighbourliness all of which are signs of community decline due to Western influence. What people mean by this depends on a mix of complex socio-cultural factors and their notion of community. There is a general belief that the mass industrial heterogeneous society of today, which continues to encourage the movement of people from rural to urban areas and from developing to developed countries, with its associated multitude of social problems, indicates the breakdown of traditional communities where people used to live more closely sharing many things in common. Those who hold this view seem to think of a community only in terms of geographical location. Whereas the spontaneous movement of people from place to place mainly to achieve balance between population and resources may be viewed as deconstructing the traditional geographical community, it could also be seen as constructing other types of communities such as community of interest and community of identity which exist in the diasporas and independent of geographical proximity.

Community is a seemingly simple word but when you try to examine it you realise it is a labyrinth and an inexhaustible world in itself. Until I examined the literature I did not believe there could be so much difficulty in trying to understand this seemingly simple term. Most people tend to think of a

community only in terms of geographical location (Dominelli 1995). This is the traditional standard view which is now very limited. Modern advanced societies have created other types of communities making the definition of a community far more complex and hugely contestable. Dominelli (1995) and Clark (1996) believe that there is no satisfactory definition of a community. Attempts to provide one have been based on geographical areas, 'aggregates of people with common cause or groups of people who have been defined externally by other people's characteristics' (Dominelli (1995). Any such definition will actually be a political one and Clark believes that: 'for the citizen perspective, inclusive definitions may be variously opportune, culturally offensive or a lever with which to persuade neighbours where the interest lie' (Clark 1996:18). The point to understand from this is that while there may be no universally accepted definition of a community, definitions tailored to particular socio-cultural or political context are correct in their own context.

The idea of a community can be used for a positive progressive as well as a sinister purpose as Dominelli explains: 'The magic ingredients of the word community have united desperate groups of individuals together and fused their energies in common purpose (1995:133). However, the spirit of community can be either abused for evil purpose as in Hitler's manipulation of 'Aryan community' to justify genocide and in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. It can also be used to promote societal well-being such as women struggling for play space for children or achieve a common purpose as seen in the recent action of the 'Takumbeng'⁴ women in Bamenda. This has happened throughout history, time and again. For example, the march of the French women to Versailles in 1789 to protest against the French despotic monarchy and the rising price of bread is another example which shows how community spirit can be used for the general welfare although this led to the French Revolution in which thousands of people died.

⁴ Takumbeng is an oppositional group of mostly elderly women in the Northwest province of Cameroon. Although not well organised, they are usually active when there is a village or national issue that directly affects women and or children. They show their discontent by barricading the streets half naked. In 1992, when the government purportedly rigged the presidential elections to remain in power Takumbeng was on the streets to oppose the action. They have repeatedly opposed the soaring prices of basic commodities by the same action.

Dominelli (1990) has divided the definition into three categories to include a) geographically based communities, b) communities of interest and c) communities of identity. Dominelli still argues that 'physical locationality' remains a popular basis for thinking about communities because it has simplicity and enables its borders to be easily identified and readily drawn. Although this is true it still remains a question whether we can talk of London as a community in the same way that we talk of Swaythling, a small region of Southampton. It is also not clear whether geographical communities have any advantage over other types of communities such as communities of interest and communities of identity.

Communities of identity have their basis in identity traits involving interpersonal reactions that revolve around who people are and how they identify with each other (Dominelli 2006). Attributes that differentiate people can include gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, religion. These are by far the most diversified communities in the world and can be found in almost any geographically defined communities. For example, within Southampton, there are many different ethnic groups within the black community. These different ethnic groups can come from the same continent such as Africa and from the same country such as Cameroon. For example there are at least two ethnic groups from North-West Cameroon found in Southampton which are the Ngembas and Moghamo.

Interest based communities are those that people create on the basis of shared interests and are usually seen to be temporal since interests change over time and experience and people may alter their interests(Ibid). These include hobby-related activities like sports, dancing and clubbing. However, there are some people who have a sustained interest for certain things for life which tend to insure permanence in some interest communities. For example, in many Cameroon villages traditional dance groups formed out of interest tend to remain over many years. Solidarity, participation and coherence constitute the three core values of community Butcher (1993).

Most definitions of community as we have seen above fail to mention actors or those who make life in the community a meaningful place to be. Definitions of

community assume that women are members but often fail to bring out their significant role in the community. Discourses about national communities ignore the specificities of women's position and the differences among women (Dominelli 2006). Women have always participated in community activities, but their significance has been relegated in favour of men's actions.

Yet the community is the site where women live, work and ensure the survival of their species (Wilson 1977b). They are often taken for granted and deceived in various ways, so that they do not see their own subjugations, and configured as having the same right of access to resources and services as men which does not in reality work out that way (Dominelli 2006). This is what happens in the Nso people's tradition in North-West Cameroon where 'women can according to custom, control their crops and are guaranteed rights to use farmland (*sum*). But it is men who control the earth (*nsay*) on which women farm' (Goheen 1996). In many parts of the developing world in particular, politicians have used women's caring capabilities as a site of exploitation to shift state responsibility to the community without the necessary resources accompanying such a move (Orme 2000).

Apart from the failure to mention women as key actors in the community literature, most definitions of community also fail to mention population as a defining element of any community. We cannot talk of a community without its population. The population element is important in classifying communities into small, medium or large which also helps in the allocation of resources and the provision of social services. In many developing countries like Cameroon, where resources are rationed because they are always inadequate, population tends to play a vital role in deciding the allocation of social services such as schools, hospitals and administrative centres. The creation of each administrative unit always depends on a number of factors which might be demographic, social or political.

One thing common in the above definitions of community is the idea that community denotes or conveys a spirit of belonging, warmth, solidarity, cooperation, caring and a sense of common purpose by its members. Viewed from this perspective, a community, especially a geographically based community is

different from the mass urban society of individuality, competition, crime and the mass consumption-oriented life style. According to this research it is the place where social networks of support, unanimity, harmony, stability and team spirit are found more than anywhere else. The community, therefore, is the ideal place where everyone would want to live.

Drawing from the above this research has developed the following working definition of a community: Community is the whole population of a particular group of people in a specific locality including to some extent people who work regularly or visit there, and who identify themselves as having any common cultural or linguistic affinity and strive to live in solidarity and harmony. What matters are primarily the people, their interaction with each other and their common objectives.

This is an inclusive definition that does not leave out any element of the community. It is both descriptive and evaluative and includes both men and women and those who regularly visit the locality and interact with its members. This definition reflects my personal background knowledge and experience of what a community is. This is the notion of community that is understood in most developing countries particularly Sub-Saharan Africa. This is what people usually mean when they talk of the village community in Cameroon; common interest and locality, and the zeal or enthusiasm for common action to improve their community and quality of life. This elaborate definition of community is intended to lead us to a better understanding of community development, the subject of the next section and one of the core themes of this thesis. I shall, therefore, draw from what has been said about community in the last section to establish the meaning of community development.

3.4 Definition of Community Development.

There is little consensus among writers on what the actual definition of community development is, but also there appear to be no huge disagreement on the various definitions. Each is correct in its own terms depending on who is defining the term and their experiences. A good starting point in this thesis is the UN definition 40 years ago which is still valid today. According to that definition:

Community development is the process by which the efforts of the

people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities, to integrate these communities into the life of the nation and to enable them to contribute to national progress (UN 1960b paras 1, 2).

This definition sees community development not as an outcome but as a process in which the people's effort must be united with those of government in order to achieve the set objective of improving economic and socio-cultural conditions. Also the UN definition suggests that community development can integrate communities into national life and enable them contribute to its progress.

The danger with this definition could be that it excludes any effort that is not united with or supported by the government as is the case with most communities in Cameroon. Most importantly, this definition embraces two models or approaches to community development propounded by Paul and Haines (2002). (1) The self help approach which asserts that community development is primarily about helping people help themselves and (2) the technical assistance approach which assumes that the main obstacle to community development is technical assistance and information which must come from outside the community.

The Community Development Exchange (CDX) formerly Standing Council on Community Development (SCCD) defines CD as:

an occupation both paid and unpaid which aims to build active and influential communities based on justice, equality and mutual respect. It is done in ways that challenges oppression and tackles inequalities and involves changing the relationship between ordinary people and people in positions of power so that they can take part in issues that affect their lives (CDX 2006:6)

Community Development work involves working with communities to identify their strengths, needs, rights and responsibilities, plan organise and take action as well as assessing the effect of action taken (CDX 2006). The aspect highlighted in the above definition of changing power relationships and structures to remove barriers that prevent people from participating in issues that affect their own lives is very important. Also very important is the fact that CD can be both a paid and unpaid occupation. Both definitions embrace the idea of change which must be triggered from within.

Alison Gilchrist has further argued that community development is about change and growth. 'It works both within communities and across boundaries, and the institutions that affect them. It is about working with people in ways which help them to have greater influence over the decisions which affect their lives and to come together with others to devise solutions to common problems' (Gilchrist 2000:2-3). This definition has also highlighted the two models of self-help and technical assistance earlier mentioned as it recognises the idea of working together within communities and across boundaries and institutions.

3.5 The values of Community Development

The key values of Community Development were highlighted by the Community Development Review Group in Northern Ireland to include participation, empowerment, self help; it recognises individual and collective rights and responsibilities; 'it strives for justice, it seeks to realise group and personal potential to raise confidence; it promotes education and community economic progress for collective and personal development; it challenges prejudice, sectarianism and inequality' (Logue 1991:9 cited in McCready 2002:22).

Although these definitions may apply in principle to both developing and developed countries it is essential to note the fact that there are still important differences between what may be considered community development in the developed countries and in the developing countries like Cameroon. The increasing role of NGOs in the field of CD which was previously dominated by programmes initiated and administered by government in countries of the global South is one the differences that has changed the way CD is being viewed in most countries of the global South today (Campfens 1999). There may also be significant differences in terms used for describing the same phenomena and in the social and cultural tradition whereby CD initiative tends to emphasise one aspect of development over the other. There are those who associate CD with local development in a social, economic and political sense so that it includes the 'building of mutual aid and social support systems and development of economically self-reliant communities as well as a means of empowering communities to undertake social actions in pursuit of social development and

change in a wider society' (Campfens 1999). Still others like Gary Craig (1998) see CD as:

(a) Method of working with people...a way of working which essentially starts with the needs and aspirations of groups of disadvantaged people in poor localities and which struggles, first of all, to articulate and organize politically around those needs and aspirations placing them at the front rather than the end of political debate (Craig 1998:15)

According to this view the needs and aspirations of the people must be the starting point of all CD initiatives which should always be at the front of political debates. These differences clearly reveal the differences in people's understanding of what community development is or what constitute development across the globe. For example, in the UK community development has gone beyond farming families helping each other and sharing equipment, efforts to finance and build village halls, to efforts to influence policies, decisions and trends which threaten local areas, school closures, new housing developments, pit closures, traffic congestion, the deregulation of bus services etc (Francis et al 2001). Further still, community organisations tackle a wide range of quality of life issues, from the provision of leisure and play to the fear of crime (Taylor et al 2000). In the Netherlands CD tries to tackle the problem of an existing advanced welfare state with a highly individualistic and consumer-oriented lifestyle which is now perceived by some to be contributing to the loss of the traditional mutual aid at the interpersonal level (Campfens 1999).

This is in sharp contrast with what CD in most developing countries like Cameroon are still struggling to deal with such as the problem of massive poverty, the provision of basic needs that have been taken for granted in the West, such as health centres, farm to market roads, market buildings, food cooperatives and school buildings (*Ibid*). In a nutshell, community development in developed countries is more about preserving what is already there and enhancing already existing high standards. It is about promoting equity to enable more people benefit from the high standards, while in the developing countries it is about creating new opportunities or simply building from scratch. This implies that the practice of CD has to be defined by the cultural, social, political economic realities of the particular country where it is to be carried out. However, the social values and principles of community development are uncompromising within any socio-cultural context. These have been identified to include 'co-

operative, responsible and active communities of involved men and women, participation, democracy, capacity and initiative of or community groups, community resources both human, technical and financial, community integration and solidarity and the social inclusion of marginalised or oppressed groups' (Campfens 1999:24).

In view of the above definitions, I have deduced a more generic definition that will be my working definition in this thesis. It reflects the general understanding of community development in developing countries in all aspects. From this perspective, Community Development is seen as 'a process of planned positive change taking place in a community involving the locals as the main actors, using community resources to meet identified needs. It also involves interaction with other stakeholders at different levels, regional, national and international who are needed to provide the impetus for change. Support provided by these external actors could be in the form of expertise, special skills or big financial incentives. This research will seek to show that this definition is consistent with people's understanding of CD in the North-West Region of Cameroon.

3.6 The Concept of Empowerment.

At the start of this 21st century, the UN has set a development agenda constituted into eight development targets called the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The third of these stresses gender equality and women's empowerment through improving their access to education. The World Bank has noted the fact that gender inequality across the world is still one of the huge factors slowing economic growth and that if the central mission of reducing world poverty by 2015 is to be met; the third Millennium Development Goal of achieving gender equality and empowering women has to be a priority. Critics have pointed to the fact that while the MDGs are focusing on key development issues, they have also diverted attention from other issues such as Family Planning which accounts for high fertility rates in Sub-Saharan Africa. One of the things which women's empowerment hopes to achieve is reproductive rights which also involves the right of access to contraceptives, a key determinant of low fertility.

Empowerment in its broadest sense can be seen as increasing power to especially, marginalised people and groups those who are farthest down the ladder in the power over hierarchy and who have least access to

knowledge, decisions, networks and resources' (Humphries 1996: 36).

Marginalised people all over the world include both men and women. They are the most disadvantaged people without power or influence to change anything in their own favour. They own little or no property or wealth and are therefore, living at the mercy of others. They need to be empowered as a means of getting their foothold on the ladder to self-improvement and economic independence.

Empowering people therefore involves a complex understanding which includes their own perspectives as well as those of other players. of how power is exercised and how it affects them' (Fook 2007:103)

Young (2007) postulates that empowerment is about people taking control of their own lives, gaining the ability to do things, to set their own agendas, to change events in ways previously lacking and to be self reliant. Further to this, Batliwala (2000) defines empowerment as the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. This includes control over resources, physical, human, intellectual and financial and over ideologies-belief values and attitudes. It has now been recognized within development circles that economic development and social progress are best achieved when a mass of the population is educated and informed about development plans and aims and sees it as the direct beneficiary of what expanded growth could bring.

This explains why empowerment has become such an important element in the development process. From another perspective Parpart (2007) has criticised the view that empowerment of the poor or women has any impact on power structures and development. 'More broad-based representation of marginalised groups on government boards and committees has done little to challenge national and regional power structures' (Parpart 2007 in Saunders: 2007:47). He further argues that 'participatory empowerment as a development practice cannot rely on the assumption that giving people the voice and increasing participation will solve development problems. It will have to pay more attention to national and global power structures constraint and define the possibilities for change at local level (Ibid 2007:53).

This view of empowerment seems to diverge from the orthodox view that empowerment is actually the means or the weapon that can change unequal

power structures and ensure equal access to resources and decision-making positions within the society. While this may be true in some societies, empirical evidence has shown that communities of empowered people are far more advanced, with people living better lives than those in which a majority of people are still suppressed. This explains the need to continue efforts to empower marginalised people all over the world, particularly women.

3.6.1 Women's Empowerment

There is an enormous body of literature on women's empowerment and in a thesis like this only a tip of the ice berg can be touched. Women's empowerment has been viewed from many perspectives including household, community and broader arenas such as economic, socio-cultural, political, legal, familial and psychological.

For radical feminism it has meant an emphasis upon women gaining control over their bodies, as in demands for self-definition access to abortion and contraception, and demands for reproductive rights (Humphries 1996:20).

Viewed from this perspective, women's empowerment goes beyond the mere exercise of control or access to resources and decision-making in the community to the extent of absolute rights over their own bodies and lives. Radical feminism views women's empowerment not only as the exercise of control over their own bodies, the right and control over their sexuality in matters of childbearing, abortion, the use of contraception and the decision as to when to have sex with their male partners, it is also concerned with dismantling the patriarchal system which perpetuates gender inequality in societies throughout the world. This western feminist view is profoundly different from the view held by most people in the developing countries like Cameroon who believe that women's empowerment is essentially about increasing women's economic and social opportunities and that this can be done without dismantling patriarchy.

The World Bank and most Western based development organisations like the UK Department For International Development (DFID) have identified women's empowerment as a major constituent element of poverty reduction and community development especially in developing countries. The promotion of women's empowerment as a development strategy is based on the argument that

empowering and investing in women brings development dividends and that women's equality is more than a right. It is an absolute necessity if the blight of poverty is to be removed from the face of the earth (DFID 2000). A similar rationale for supporting women's empowerment has been postulated by the policy statements put forward by the Platform for Action, the Beijing+5 declaration and resolution, the Cairo Programme of Action, the Millennium Declaration and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Bathiwala 1994). The UK Department For International Development (DFID) has further emphasised that empowerment means the ability of women to acquire the power to think and act freely, exercise choice and fulfil their potential as full and equal members of society. Property rights, poverty eradication, political and economic rights, reproductive rights etc are all included in what women's empowerment hopes to achieve (DFID 2000).

Drawing mainly from the human rights and feminist perspectives many definitions contain the idea that a 'fundamental shift in perceptions or inner transformation is essential to the formulation of choices. That is women should be able to define self-interest and choices and consider themselves as not only able but entitled to make choices' (Malhotra et al 2002: 6). Stromquist (1993) has gone further including in his definition elements of cognition and psychology as he writes:

Empowerment involves women's understanding of their conditions of subordination and the causes of such conditions at both micro and macro levels of society...it involves understanding the self and the need to make choices that may go against cultural and society's expectations' (Stromquist 1993:14)

This implies a thorough understanding by women of the social conditions at the local and national level responsible for their subordination in the first place and the need to take responsibility for getting out of that position. It is clearly the case that most developing world women do not fully understand the socio-cultural conditions that contribute to their subordination. Their understanding of these issues is crucial in giving them the means and the methods of dismantling those barriers of inequality. his view is also supported by Nku (1995) in these words:

Women need strong solidarity amongst themselves....a will to rise

against the traditions and contemporary societal structures of injustice that debar them from attaining full humanity and accessing the higher heights of the economy (1995:37)

Many assumptions have been made by western feminist writers about third world women which ignore the diversity in their history, cultural backgrounds and educational orientations thereby putting them at the same level. For example this is what Perdita Houston writes:

What surprised and moved me most as I listened to women in such very different cultural settings were the striking commonality. whether they were educated or illiterate, urban or rural-of their most basic values: the importance they assign to family, dignity and service to others' (Houston 1979:.115 cited in Mohanty 1991: 64).

The danger with this type of generalisation is that it assumes all Third World women to have the same history and a universal unity between women based on their subordinate positions. Mohanty (2005) has critiqued western feminism for its generalisation of the problems of Third World Women treating them as an identifiable group purely on the bases of shared dependency and argues that:

I am not objecting to the use of universal groupings for descriptive purposes. Women from the continent of Africa can be descriptively characterised as 'women of Africa' It is when 'women of Africa' becomes a homogeneous sociological grouping characterised by common dependencies or powerlessness or even strengths that problems arise- we say too little and too much at the same time (Mohanty 2005:25)

It is actually difficult to classify Women of Africa or Third World Women under any category as their status depends on a complex of social factors such as their level of education cultural background marital status and other cultural or political affiliation. Mohanty (2005) further criticises Western Feminist writers for limiting the definition of the female subject to gender identity and completely bypassing social class and ethnic identities 'instead of analytically demonstrating the production of women as a socioeconomic and political group within particular local contexts.

Pulling this together, the key point to be noted from the above analysis is that women's empowerment is a secular concept developed in the last thirty years which has gained prominence mainly in western societies and within western development and bilateral organisations. However, it is still unpopular in most

developing countries and within some of the major world religious bodies because of what it advocates or hopes to achieve such as total equality with men, breaking down traditional norms, and offering equal reproductive and political rights.

3.6.2 International Conferences on Women

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994 was the first of its kind to discuss women's reproductive rights as part of what women's empowerment hopes to achieve. The conference was a real battle between religious fundamentalists led by the Vatican and feminist health advocates. The struggle to gain women's sexual rights continued a year later at the Fourth World Conference on women in Beijing with greater success for feminists (Sen 2000). Beijing in fact went a step further from Cairo and the issue of women's empowerment and rights became the human rights of women as echoed from the following declaration *inter alia*:

The human rights of women include their right to have control over *and* decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion discrimination and violence. Equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity of the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for the sexual behaviour and its consequences (United Nations 1995).

In Beijing 1995, abortion was moved from being only a women's health issue to becoming also a human right issue for them. In general, the subjects of the Beijing Conference including reproductive rights and sexuality, abortion and contraception were very controversial and unpopular especially among religious groups and most of those from the developing world. This clearly suggested from the beginning that implementation of the Platform for Action was going to be a hard nut to crack. Marshall et al (2005) have remarked that the conference gave short shrift to some of the most basic concerns shared by the great majority of women around the world. Since 1995, two major follow-ups have been made to evaluate and reaffirm the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. In June 2000 the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General assembly of the UN (Beijing Plus 5 which became known as "Women 2000") adopted a political declaration by which participating Governments reaffirmed 'inter alia' their commitments to the goals and objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform

for Action. Beijing Plus 10 took place from February 28th to March 7th 2005, where participating Governments again reaffirmed their commitments to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the outcome of Beijing Plus 5 entitled “Women 2000” (UN 2005).

If women’s empowerment is about the exercise of power, then everyday forms of women’s empowerment are the ability to exercise power in the social institutions that govern their daily lives: household and extended family, local community councils and associations, local elite, local markets and local government (UN Resource on Gender 2005). This would involve for example women having the right to debate and contribute to household and extended family issues and be equally represented in local councils, regional and national government. This is still far from being the case.

3.6.3 Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD)

One of the most dominant development perspectives in the 1980s and which in fact still continues to influence the field till today is the concept of Women in Development (WID). WID is based on the modernization theory which depicts traditional societies as authoritarian and male dominated and modern societies as democratic and egalitarian, thereby showing sensitivity to the problems faced by women worldwide (Visvanathan et al 2007). Basically WID saw the problem in development to be the oppression and exclusion of women from the process and the solution simply to be their inclusion through women targeted development programmes. This view remained dominant in the 1970s but a major shift from this occurred in the 1980s when it began to be felt that the problem with development was not just the absence of women alone but that social relations between men and women in the work place as well as in other settings needed to be analyzed as well. This then ushered in the concept of Gender and Development (GAD) which uses gender relations rather than women as a category of analysis and views men as potential supporters of women (Ibid)

However, a criticism has been made of the fact that although the shift from (WID) to (GAD) indicated a move towards recognising the need to analyse social relations between men and women together rather than in isolation, much of gender policy and analysis has been focused on women. Where men are

mentioned they are usually only seen as obstacles to women's development. The argument is that if (GAD)'s aim is to achieve gender equality and social justice, there needs to be a recognition that both men and women can be disadvantaged by social and economic structures and that all have a right to a life free from poverty and oppression (Cleaver 2002). This view is expressed in Oxfam's policy documents which stress the overall objective of gender policy being to promote human dignity through overcoming pressures on both men and women (Oxfam 1993 and 1998). In western societies today there is beginning to be the view that masculinity is under attack as seen from the way that women are increasingly taking up major positions of decision-making in the society, pushing more men into domestic duties like child care and home making and even out-numbering men in habits such as drinking, smoking and drug dealing. WID and GAD are both different approaches to development. While the WID approach may appear suitable in the context of most developing countries, the GAD approach is a western feminist paradigm which is hugely contested. The position adopted by this research regarding this centre debate is fully discussed in the next chapter.

3.7 Globalisation and Community Development

Globalisation is a term that has come to mean different things to different people. The impact of globalisation has penetrated into the fabric of every society in the world and this thesis would not be complete without the mention of it. The aim of reviewing this concept here is to see how, if in any way globalisation affects the community development process. Globalisation has been associated with both good and evil with some people seeing it as the ultimate solution to some of the crisis like poverty, environmental degradation and climate change which the world is facing today, while others think it is the greatest perpetrator of evil and injustice in post-modern times (Kegley & Witkopff 1999).

Globalisation has been defined in many different ways but all leading to the same or similar ideas including the increasing economic interaction among nations dominated by big multinational corporations, the increasing capitalist domination of the world economy as well as the Western influence on social, political and cultural world order. The term 'Global Village' has come to mean the way in which the speed of communication technology, the mobile phone and emails in particular, transportation and scientific advancements has brought the

world closer reducing the importance of proximity, contributing to the ‘death of distance’ and creating a sense of every one belonging to one small village sharing the same fate. Former US President Bill Clinton (1997) said that ‘globalisation is irreversible’ (Kegley and Wattkopf 1999).

‘Globalisation is associated with an increasing dominant process of economic change, with economic transactions taking place regardless of national jurisdiction’ (Craig 2003). Many people in the West argue that globalisation represents the construction of a liberal world economic order bringing with it demonstrable benefits, free market economies and liberal forms of representative democracy (Venters 2002). Among African scholars, globalisation has been seen just as other outside impositions like slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, which have all had devastating impacts on the African people. Globalisation is now seen as the fourth stage of such imposition on the African people through which the people are experiencing both minimum influence and maximum consequences (Henriot 1998).

Dominelli (2004) argues that globalisation is more than just economic change and looks at the socio-cultural aspect of it and its impact on countries throughout the world. She states that globalisation is:

a phenomenon that involves the penetration of capitalist social relations through everyday human existence in differentiated ways in countries throughout the world. It is a system of social, economic, and cultural domination that impacts on every aspect of life in both the public and private domains (2004:154).

If globalisation is all that has been stated above, the question to ask is what impact this has had on community development and the empowerment of women. On the positive side it can be argued that globalisation has facilitated the process of CD through its advanced communication technology notably the mobile phone, internet and other fast methods of regional national and international money transactions. ‘More and more development workers tell stories of mobile surprise...many are optimistic that mobile banking systems will lower the cost of financial service to millions of poor mobile phones users’ (id21 insights 2007).

Today, more than ever before, community groups can deal directly and much faster with other regional, national and international partners and donors

making the process of enquiry and funding application much less time consuming and easy. Women in many Sub-Saharan African countries and the developing world in general now use mobile phones for all sorts of businesses such as to make contacts to find out about the availability of marketable products before they take the risk to travel which is a huge saving on travelling costs and unnecessary risks. The mobile phone has empowered women in many developing countries to some extent. In Kenya for example, the mobile phone has enabled animal health care service providers to keep one another updated on animal health issues and it is even claimed that it has increased the social capital of the community animal health workers (Kithuka et al 2007).

On the negative side, globalisation has led to social disorder and cultural decline across societies in the world, an increased dependency by the developing communities on the developed ones and the continuous exploitation of the lesser economies by the advanced ones through various means such as cheap labour, brain drain and international trade. It has also led to an increasing stress on natural resources as well as environmental degradation. It is being argued that the gains of globalisation accrue mainly to the developed countries while the developing countries have continued to pay the price as they remain languishing in poverty. The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan (1998) said *inter alia*: ‘there is a saying that all politics is local. But increasingly, all local politics has global consequences and those global consequences in turn affect the quality of local life everywhere’ (cited in Kegley and Wittkopf 1999:155). The point about the impact on local economies has been buttressed by Craig:

The globalisation of economic power has led to local economic development in allegedly independent states being dominated by free-market models, but market oriented economic change has brought not freedom for local people to control local economies but the reverse. Local economic change becomes less and less controlled by local even national interest but is concentrated in the except as a cover of programmes (Craig 2003:6).

The free-market model takes no recognition of growing young economies that need protection to reach maturity and be able to compete. The local economy in most developing countries is dominated by foreign investors who only employ a few local people to exploit their cheap labour. In direct answer to the question

about the role of community development in this globalising mixture Craig again has postulated as follows:

At its most basic level, community development, underpinned by the values of social justice, stands in opposition to global capitalism and the commodification of human activity. First of all then, community development's response has to be one which promotes its value base; it should challenge the appearance of racism in whatever form it takes and support the development of local responses and solutions to social and economic problems (Craig 2003:13).

However, despite this seemingly weakening position, the role of community development in this globalising world remains crucial in giving power to the poor to voice their concerns and needs and in giving them the chance to participate in decisions that affect the ways that these needs are met. A balance sheet of the gains and losses brought by globalisation to developing countries may reveal a situation of near equilibrium. Therefore, the question of whether globalisation has brought more good than evil to developing countries is a difficult one to answer when we consider some of the advantages like those of the mobile phone alongside some disadvantages like environmental degradation leading to climate change. Community development through its professionals has the task of mediating global consequences on local life and upholding its values. But this is not by any means an easy task to carry out.

3.8 Sustainable Community Development

Since the 1987 Brundtland Commission or World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) which came out with the definition which is now widely used for sustainable development, it has become virtually impossible to pick up a planning document whether from the government, local or international development organisation which does not make mention of sustainable development as a goal it hopes to achieve. That commission defined sustainable development as 'development which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the chances of the future generations to meet their own needs' (Brundtland Commission 1987).

At the start of this new millennium governments all over the world have acknowledged the fact that past human activities have damaged the natural integrity of major ecosystems on every continent in the world, threatening the

security of many societies that depend on these (Brown et al 1998). The major task therefore, is to try to rebuild and avoid a further damage which is where the concept of sustainable development fits in this thesis. Should every development effort whether at the local, regional, national or international level strive to ensure sustainability?

A sustainable community has been defined as 'a community that uses its resources to meet current needs while ensuring that adequate resources are available for future generations' (Minnesota SEDEPTE, 1995). Meeting current needs is the most crucial thing for any development initiative but in the case of communities in Cameroon and the North-West region in particular, this is not yet happening. The lack of adequate technology, specialised skills and financial capital all constitute one reason why these communities are underdeveloped and hence not able to meet their needs currently. Achieving sustainable community development requires resources for the planning, implementation and evaluation of development projects at all levels. In the case of developing countries like Cameroon, it requires resources to inform and educate the population on the benefits of SD and to divert people for example from unsustainable agricultural practices to those that are sustainable, and resources to support local councils implement their local agenda 21 which does not seem to exist yet. But the emphasis for now is on meeting basic needs through community economic development activities. By and large, this encourages excessive reliance on the physical environment which happens to be the only means of livelihood for a majority of the population.

The current practice in both the developed and developing world is unsustainable for different reasons. For the developed communities it is their insatiable demand for consumer goods which promotes unsustainability while in developing communities like Cameroon it is the desire to meet basic needs. Global resource depletion and pollution are forcing recognition that existing patterns of development are not sustainable (Roseland 2000). The move towards sustainable communities leading to sustainable development all over the world requires new ways of thinking about our world and about everyone and our future especially for communities in developing countries who still rely heavily on natural resources for their livelihoods. For the developed countries it requires

a radical shift from the mass consumption-oriented lifestyles and culture of waste to a moderate and sustainable lifestyle. How this is going to happen remains a subject for great controversy.

Considering the importance of sustainable development in preserving our world it is essential that all CD practices across the world should ensure the aspect of sustainability. For most developing countries still struggling to satisfy basic needs, CD planning usually does not take into consideration the sustainability aspect. The emphasis is more about achieving objectives and meeting pressing needs. The role of rural women, the majority of whom are involved in the exploitation of natural resources in the rural communities, is crucial in achieving sustainable CD. The current practice where by women are grossly absent in positions of decision-making in the community, regional and national levels means that their contribution to decisions about Sustainable Development will continue to be ignored and therefore Sustainable Community Development in developing countries like Cameroon remains an economic impossibility of our time.

3.9 Community Development and Civil Society

The role of community development in promoting civil society is increasingly being recognized by most governments across the globe including major development organisations today. It was to this effect that the International Association of Community Development (IACD) in collaboration with the Cameroon Government organized an International Conference on the theme of 'The role of community development in building civil society' which took place in Yaoundé Cameroon from the 3rd to the 8th of April 2005. At the conference, delegates saw civil society as a countervailing power to the state, a force to be reckoned with in the community development process in every nation but also agreed that civil society cannot develop itself to full potential without the cooperation of the state⁵. African governments through the African Union were thus called upon to create within their respective states a conducive environment for the peaceful flourishing of civil society organisations in all their forms and ramifications (The Yaoundé Declaration 2005). The London School of Economics

⁵ Workshop discussions at the Yaoundé Conference

Centre for Civil Society refers to it as 'the arena of uncoeced collective action around shared interest, purposes and values'. Civil Society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors, and institutional forms varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Registered charities, NGOs, community groups, women's groups and faith-based organisations generally make up what is referred to as the civil society. (London School of Economics Centre for Civil Society 2008). Bayart (1986) and Sanbrook, (1993) both see civil society as comprising a range of non-governmental organisations, including occupational grassroots and issue-oriented associations. If civil society is what has been defined above, a question might be asked about whether it is the community that constitutes civil society or the civil society that constitutes the community? Going by the definition of a community earlier defined in this chapter it could be argued that civil society organisations are themselves communities. They flourish within the geographical communities. They are therefore, communities within communities. Civil societies are the live wire of communities who keep them active. Without civil societies organisations communities will remain dormant.

3.10 Community Development and Social Capital

Since Putnam's work on the role of social capital in regional government and economic development in Italy (1993) and his suggestion later of its usefulness to the United States, there has been an enormous interest in the subject by others such as Keyes (1996) Timken (1998) and its implication in low-income communities. That involvement and participation in groups can have positive consequences for individuals and communities is a stable notion which dates back to the work of Durkheim and Marx (Leonard 2004). However, Putnam's work remains outstanding as the intellectual departure point for most recent writers. Putnam defines social capital as 'features of social organisations'. These includes trust, norms, networks that can improve the efficiency of society and facilitate coordinated actions that enable participants to act together effectively to pursue shared objectives (Putnam 1993).

Like other forms of capital social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attained in its absence.
.. a group whose members manifest trustworthiness and place extensive trust in one another will be able to accomplish much more than a Comparable group lacking that trustworthiness and trust (Putnam 1993:167)

Community development is seen as a means to build social capital and tackle other social issues like social exclusion, poverty and even crime.

Gary (2000) has argued that 'the need to tackle social exclusion has moved up the European agenda which he believes is a recognition in some quarters that 'poverty is not the choice of the individual but the outcome of the economic and social pressures over which most have no control'(2000:328)

The underlying idea about social capital according to Putnam is that the more people know each other the more they can trust and the better off they are individually and collectively. Not only does social capital contributes to CD, 'it also contributes to empowering people, building their confidence and giving them a sense of commitment to taking charge of their own lives'(Mubangizi 2003:147)

In his discussion of social capital Putnam completely leaves out women as crucial players in the community responsible for setting the scene for all that happens and creating the atmosphere of trust and reciprocity on which social capital is built. Putnam (2000) is concerned with American individualism which promotes solitary pursuit over social ones (Dominelli 2005). Here Putnam fails to see people especially women participating in informal forms of organisations.

Because women's community networks are built on 'trusting connections' with others caring for them, it is easier for women to engage in transformative local politics and practice. In this sense women's skills and relationships form the social capital that lies at the centre of civic engagement or creates the substance for community work' (Dominelli 2005:55).

Lowndes (2000) has argued that both men and women have the same amount of social capital but because of their gender this is differently composed. Men's social capital is active in public arena while that of women is in the private sphere reflecting their exclusion from political structures. Paul and Haines (2002) have further argued that social capital can be considered an asset that contributes to the development of other forms of capital-human, financial and environmental through strong ties, networks and cooperation, the individual's well-being is improved through its effect on health and happiness, safe and productive neighbourhood, education and children's welfare (Putnam 2000). Putnam further believes that areas greatly disadvantaged in economic and human capital and suffering from poverty, ill health, unemployment etc can be mitigated through social capital, but this has been criticised following research in

a Catholic community in West Belfast (Northern Ireland) by Madeleine Leonard (2004). The research revealed that although this community became top of the list with negative indicators including poverty, unemployment, ill health and poor housing, which suggested penury of social capital, this was not the case when they visited the community and found it to be vibrant with strong networks and economic support structures. Leonard (2004) critiques Putnam's bonding and bridging social capital claiming that to move from bonding to bridging social capital the conditions which led to the development of bonding social capital have to be undermined (Leonard 2004). In fact the values of community development which include solidarity, democracy and participation can not be achieved without social capital. Social capital therefore, is the springboard from which community development can take off. The prevalence of social capital therefore, is a prerequisite for the success of community development.

3.11 Community Development and Participation

One of the core values of CD is participation. We have seen that the word participation features very prominently in most of the elaborate definitions of CD earlier examined. It is for this reason that I deem it necessary to examine in more detail the concept of participation and its relevance to CD in general which would be applied to the Cameroon context in the next chapter. Participation is a broad area of study on its own and I am not examining the literature in detail here but merely wish to discuss it as it relates to the concept of CD. The concept of participation arose from the need to involve rural people more actively in the issues and processes which influence their lives and to seek ways of changing the style and approach which dominated development in the past (Amungwa 1999).

The concept of participation came to the limelight in CD in the 1970s following the UN Economic and Social Council recommendation that government should henceforth 'adopt popular participation as a basic policy measure in national development strategy, and should encourage the widest possible active participation of all members of the community and national non-governmental organisations in the development process in setting goals, formulating policies and implementing plans'(UN Document N0 E/CN.5/525, para. 4. January 1975) quoted from Amungwa 1999). This recommendation came following the widespread failure of the UN first Development Decade in the 1960s with its top-

down approach to development which failed to achieve the ‘trickle down effect’. Development theories felt that greater participation of those affected by development programmes in the planning, implementing and evaluation of the programmes would maximise their benefits. Participation has been used to refer to a means of accomplishing a project more efficiently, effectively and cheaply and also as a means of ‘empowering the weakest and poorest of the community’ (Nelson and Wright 1997).

The United Nations Research institute for Social Development (UNRISD) defines participation as the organised effort to increase control over resources and regulative institutions by groups and movements of those excluded from such control (Pearse and Steifel 1979:8 in Shepherd 1998:179). At least this definition recognises the idea of equity and empowerment. In fact, if participation is to mean anything it must involve a shift in power within communities and between people and policy making and resource holding institutions and within the structures of those organisations (Nelson and Wright 1997).

The different definitions of participation have been summarised as follows:

Participation includes people’s involvement in decision-making processes, in implementing programmes, their sharing in the benefits of development programmes’..(Cohen & Uphoff 1977) ‘Participation is the Organised effort to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations’ (Pearse & Stiefel, 1979) community participation is an active process by which beneficiary or client groups influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view to enhancing their well-being’ (Paul, 1987) (As quoted in Amungwa 1999: 71-72)

‘Participatory development is increasingly being adopted as a more secure way of taking development to the people (Rahman 1995). In 1990, the Arusha Conference on popular participation in the Recovery and Development process in Africa issued the ‘African Charter on Popular Participation which is a strong call for popular participation in development (Rahman 1995). Today there exists a huge body of literature on participation and many major donors emphasise the aspect of genuine participation as a condition for making grants available for community development projects. The word is now being used as a kind of propaganda or catch-all word to convince donors and government that a development project has involved all those who should participate, usually women, youth or the poor, and deserves to get the funding. But Shepherd (1998) argues that participation is usually asserted rather than demonstrated and that

few in the audience have time to examine the indicators of participation and what its effects are on participants in the wider society. Government and NGOs both have the role to promote participation but it is arguable whether it is the government or NGO who is better at it. Community participation should aim at encouraging local initiative and involving local people at every stage of the development activity. The notion of popular participation in development is increasingly being endorsed by development scholars. International development cooperation, agencies including most UN agencies are affirming popular participation as a necessary element of a strategy for poverty alleviation' (UNDP 1993).

Women throughout the world and in Cameroon have been at the centre of this call for participation in development. The non participation of women in decision-making that affects them in all spheres of life has been noted as a huge power imbalance and injustice and a major setback in development. The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) addressed the great disparity in power between women and men and made a strong call on governments, NGOs and the private sector to take action and ensure the following:

ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making. Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership' (Beijing Platform for Action Para. 183).

The equal participation of women in positions of power is the only way that could give them the voice to influence change in their direction, move the process of empowerment forward and ensure their full and active contribution to community development. Women throughout the developing world are still greatly hampered by unequal power structures, tradition and custom and the legislation which continues to keep them in subordinate positions.

2.12 Capacity Building.

The term capacity building has become a key concept in policies that are concerned with improving local people's quality of life within governments, NGOs and other organisations that are concerned with human, social and community development. The term is used to refer to both individuals and groups or organisations with emphasis on the approach to helping people play a significant role in development that affects their lives and surroundings. Seen in this way,

capacity building is therefore, an approach in CD which is aimed at helping individuals or groups to make maximum use of their potential for community benefit. On this basis capacity building is therefore, an important concept for review in this thesis.

The term originated from the US where it was associated with business skills for economic development. It has become a crucial tool in UK regeneration programmes (Paul and Haines 2002), and also in the UN, IMF and World Bank discourses. It is usually used to mean equipping people with skills, knowledge and techniques to fit particular tasks and jobs rather than building their confidence or their critical awareness (Henderson and Salmon 2001). Defined in this way, capacity building assumes that those people targeted are themselves empty vessels with no experience, knowledge and skills that can be recognised and used to build on. This is why it has often been used to apply to the less powerful side of any partnership such as the local farmers in Cameroon. In Building Civil Renewal (Home Office 2003), community capacity building has been defined as:

activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills and abilities of people enabling them to take effective action and leading role in the development of their communities' (Home Office 2003)

Channan et al (1999), simply see it as 'increasing community organisations' ability to foster employability' but emphasises that capacity building need to include not only the capacity of the community to do things but also that of authorities and professional agencies to support and accommodate the active community role. Dominelli (2004) defines capacity building as the strengthening of poor people's ability to improve their quality of life. According to Skinner, capacity building is:

'Development work that strengthens the ability of community organisations and groups to build their structures, systems, people and skills so that they are better able to define and achieve their objectives and engage in consultations and planning, manage community projects and take part in partnerships and community enterprise (1997:1-2)

Skinner's focus is on the strengthening of group or organisational ability to manage community projects and activities. Although there is not a mention on individuals we assume that groups and organisations are made up of individuals. Furthermore, the Catholic Relief Service (2005) believes capacity building to be

an on going process through which individuals, groups, organisations and societies enhance their abilities to identify and meet development challenges. The phrase 'on going process' in this definition is very important as it suggests that capacity building never ends either for individuals or groups. We can never be fully satisfied at any one point that we have built capacity enough for any individual or community to last a life time. The need to constantly identify challenges in the development process and strive to adequately meet them will always be there, hence capacity building. Henderson and Salmon (2001) have added that building capacity is one way of strengthening social capital.

It is interesting that all these definitions emphasise one thing; the strengthening of ability to enable individuals or groups or organisations to achieve more for their communities. This suggests that capacity building is all about enhancing abilities, knowledge, skills, and experience for greater individual and community achievement. But (Taylor et al 2000) have gone further to say that training people for the skills they need to achieve their goals must involve action learning since learning by doing is the most effective educational tool. Although capacity building has always been directed towards the weaker partners as evident in the definitions above, many now see the need for it to move forward to include building the capacity of authorities and professional agencies to better support and accommodate the active community and also to try and recognise the skills, knowledge and experience of those considered to be the weak, as a starting point (PLCRC 1999).

Capacity building needs to move away from the predominant deficit model for example, what skills does this sector need to participate in our agenda? To a more participative model for example, what does this group have to contribute to our common agenda and how can they be supported in participating fully in that process? (PLCRC 1999:17)

From what has been said so far, capacity building implies strengthening the skills not only of grassroots beneficiary groups and individuals but also that of donor organisations and professionals to better deliver services.

3.12 Summary and Conclusion:

This chapter has defined and examined some key concepts that constitute the core of this thesis. I began with an introduction of what the content of the chapter

is and went further to examine the problem of policy implementation in developing countries. It has been seen that the existence of gaps between policy and implementation is a characteristic feature of developing countries caused by a number of factors such as poor planning and resources deficiency. The concepts of community and community development have been discussed, showing their conceptual importance to the thesis. It has been argued that these are highly contested concepts with no generally accepted definition. The community has been defined as the total population of a particular locality who identify themselves as having any common interest or objective based on a common culture or historical background. Community development has been seen as an activity which focuses on groups of people aiming to pull their energies together utilise available resources to improve their lives and that of the community. In developed countries, community development has gone beyond the quest to meet basic necessities for the community to the level of lobbying government for policy change in favour of more advanced needs, while in developing countries community development is still striving to satisfy basic welfare needs. Its core values of solidarity, participation and democracy however, remain uncompromising within any context. Women's empowerment has been seen as a secular concept originated from the west where it still has its stronghold and still timidly gaining ground in developing countries. It has been criticised especially by male opinions for its perceived vigorous attempt to dismantle tradition and family life. But women's empowerment remains popular among western governments and other bilateral and development organisations as the only means through which women in the global South in particular would gain access to resources and major decision-making positions in order to change things and be in control of their own lives. Women's empowerment is also seen as a means to social justice.

Globalisation is affecting almost everyone in the world today in different ways and there are different perspectives on whether it is a good or evil thing. CD informed by the values of social justice has a pivotal role to play in building bridges between communities and supporting the goals of multiculturalism and combating the concomitants of globalisation at local national and international level.(Craig 2008:2) and to give voice to the poor and get them involved in decisions that affect their environment and lives. The concept of sustainable

community development has been examined to show how important it is for development at the local level to be sustainable and I have indicated what a difficult task it will be to achieve the dream given that this to a large extent depends on a radical change of western lifestyles. I have examined the concept of participation and shown how important this is to the process of CD and highlighted the fact that women throughout most of the developing world are still greatly hampered by unequal participation in positions of major decision-making and that equal participation of women in these positions is the only way for them to change things in their favours and move the process of empowerment forward. The competing positions between WID and GAD have been discussed and this research has argued in favour of WID for the reason that this is the approach more appealing and realistic in the Cameroon context although it is acknowledged that GAD is better for the general human condition. The next chapter will examine how some of these concepts are more directly applicable to the Cameroon context in general and the North-West in particular.

Chapter Four

The concepts of Community Development and Women's Empowerment as applied to the Cameroon Context.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the applicability of some of the key concepts from the previous chapter to the Cameroon context. The purpose is to show the perspectives of both Cameroonian men and women on the key research themes, Community Development and Women's Empowerment and how this will enhance our understanding of the key research question and the method of investigation employed. This would also present the reader with a picture of the state of knowledge and major questions in the subject area under investigation and the complex and contested nature of the issues I am dealing with in the context of both the developed and developing countries like Cameroon. The history of CD in Cameroon will be reviewed to show how this has developed through the last century from a tradition of good neighbourliness, caring, solidarity team spirit through the era of colonisation by the Germans, the British and the French, characterised by forced labour driven by the need to meet basic development targets and implement reforms that only served the interest of the colonial masters.

Women's empowerment will be seen as a concept largely imported from the West which is still to find its place in the Cameroon socio-cultural and political set up. Its official definition and the way Cameroonians of all status understand and interpret it are examined. It will be shown that the way Women's Empowerment is understood and what both Cameroonian women and men think its aims should be is far too limited from the view of western government and other development organisations. This is mostly due to lack of education on what its benefits are but also as a result of socio-cultural influences. There will be some repetition of some sub-headings discussed in the last chapter but here the focus will be on Cameroon.

4.2 Gaps in the implementation of policies in Cameroon

The Cameroon political system is characterised by policies and decrees stored in government files waiting for long periods to be passed into law which most times

do not happen (The Post online June 2007). The political system is one that is good in deceiving its people through decrees which usually promise to deliver various amenities but which more often than not end up not being implemented. For example, the Decentralisation Laws promulgated in 2004 are still pending the implementation decrees and legal coordination mechanisms (Cameroon PRSP 2007 Annual Report). The policy process in Cameroon is very inconsistent and clouded with many complexities. Some laws are passed by the president and are called presidential decrees others by the minister called ministerial decree and others still are called parliamentary laws. To pass a bill into law is one thing but for that to be abiding as law to the citizen it needs another decree to ratify or authorise implementation which is a process that can take more than a decade in Cameroon. An example is the 1996 Family Code which has still not been ratified till today.

Like in most developing countries, most policies and programmes such as the Poverty Reduction Strategies Papers, The Decentralisation Programme, The Rural Development Fund, The Women's Empowerment Centres, are well intentioned and usually aimed to improve general conditions and achieve development. However a web of factors similar to those of other developing countries contributes to blur the effective implementation of policies which could improve lives in the country.

The most important of these is the lack of sufficient financial and human resources. Many policies and programmes of government end up in papers simply because the government lacks sufficient financial and human resources to get them running. Inadequate finance limits the government's ability to allocate sufficient funds for projects and to monitor and evaluate their implementation (Glenngard and Maina 2007). It is the lack of adequate resources which explains why some of the women's projects such as the empowerment centres are not running effectively. It also explains why many ministerial departments are not functioning thereby unable to deliver the services and benefits to local communities. Furthermore, the corruption issue is a more serious problem which explains why there are gaps between policy and implementation in Cameroon. Although resources are limited, it is a well known fact that in the Cameroon public services government officials embezzles public funds thereby crippling the

implementation of the programmes and projects for which they were intended. The situation is echoed in the following words:

Corruption in Cameroon is a living thing, a monstrous Slimy hydra: Vicious in outreach, cancerous in speed and disgusting in reach. Corruption runs in the system; it is the life wire of Cameroon and Cameroonians. Here is a country where governance can easily be defined as 'by the corrupt ,of the corrupt and for the corrupt (Ntemfac: 2004:1).

The highly centralized bureaucratic administrative system in Cameroon contributes massively to delay the process of implementation of policies and programmes. Despite the many promises by the government for nearly a decade now to decentralize the administration in Cameroon nothing has happened to that effect. Yaoundé is still the main administrative centre in the country where all policies and programmes of government are enacted. The lack of effective communication tools creates a further gap between policy and implementation. Gaps between policy and implementation in Cameroon are sometimes created by the unequal representation of women and men in the policy process and in decision-making positions. Where women are grossly absent in positions of decision-making most policies and programmes that are intended to benefit women tend to be overlooked. A regions that is underdeveloped initially because there is no one from there to influence the direction of resources remain so because even when the central government makes any plan to develop the region, the fact that there is no powerful representative from the there will always delay the process of implementation.

Cameroon is quite adapt in assessing the needs of its population and designing reforms and programmes which look adequate to address these needs but which often end up as statutes hanging in ministers offices. In a nutshell, gaps between policy and implementation in Cameroon constitute a major setback for community development and women's empowerment. These are caused by various constraints including inadequate resources and socio-political factors.

4.3 Community Development in Cameroon

Community Development (CD) is a very familiar concept in Cameroon especially in the Northwest (Anglophone) region where CD is believed by most Cameroonians to have its strong hold. This has been confirmed by this research.

During my fieldwork everybody I met in the North-West had a view about the subject. A community leader in one of the villages in the study region had this to say ‘Community development is something that we do everyday. It is the way we survive here in the North-West’ (R5, field notes). Because Cameroonian are familiar with the concept of CD, researching the topic was like trying to discuss something which people already know much about. However, what most people know in Cameroon is more about the practice of CD rather than the theory and definitions of the term. Not much has been done through research and writing into this area. This is one reason why most of the literature on definition and concepts is from the West particularly the UK. There are many actors involved in the CD process in Cameroon interacting at various levels and influencing each other and the process. Each actor operates with a slightly different notion of CD.

Official sources in Cameroon define CD as ‘a continuous process whereby the socio-economic and cultural needs of the people are identified by members and the contribution of local and external resources are used to meet them through community action and participation’ (R1). This definition also highlights two important elements of CD that featured in most of the key definitions in the previous chapter which fits in to the self-help and technical assistance models. Other authorities in Cameroon define community development as ‘a movement for better living or a process in the life of a community by which the people plan and act together for the satisfaction of their felt needs’ (R1). Other official quarters state that community development is ‘an approach to development which recognises the dignity of the human person as the subject of their own development’ (R1). The change of peoples’ mentalities, to understand the process and come together to identify and solve problems is emphasised.

In Cameroon, community development is recognised as the ‘bedrock to all self initiative and the principal approach to local development’ (R1). The government recognises and promotes it through the creation of a special department in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (The Department of Community and Local Development) with provincial and divisional delegations throughout the country to organise and supervise community development. Community development has always been part and parcel of local peoples’ social cultural approach to life in Cameroon. Before the creation of the nation state in the 20th

century, what existed were small ethnic groups, clans, tribes, and chiefdoms linked by cultural and linguistic affinities. These were very closely bonded and provided for their common needs such as roads, bridges and houses through 'community work' set aside on specific days of the week driven by their tradition of good neighbourliness, caring and solidarity.

Before European colonialism, mutual help based on kinship and neighbourhood was a feature in Cameroon. People collectively participated in hunting expeditions, farm work, construction of houses, palaces, roads, fetching firewood and water (Nuza⁶ 2005).

Community development in this sense has the same meaning as Community Work. In North-West Cameroon, community work is a very common word which almost everyone understands including the uneducated. Every now and then, people are called upon to come out for 'community work' referring to a specific task like road or bridge construction, general clean-up in the village or town, the digging of a water pipe line or the maintenance of a public building or a new school or health centre to be constructed. The underlying aim of any such community work is always to achieve a visible target that would benefit every member of the community. Community work in Cameroon is, therefore, defined as; 'organised work done collectively by members of a particular community for the benefit of all members of that community' (R1). Community members through their leaders meet identify and discuss the work to be done and its usefulness to the community. A plan for the work is drawn and the community members are informed.

In most North-West villages, community work is carried out in the early morning hours of specific days of the week usually the traditional resting day. But in the towns and cities it takes a different dimension. For example, the morning period of every first Thursday of the month has been set aside for community work day in Bamenda town by the government delegate to the urban council. The inhabitants know this and on this day all businesses and offices are closed for the first four hours of the day and everyone has an obligation to go out and keep the streets clean. This is an acceptable line of action in Cameroon and any community can undertake it. In the Cameroon context, all community work action is expected to lead to some aspect of community development. In the UK

⁶ Keynote address at the IACD Yaoundé Conference April 3-8th 2005

Popple (1995) refers to it as an area of practice that is both imprecise and unclear. He states that 'community work is not a profession like any other. It is a profession dedicated to increasing the expertise of non-professional, to increasing the capacity of people in difficult and disadvantaged situations' (Presley 1987:2 in Popple 1995). In Cameroon like in the UK, community work is not regarded as a profession but simply as an organised activity aimed at improving community life.

Before the coming of the colonial masters the core values and principles of CD such as solidarity, participation, and democracy were already embedded in the local peoples' way of life (Nuza 2005). Through colonisation the nation-state was created to unite these smaller communities and to provide public amenities for everyone from the central administration. However, the community spirit of working together to achieve common objectives has always been part of the peoples' total way of life. Colonial rule had its impact on the local peoples traditional attitude towards CD which could be seen as purely exploitative or both beneficial and exploitative to local people. For example, Kwo (1984) argues that '

It would be wrong to condemn colonialism or reduce the Phenomenon to simplistic ideological terms without appreciating the contribution it made generally towards the welfare and development of indigenous people' (1984:204)

Another view argues that:

'The attitude of Britain...towards what they call participation by colonial peoples in colonial government and public affairs are half-way measures to keep them complacent and to throttle their aspirations for complete independence social projects, agriculture planning, facilities for full participation in government merely serves as a means to one end: the perpetuation of foreign rule upon colonial peoples and the economic exploitation of their material resources.

(Nkwame Nkrumah in Gary 1989:6)

Organised community development work started in Cameroon during the period of German colonisation (1884-1916) Coercive methods were used to get people to

work in plantations and in the construction of road networks (Amungwa and Lantum 2005). British during their period of colonial rule in West Cameroon from 1922-1961 did the same. The whole purpose echoed in the quote above was to double economic benefit to the colonial government rather than the local people. However, the official introduction of community development into Cameroon was in response to article 76 of the United Nations Charter (1945) which requested protecting powers to encourage the progressive evolution of trustee territories towards the ability to administer themselves independently. While the British introduced mass education which later became known as community development in the part of the country which they administered from Nigeria now West Cameroon, the French in East Cameroon introduced Animation Rurale. 'Community development and animation rurale were instigated in British and French colonies respectively both before and after independence to assist rural reconstruction and nation building' (Midgley et al.1986:93). 'Animation Rurale' was paternalistic and more out-ward looking and was attached to the Ministry of Youth and Sport while Community Development based on self-reliance was attached to the Ministry of Territorial Administration.

These two approaches stayed until 1976 when decree N0 76/256 of July 1 1976 consolidated them to form a national development programme which then created the Department of Community Development attached to the Ministry of Agriculture . This step was taken in recognition of the fact that 'Animation Rurale' encouraged too much dependency on government and other external bodies for the provision of basic services rather than Community Development which encouraged initiative and creativity from the local people to provide for basic needs instead of just waiting for the government or other external sources. It was also the case that animation rural with its strong tradition of central direction under French administration soon became vehicles of implementing pre-established government programmes which gave local participants little real say in decision making (Midgley et al 1986)

The official opinion in Cameroon is that the impact of these two colonial legacies is still being felt in Cameroon today as seen from the attitudes towards CD of people from the two main divisions of the country. The people of French Cameroon are still largely depending on the government for the provision of most

services like schools and hospitals while in British or West Cameroon most new schools, hospitals, roads and other development projects are organised and realised through the efforts of the people at local level. Generally, community development is considered to be 'a thing of the Anglophones' (R1) who alone know how to go about it. The Government of Cameroon GOC is fully aware of this. Most of those who have headed the Department of Community and Local Development of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development have been English Speaking Cameroonians who understand better how to mobilise the rural population about CD.

The main task in the 1980s throughout Cameroon was defining the stages of the process and the functions of development committees at village and regional levels, promoting the use of tools for community members to become investigators and planners of their reality to produce the desired change (Amungwa et al 2005). In Cameroon, community development is organised at various levels and involves very many actors interacting with each other at the central, the provincial, divisional and village levels. At the central level, there is a director of community and local development who is the professional adviser to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. At the provincial level the main person is the Provincial chief of community development. At this level and the divisional levels, there is an emphasis on supervision, coordination planning and execution of village level programmes while at the village level programmes are organised through multi-purpose village level workers called Community Development Agents (CDAs). They live and work face to face with village communities and are responsible to the divisional and sub-divisional delegate for technical and administrative matters respectively⁷.

Multilateral organisations and NGOs like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), PLAN Cameroon, and diplomatic missions like the British High Commission (BHC), the American Embassy, operate at various level and work with both the government for administrative and technical support and also directly with grassroots organisations to promote community development. This creates a chain of interaction of actors at various levels with diverse interests in the community development process. Community based organisations such as

⁷ Based on sources from MINADER

Common Initiative Groups (CIGs)⁸ which might be same sex or mixed, youth organisations such as the Bambui Youth Organisation (BYO), faith based groups such as the Catholic Women's Association (CWA), Christian Women's Fellowship (CWF) and village development associations such as the Bambui Cultural and Development Association (BACUDA) etc interact at various levels and contribute in different aspects to the community development process.

4.4 Women and Community Development in Cameroon

The 1970s will remain an important decade in the history of women in development throughout the world. It was then for the first time that an important transformation took place with a shift from the earlier belief that women could only serve to advance development to the conviction that development itself was not possible without the full participation of women. The world seems to have recognised at the time how much it had missed out over the centuries by excluding women from the development process. In the early 1980s, the doctrine of 'women in development' founded in the West soon spread to the rest of the world including Cameroon. Women in Development became an important programme of government propagated in the national media. The first world conference on the status of women was convened in Mexico City to coincide with the 1975 International Women's Year, observed to remind the international community that discrimination against women continued to be a persistent problem in much of the world. The Conference, along with the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985) proclaimed by the General Assembly five months later at the urging of the Conference, launched a new era in global efforts to promote the advancement of women by opening a worldwide dialogue on gender equality. A process was set in motion, a process of learning that would involve deliberations, negotiations, setting objectives, identifying obstacles and reviewing the progress made (UN 1975).

Earlier in 1974, the US government had introduced a resolution on women in development in the General Assembly of the United Nations which became part

⁸ Common initiative groups (CIGs) are the most common types of associations or unions found in the Northwest province and in fact throughout Cameroon. They are formed purely out of the desire to support members in which ever way necessary such as by contributing an agreed amount of money and giving one member at a time and supporting them in times of need. They do not need to be registered officially and they is no lower or upper limit to the membership. CIGs are the main poverty coping strategy for the rural population and the only means of credit available to many.

of the 1975 conference. Women in Development (WID) became a popular concept among governments from then onwards. In the words of Lucile Mathurin, we can capture how rapidly it was adopted:

Women had been a missing link in the development, now they are being found; they could actually be a valuable resource, indeed half or more of a nation's human resources, no longer to be wasted. Women in Development became the decade's overnight catchphrase a seductive one, which for a time at least could evade the question of what kind of development women were to be drawn into (As cited in Tinker 1990:31)

The beginning of the 1980s were marked by some divisions mostly between women of the North and South over what constituted 'women's issues'. The Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women in 1985 highlighted that: discriminatory legislative provisions-civil codes in particular continued to limit the legal capacity and status of women and their ability to inherit own, and control property. At the Conference in Nairobi, many women were beginning to reject the divisions and there was increasing emphasis on the intersection of issues. 'Women had learned that there can be no development without peace' (Tinker 1990). Global feminism in the 1980s was also expanding in the developing world and helping to shape the way women's issues were approached generally. Many saw it as the key to new development strategies as echoed in the following words by Tinker

Feminism offers the only politics which can transform our world into a more human place and deal with global issues like equality development and peace because it asks the right questions about power, about the links between the personal and the political and because it cuts across race and class (Tinker 1990:73).

The focus of GOC in the 1980s was to bring women further into development in order for them to reap the benefits which had been lost as a result of their exclusion over the years. The creation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 1984 was in response to global changes and in partial fulfilment of this women's expressed needs.

4.5 The influence of Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD)

Another major shift in the 1980s was that from Women in Development (WID) to Gender and Development (GAD). Hardly had WID gained any roots in Cameroon, than the West started talking about GAD. Many people even now are not clear

about the difference. While some saw and continue to see this shift as destabilising and decentring the claims of women, gender and development (GAD) theorists have argued that a focus on the relationships that position women within society must be at the heart of the political activity (Rai 2002). The main differences can be seen in the following way: Broadly speaking, WID views the absence of women in development plans and policies as the major problem. The focus here is on women. The problem is the exclusion of women from development process an efficiency approach that focuses on the loss of half of the developmental resources as consequences of this exclusion. The goal of WID, therefore, is more efficient, effective development that includes women and the solution is to integrate women into the existing development process. The strategies for achieving WID include focusing on women's projects, on the women's component of projects and on integrated projects, increase women's productivity and increase their ability to look after the household (Parpart et al 2000).

On the other hand the GAD approach views unequal social relations between men and women and their naturalization as the major problem. GAD focuses on socially constructed and maintained relations between women and men with special focus on the subordination of the women. The problem according to GAD theorists is unequal power relations which prevent equitable development and women's full participation. The goal of GAD, therefore, is to achieve equitable development with both men and women as full participants in decision-making and the solution that GAD is seeking for is to empower disadvantaged women and transform unequal gender relations. The strategies that would lead us into this are to reconceptualise the development process taking gender and global inequalities into account, identifying and addressing practical needs determined by women and men to improve their conditions and at the same time address women's strategic interests and those of poor people; through a people's centred development (Parpart et al 2000).

In Cameroon, WID has been the doctrine for nearly three decades and has been the focus of the media but the crucial differences between WID and GAD are not clear to many grassroots women and development organisations according to this research. GAD and WID are often confused and there is a lack of focus and the

approaches to both are not clear. However, the goals of WID which seek to address the problem of women's absence in the development process and to increase their economic opportunities, the benefits of which are clear to both men and women in Cameroon, are more appealing than those of GAD which are perceived to be attempting to alter the power structures. Women need economic power first as a driving force and stepping stone to social and political equality with their male counterparts in Cameroon

WID was expanded in the 1990s to involve everyone not only the government through the Laws on Freedom of Association in Cameroon. This enabled many NGOs and women to form common initiative groups which have become very successful and powerful today. The main reason for making these laws was to enable NGOs and community groups to flourish and assist as partners in the development process. The following words capture the rationale vividly:

The catastrophic effects of the economic crisis in the late 1980s and the harsh adjustment measures that followed later in the early 1990s among other factors encouraged the emergence of many NGOs in Cameroon. Government influence has waned; it has been unable to meet most of the basic needs of the people, leaving the population to take charge of their destiny through self-reliant Development (Fonjong 2001).

Most NGOs had as common objective the enhancement of the economic status of its members through support, and common economic activities like farming, small and regular savings etc. The Women's groups and organisation constitute over 90% of the informal sector in Cameroon today.⁹ The focus of the NGOs on women was crucial since they were affected more than men by the crisis. More women than men became unemployed and household incomes fell. They needed assistance to find new strategies to survive and maintain their crucial roles in the community. The government recognised this as echoed in the following words: 'The challenge of government overcoming the economic crisis and other types of crisis in our society will be achieved by the Cameroonian women or else it will not be achieved'. (Inter-Press Service 1997).

Women are the backbone of community development in rural Cameroon. They manually produce about 90% of the food which has made Cameroon the 'bread

⁹ Annuaire statistique sur la situation de la Femme Cameroun

basket' of Central Africa feeding Chad, Central African Republic, Congo Gabon and parts of Nigeria (CGT 2005). Their activities include running farming groups, Meetings or Rotatory Credits Associations (RCAs) '*Njangis*' for savings, acting as food crops distributors from remote areas to semi-urban and urban markets locally known as 'Biyam Sellam', as fruit and food vendors, restaurant operators, telephone call box operators, hair dressers, beer parlours operators, second-hand clothes sellers etc. They are also active in community projects like rural water and electricity, road and bridge constructions, new schools and hospitals or health centre projects, churches and community centres. In most rural areas, women out-number men in their contribution to these community development activities but their achievements have not gone far because of gender stereotyping and cultural barriers which prevent them from rising to positions of decision-making which could give them the opportunity to influence change in their situations and enhance their achievements.

Land and other property ownership and the freedom to engage in any economic activity are vital for rural women in Cameroon in order for them to continue to make any meaningful contribution to their community development. In chapter 1 I talked about the dominant role of men which prevents ownership and control over assets such as land and housing by women that provides security and incentives for taking economic risks. Further to this, the coexistence of statutory and customary laws makes things difficult in matters concerning women's economic rights, in Cameroon in general and the North-West in particular. Studies from around the world also show that women represent less than one third of land owners in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (UN Millennium Project, 2005).

Gender roles of division of labour assign most of the household and community tasks to women while men enjoy the privilege of doing lighter work in the morning and spending more time in what is considered family or community matters that can only be dealt with by men. Inheritance rights are reserved for the male only and women are considered to be mostly emotional and lack the judgment, assertiveness authority and ability to be trusted with power and leadership in the community and the country. The following word captures the situation vividly: 'The economic position of women in Bamenda has perpetually

been characterised by persistent gender-specific division of labour and responsibilities and the domination of male authorities has led often to militant demonstration by women' (Ajaga Nji 2000). This situation is similar to that of Ghanaian women as echoed in these words: Ghanaian women have remained invisible in the development process because low levels of education place them either in the informal sector of the economy....again it is assumed that girls do not have the capacity to learn as much as boys and therefore, cannot do certain types of highly prestigious jobs' (Abane 2001:49-50)

In spite of this, evidence from the field suggests that Cameroon's rural women physically contribute more to community development projects than men. Where community projects like the construction of new schools or health centres require the contribution of community members in labour as it is often the case, women turn out for this more than men and also contribute more financially. In Cameroon, women have become the most influential in local development initiatives at the grassroots, not only because of their numbers but more so because they happen to be the ones most affected by the cut down in service provision by the state. Their general lack of adequate education to gain employment in the private or public sector has forced most of them to remain in the informal sector which is easy to get into and offers so many opportunities for basic survival. 'Inadequate skills limit women's effective participation in development' (Fonjong 2001). However, their activities at local levels have enlivened many communities in Cameroon. 'Women's work in the food sector is a major source of rural family welfare their sales of surplus food represent by far the major source of the local regional and national commercial food supply' (Goheen 1996:137). This appears to be the case not only with women in the North-West of Cameroon but also to women in other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa as Cleaver (2002) echoes in the following words: 'Government and non-governmental organisations consider women's groups in Kenya as important organisational structures or channels through which development assistance is transferred to the local level. In Cameroon as in Kenya, women's groups are viewed by the state and other development partners as key indicators to gauge the involvement of women in national and socioeconomic development. 'There are seen as vehicles for self-help and income generation' (Government of Kenya 1997).

According to the UN women perform about 53% of the economic activities in developing countries but only about a third of their work is currently measured in national accounts compared with three quarters of men (DFID 2000). In Cameroon they constitute 'two-thirds of the work force but receive one-tenth of the income and own one-hundredth of the national property' (Fonjong 2001). 'Women are the key influence on family health, and education. They are crucial players in the domain of community development. Unfortunately their contribution as activists and as the people working behind the scenes to enable the 'show to go on' has been scarcely acknowledged' (Dominelli 1995:51). This statement summarises the position of the North-West women in general and reiterates the rationale for the study stated earlier which is to investigate the reasons why women's activities in the community having been recognised as crucial is still not making a huge impact.

4.6 Women's Empowerment in Cameroon

Women's empowerment is a highly controversial subject in Cameroon. This controversy comes partly as a result of the lack of proper understanding and interpretation of the concept and what it hopes to achieve for women and the wider society. It is also the case that many Cameroonians believe the concept is foreign and does not fit into the Cameroon culture. Perhaps the first time that the subject came into public discussion in Cameroon was after the 1995 Beijing International Conference on Women which was wrongly understood throughout Cameroon as a conference meant to give women power over men. Women's empowerment programmes and issues started gaining prominence in national discourses only after Beijing in 1995. The government has since shown a genuine intention to foster women's empowerment and advance the status of Cameroon women. The creation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 1997 which changed to Women's Empowerment and the Protection of the Family in 2004 are all part of this government's efforts.

Among Cameroonian intellectuals, there is clearly a division of opinion regarding the dimension which women's empowerment should take. In fact, some of the men whose wives were in the first batch of the Women Studies degree programme in the University of Buea, actually ended up in divorce as they firmly

believed that these women were studying a dangerous subject that will enable them alter cultural norms (R5). The argument from a cross section of some elite women and men is that although the Cameroon woman needs to be empowered this is not to be in the same way as their western counterpart. This perhaps means that whereas empowerment according to the western perspective includes full economic, political and reproductive rights, rights to abortion and contraception etc, this is not to be the same with Cameroon women. They believe that these issues are culturally sensitive and should not be the subject of public debate. The following view from one of the senior female informants makes the case clear: 'Women's empowerment in Cameroon should be more concerned with improving women's economic and social status' (R1). But another Cameroon woman argues *inter alia*:

Using empowerment in connection with projects that focus only on ensuring women's access to moneymaking opportunities can only mislead as the true meaning of women's empowerment which includes the transformation of unequal power relations reproductive rights and the control of resources are forgotten (Endeley, 2001:39).

These views show the different perspectives of both men and women in Cameroon regarding this subject. While educated and elite women argue about the dimension which women's empowerment should take, most rural women seem to see it from one common lens. According to most of them, women's empowerment is about giving them the opportunity to do things they were never allowed to do before such as running personal income generating projects and businesses, owning personal accounts, being able to obtain loans and pay children school fees and hospital bills and belonging to any groups of their choice. These are the things most rural women see as empowerment. One of the women's group presidents said this about women's empowerment. 'I understand women's empowerment to mean giving women the right to do things just as men are free to do what they want to do' (R4). This brings in the notion of equal rights and opportunities but which is clearly limited to basic things. Other more learned women leaders stated that 'women empowerment means women having equal say in political, financial and social matters and should be able to lead and not only to be lead' (R4). Another view from the same category of women respondents said 'I understand women's empowerment as equal opportunity to both men and women which in the past was absent' (R4). The feeling of being empowered is

important for all the women which they measure by their ability to belong to groups through which they can voice their concerns as well as their independence from men in financial matters. Other women see the fact that they can now come home later in the evening without getting into trouble with their husbands as empowerment as this never used to happen before. Women's empowerment is understood to be merely a strategy or means to improve local women's condition without any attempt to challenge unequal power relations. In a study of how gendered micro-lending schemes are helping sustainable women's empowerment in Nigeria, Izugbara (2004) found a similar situation that 'the strategy merely supports the kind of empowerment that never goes beyond marginal improvements in small areas of poor local women's life, leaving unchallenged the critical issues of women subordination and gender inequality' (2004:72).

Broader definitions of empowerment as we have seen go beyond this. The UNICEF empowerment framework is based on the premise that women's empowerment involves five levels which include, (Welfare, Access, Conscientisation, Participation and Control (UNICEF 1993). According to this research women's empowerment in Cameroon is far lagging behind these levels and is still clamouring around welfare issues and access to resources for basic survival. Opinions from mostly male quarters in Cameroon believe that reproductive issues should not be put into public debates as they are strictly private and should be the decision of families to decide on them. Men in Cameroon like in most of Africa and the developing world, tend to see women's empowerment as giving them the power to control their sexuality, including the right to determine when to have sex with their husbands, the number of children they desire to have and much more. Seen in this way women's empowerment becomes a threat to men and a weapon to break down long established traditions. Women generally see empowerment as a means of gaining equal access to education; employment and business opportunities in order to improve their welfare and social status.

This view indicates the lack of adequate education about what women's empowerment is meant to be and the benefits it could bring to both men and women and the society. This has made some men see women's empowerment as a

zero-sum game not as a win-win game. This view seems to be supported by the following words of Cleaver *inter alia*:

There is a perceived need for men to change in order to benefit women, for men to take on a greater burden of domestic work, to give up some of their control over household finances and decision-making, to cede their places on committees and public bodies for women' (Cleaver 2002:1).

Viewed from this perspective, women's empowerment can only be possible if men give up power. Since no man who has power is prepared to lose it, this places the Cameroon women in a very difficult position in their struggle for full empowerment. Although women's empowerment is not only about women having control over their sexuality, this appears to be the sense in which most men see it. Maria Mies (1993) also sees the demand for self-determination and autonomy over their bodies and lives as one of the fundamental demands of the women's movement as she writes:

For women were not granted this right of determination over the Self, and especially not over our bodies, which have been treated as the property of others, as territory occupied by men, medicine-men Statesmen churchmen and of course men in general. Female reproductive organs and female generative power especially suffered from this occupation. Thus for women, Self-determination meant first, the liberation from occupation, the end of the Determination by others, men and by patriarchal social powers (Mies et al, 1993:218).

From this perspective, it can be understood why women's empowerment still has a long way to go in Cameroon and in societies where male domination and control over sexuality is the dominant norm. According to Mohanty, 'male sexual politics' in Africa and around the world share the same political goal: to assure female dependence and subservience by any and all means (Mohanty 1991).

The success of women's empowerment in Cameroon depends to a large extent on their level of awareness of their situation and the conditions which continue to perpetuate this. Awareness can provide them with the basic actions to overcome and dismantle some of the obstacles which are holding them back (Fonjong 2001). Empowerment is a process that has to be started by people who lack power themselves; at least a commitment to it has to be willingly adopted (Stein 1997). Unfortunately Cameroonian women en masse appear still too shy and hiding in the confinement of their men. This is happening not only with the illiterates but most shockingly with some of the mostly educated women of the country as Nku (1995) laments in the following words:

Today even some of the most enlightened women with a sound western education condescend to become second and third wives...here in Cameroon it is women who insist on most of the debasing and Oppressive widow rites which subject widows to torture and misery (1995:37)

In Cameroon women of all levels are showing a genuine commitment to the cause of empowerment. They believe generally that empowerment is the starting point of their liberation from various cultural constraints which limits their chances of participating in the national socio-economic and political activities. According to this research, it is not the aim of Cameroon women especially those of the North-West at this stage to break down patriarchy and the institutions that perpetuate male domination as advocated in the West. Empowerment for North-West women is a means for improving their lives from what it is now. The GOC has expressed its commitment in the same way to foster women's empowerment which basically means improving their socio-economic status.

4.7 The Civil Society in Cameroon.

The concept of civil society was examined in the previous chapter. The concern here is to examine its application to the Cameroon context with a view to establish an understanding of how the concept is important in the thesis in the first place. In Cameroon, civil society embodies a variety of people's and voluntary organisations that emerged since the 1980s and became expanded in the 1990s to participate in the struggle to alleviate poverty and misery in the rural areas as well as advance the particular interests of the activists (Amungwa 2005). According to Nuza, (2005), there are five categories of civil society organisations in Cameroon namely: Village Development Associations (VDA), Trade Unions and Student Unions, Women's Associations, Human Rights, Religious Organisations and other voluntary organisations.

The first category includes village development associations such as the Bambui Cultural and Development Association (BACUDA). These are based on kinship, ethnic and cultural affinities. Their main interests are the promotion of local culture and the achievement of local development. These carry the danger of further strengthening local and tribal ties or bonds without bridging and

networking nationally and globally. Tribalism in Cameroon has been noted to be a force against national unity and development. It has given people positions they don't deserve or qualify for, allocated development funds and projects in areas that don't qualify for or do not need them. Generally, tribalism is hugely responsible for the present in balance in regional development in Cameroon and what village development associations do is further strengthening them.

Cameroonian politics is perceived by the general public to be characterised by divisions along Francophone and Anglophone lines and is a factor in non government activities in the country, mutual suspicion, mistrust and marginalisation are evident in the NGO community (ICSW 2005)

Cultural Associations tend to influence local and national politics depending on how powerful they may be. Their strength is determined by the status of people who make up its membership. For example, members of Cultural Associations who hold important positions in government such as ministers and directors of state enterprises tend to give their association some undue advantages over others. It appears that the civil society in Cameroon though very active does not benefit national unity and development because the cultural interest and individual benefits tends to override national interest.

The second category comprises trade unions and students associations such as the Bambui Union of Students (BUS), the Cameroon Teachers Trade Union (CATTU). Although these are classified under one category they are actually different as they have different convictions and goals. Students unions are mainly made up of young women and men whose activities are centred on lobbying from the elites to improve their status as students. These take place mainly during the summer holiday. Youth Associations operate mainly at village level to support the main village development association in achieving local development. The third category constituting women's organisations is the focus of this research and will discussed fully in chapter six. Most women's organisations in the rural areas work to promote women's rights and empowerment and promote their socio-economic status and community development through self-help initiatives. Within this category are also sub categories such as those based on faith like Catholic Women Association (CWA), the Christian Women Fellowship (CWF) and Legal Women (LW). In general, women's organisations tend to find it more difficult to gain funding because of

their low economic status. Husbands who don't support their wives belonging to groups will not give them the financial support to continue membership. The problem for some is that they see women's movements as a force to overtake their traditional leadership positions in the family and society. For the rural women, group affiliation is mainly for economic benefit and is the only form of social insurance available to them.

Between these categories as would be expected there is competition and conflict over recognition and funding and even space for operation. Most groups raise the funds for the running of their activities by themselves through member's contributions and join group projects such as a farm. All these constitute what makes up the civil society in Cameroon and to some extent contribute to the development process in the country.

4.8 Social Capital in Cameroon.

It is essential to examine at this stage the key elements of Social Capital analysed in chapter three, to see how these correspond to the elements that help various organisations and associations to function well in Cameroon. Trust and reciprocity, cooperation, networking as well as shared vision and neighbourhood interests are the core pillars of organisational functioning and survival in Cameroon. These also are the key elements of social capital. In Cameroon, social capital exists at all levels of society. Family meetings, Common Initiative Groups, (CIG) or what Putnam calls Rotatory Credit Associations (RCAs), Njangi¹⁰ Village Development Associations or Unions and myriads of women's organisations are some of the breathing grounds for social capital in the rural areas. At the regional and national level, professional unions or associations such as the Legal Women (LW), the Association of Cameroon University Women (ACUW) and the North-West Elites Association, (NOWEA), provide the forum for networking and interaction at a much higher level.

However, these regional and national organisations such as the North-West Elite Association, The Tubah Cultural and Development Association (TUCUDA appear

¹⁰ Njangi is a form of credit scheme common in Cameroon especially in the rural communities. Groups of people who know each other so well come together at regular intervals say weekly or monthly and contribute a fixed amount of money which is given to one person. The process continues until each member in the group has benefited and they may start all over again.

to lack the same kind of trust and cooperation among its members as in the more locally based village groups. This might mean that what exists in most of Cameroon is only bonding social capital whereby trust, cooperation and networking ends at family, village or tribal level and development initiative is locally based. Local groups can support each other very well towards the means for basic survival but for community development to succeed there need to be external networking and cooperation for information on expert technical assistance, financial assistance and exchange in ideas.

Research at the Provincial Delegation of Community Development in Bamenda in The North-West reveals that there are over eight thousand women's groups registered from all over the region. These work in various capacities in the promotion of women's empowerment and in enhancing the women's economic situation. Cameroon's women in this sense have enormous potential for a faster community development according to Putnam and his followers. But more than a decade has gone by since civil society organisations became recognised in Cameroon as state partners in development. Although there is some progress, the general trend is slow which raises a question as to whether social capital in the Cameroon context has got the same effect on community development as it does in other high-income economies. The main constraint seems to be that although there is sufficient breeding ground for social capital its impact is limited to the local level where relationships and support networks are strengthened but continue to get weaker as we move from the regional to the national level. In a study of social capital and community development in a North Indian village Dhesi (2004) found similar trends. He makes a distinction between high private trust and low public trust whereby high private trust refers to networks of families, friends and local communities based upon particularism at the expense of universalistic qualifications. Links get weaker as you move from one village to another and from one administrative division to another and to the provincial level. There is no mechanism for effective networking and cooperation between groups found in different villages, divisions or provinces for the purpose of mutual benefit. A national coordinating system is therefore necessary to reinforce norms of good behaviour within community and regional groups to keep them connected and strong. This is what Dhesi (2004) is talking about as he states that

‘it is important to have a formal institutional structure

that reinforces expectations of supportive behaviour, thus strengthening the cultural dispositions towards collective actions. Without the institutional support, the cultural disposition may weaken and disappear' (2004:202-203).

During my field work in Bamenda, I found that many of the women's groups were not aware of others in the same town doing the same or similar work. There was no forum of meeting and networking between groups within the same village, town or administrative division. Most women's groups were not even aware of the many government services and NGOs available at their service in the provincial capital and how they could benefit from them.

One thing blocking this cooperation is the cultural diversity in Cameroon. There is in many Cameroonians an instinctive attachment to one's tribe of origin which acts as a barrier to national unity and development. Trust and confidence gets weaker in a group made up of people from different tribes or regions of the country. This appears to be the unfortunate situation in Cameroon. Breaking these barriers of tribalistic values and interests to move from bonding to bridging social capital is the greatest challenge facing development in Cameroon today. This research will strongly advocate that the government has the responsibility to set up mechanisms that will promote networking among regional and national groups for mutual benefit and to discourage unnecessary tribalism which is hampering national unity and progress.

The main emphasis here is that social capital can promote social gathering and interaction, and develop formal and informal networks for information. Secondly, Community Based Organisations (CBOs) can use public debate to encourage participation, offer a venue for residents to identify shared purposes and common concerns. The opportunity to develop a vision of the community is very important in planning for the development of the community (Paul and Haines 2002). Social capital can encourage new investment as well as making existing investment to go further; it is the glue that bonds the benefit of economic and physical capital into marginalised communities (Commission for Social Justice 1994:308). In Cameroon many rural communities continue to remain poor despite strong ties and support networks from within which suggest that social capital isn't always

the answer. This is not only because it is bonding social capital as we have seen, but also due to other interrelated factors which might be political, social, economic or geographical.

4.9 The Role of State in Promoting Social Capital

The success of CD in Cameroon requires high level collaboration between different stakeholders including the central government and local communities. Social capital has a major contribution to make. However, this research argues that this can not be a substitute for central government funding. It has already been shown how in many communities where social capital is flourishing there are still many deficiencies in social amenities and basic health and educational facilities which suggests that social capital is not always the answer. Whereas social capital is necessary to stimulate grassroots level initiative on which the government can build, central government funding remains the main determinant of CD success in Cameroon because it can be reliable and measurable. This stand is supported by Mubangizi (2003) in his study of what social capital does in improving living conditions in rural Maluti in South Africa as he argues that 'initiatives that draw on social capital such as those in Maluti district can only realize their full potential if there is commitment from the state, the business sector and civil society to support them to harness the existing social capital into mobilizing the other forms of capital' (Mubangizi 2003:147). Obtaining committed and coordinated support from the state, the business sector and civil society is therefore essential for achieving the full utilisation of social capital. The government is also fully responsible for establishing a social, economic and political environment on which social capital can continue to triumph.

4.10 The WID and GAD Debate

The WID and GAD debate is one of the major debates in this thesis and here I present the position which is adopted by the researcher on this. This research focuses on the strategies for achieving WID. The argument is that if WID is achieved the effect will trickle round to regularise the unequal gender balance. Control over resources is seen by many as the ultimate proof of women's economic social and political Empowerment' (Endeley 2001). The WID approach

is that which appeals to the people in Cameroon as it does not attempt to dismantle most local traditions and cultural norms. WID is still the approach very much needed in Cameroon today to empower women economically which is the first step towards social and political empowerment. This argument is also consistent with the main argument in this thesis that women's empowerment and GAD need to be re-defined within specific contexts taking into cognizance tradition and cultural sensitivities. GAD is a more secular concept which seeks to dismantle patriarchy in all its forms and manifestation which is great if this can be achieved. It might be argued that in developed societies GAD has been achieved to some extent but considering the tradition, socio-cultural, economic and political realities in most developing countries like Cameroon GAD still has a long way to go; and in my opinion it seems an economic impossibility of our time and it will be a waste of resources to continue to pursue this goal. To say the least, women in Cameroon are not passionate about gaining equality with men; they are more concerned about improving their socio-economic conditions. For GAD to be achieved, this requires a radical change of the mentality of women to believe that this is something possible and a total commitment to the course. This does not seem to be the case right now. This view is supported by a Cameroon female writer in the following words 'While change that is consonant with the Women in Development (WID) approach, changes in gender relation propounded by the Gender and Development (GAD) approach have been met with resistance mainly from male-headed quarters' (Samba 2005:41). The phrase mainly from male headed quarters does not suggest that opposition to GAD is only from males. Many traditional elite women still believe that the idea of women's empowerment should not be to alter traditional power structures. They still see the role of men and women in terms of complementarity.

4.11 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the key concepts of this thesis as applied to the Cameroon context. It begins with a review of the issue of gaps in policy implementation in Cameroon. It has been shown that the implementation of policies in Cameroon is flawed by different factors which prevents government policies and programmes initiated to benefit women and rural population from being effectively implemented. Community Development is seen as the most needed engine of change in the rural areas especially in the North-West.

Government efforts at bringing women into the mainstream development process in which they have been absent in the past is seen through efforts to embrace WID in the 1980s and expanded through the 1990 Laws of freedom of association and the many women-targeted programmes for rural development. Women are acknowledged to be the bedrock of rural economy even though with limited resources and capacities to make a greater impact.

Women's empowerment is currently one of the foci of government programmes and is seen as the catalyst that will speed up local development. Yet there appear to be many impediments on the way to achieving this, prominent among them the patriarchal nature of the society. For most men in Cameroon including the intellectual class, women's empowerment should be a means through which women gain access to education and economic resources mainly to improve their welfare status. For most rural women, empowerment is all about the means to improving their livelihoods and the freedom to participate in community activities. This view clearly falls short of the overall goals of women's empowerment from the Western perspective. However, the chapter has also shown how Cameroon women have emerged from relegation in the last thirty years to become major actors in the community development process today even though still facing difficulties. The civil society is shown as a countervailing force in the process of CD in Cameroon even though its negative impacts are also noted. And finally the potential for social capital helping to foster the process of CD has been examined and this is seen not to be having the same effect on CD in Cameroon as in other high income economies like the USA and Italy. However, it has been argued that although social capital is necessary to stimulate grassroots initiative, this cannot be a substitute for central government funding. State intervention through other forms of capitals is still required to make social capital more profitable in the local communities. The position of this research on the competing positions of WID and GAD has also been articulated. This chapter has therefore shown how the concepts discussed in chapter three are related to Cameroon and has provided a clue to the main research questions about the importance of women's empowerment for Community development in Cameroon. The next chapter will begin to present and analyse data from national sources which form the wider context of the research.

Chapter Five

Overview of the Context and Data, Sources

5.1 Introduction:

This chapter will present and analyze the data from sources which constitute the general context from which ‘the case’ has been determined. In other words, it describes two Cameroon Ministries, one multilateral organisation and one diplomatic mission directly involved in advancing women’s status and promoting their roles in CD in Cameroon and the strategies being undertaken to achieve this. The Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development, Women’s Empowerment and the Protection of the Family, the UNDP and the British High Commission (BHC) are based in the capital Yaoundé and extend their impact all over Cameroon. Together they constitute the wider context within which ‘the case’ has been studied. Although ‘the case’ study is women in the Northwest province, it was necessary to collect national data from a wider context in order to compare and better understand the problems of women at the grassroots. It is also essential that in trying to understand how government policy is affecting grassroots women we get the views of both the programme initiators and of the beneficiaries. These combined views are crucial in the analysis. In fact, the centralized system of administration in Cameroon precludes any proper understanding of the way things operate at the regional or provincial level without knowledge of policy process at the national level. In recent years, however, attempts are being made to decentralize the administration. The table below shows the organisations that I will be dealing with in this chapter, their main mission and the methods that were used in gathering data from them. Following the table I will present a summary of the work of each of these organisations and how it relates to the themes of Community Development and Women’s Empowerment.

Table 1 Summary of Data, sources and methods presented in this chapter

Organisation	Main Mission	code	interviews	questionnaire	Docs
MINADER	Promotion of agriculture in the country through, training research and development, agric extension and rural women targeted programmes	1	6	15	3
MINPROFF	Women's empowerment and advancement of their status via various programmes	1	3	10	4
BHC	Assistance to grassroots level development projects	2	1	2	1
UNDP	Development assistance in various domains throughout the country	1	1	4	2
Total			11	31	10

5.2 How the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) is promoting Women's Role in Community Development

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development abbreviated in French as MINADER is one of Cameroon's key ministries considering the fact that Cameroon is predominantly an agriculturally based economy. 'This ministry is responsible for the promotion of agriculture and rural development throughout the country. This involves the promotion of research and development (RD) in agricultural techniques, the training of agricultural staff at various levels, the improvement of farm to market roads, incentives and subsidies to farmers and to farming groups especially those at the rural areas'(interview with R1). The ministry is divided into specialized departments headed by directors or directresses and sub-directorates who are specialist in their various fields. One such specialized departments is the Department of Community and Local Development which also has a women's unit specialized in promoting women's role in CD through agricultural productivity.

My research in this ministry was concentrated in this department. The key issue investigated in this department was the question of how the Cameroon government is promoting the role of women in community development and women's empowerment. This was coded as category 1 data source abbreviated in the thesis as (R1). Two main methods were used to generate and gather this data. These were interviews and questionnaires of which there was a high response rate. Some of the interviews were videotape recorded and for others only notes were taken. But also documentary sources from this department were consulted to obtain some quantitative data to substantiate data from interviews and questionnaires and these have all been referenced where used. These have been used in analyzing the research findings in chapter seven. Officials of this department confirm that 'women are the bedrock of the rural economy in Cameroon including the Northwest province. With their multiple roles as reproducers, producers, planners etc, they contribute remarkably to household incomes, to the health and education of the family and, therefore, the development of the community' (interview with R1). It was also noted that women are fast becoming the greatest investors in the economy via small saving schemes. Sources from this Ministry also revealed that 'practically every woman living an active life in Cameroon belongs to at least one self-help or common initiative group through which she makes a contribution to the community development process (Ibid).

The Government of Cameroon (GOC) is committed to promoting women's role in CD through various means such as the creation of specialized technical departments and services to assist women at the grassroots. The Women's Unit section of this department serves as the main mechanism for the promotion of women' role in CD through agricultural improvement. It promotes the organisation of women in cooperatives and farmers associations. The Investment Fund for Agricultural and Community Micro Enterprise (FIMAC) was created to encourage women to organise themselves in groups and obtain credits. The National Project for Extension and Agricultural Training (PNVFA) is the first to be directed to food production and to address the needs of women farmers (interview with R1).

The appointment of women at key technical and administrative positions both at the central ministry and at the provincial services is also one of the ways in which the government is helping to promote this role. According to the Cameroon's policy both men and women have equal rights and access to all national services and institutions but there are specific priority projects to enhance and strengthen women's economic power, promoting appropriate technologies to reduce the workload of women, encourage women's access to loans, agricultural services, resource training and extension and promote women's entrepreneurship as well as eradicating gender disparities in the primary and secondary school enrolment and introducing incentives to encourage girls to opt for science and industrial technical subjects (PRSP 2003).

Although these services and programmes are neatly laid down in policy documents it is still a long way from coming close to realization. 'Many of the technical services at provincial and divisional levels such as the extension services, small loan schemes and those aim to promote appropriate technology are not functioning' (interview with R3). The government does not appear to be fully committed to addressing the problem which continues to prevent rural women from gaining access to credits. Even though the facilities for credits may be available, women's inability to meet the requirements of collaterals prevents a huge number of from benefiting. For example only about 12 % of women benefit from the PNVFA credit facility (MINADER 2005). There are still not many women in key Ministerial positions as government sources claim and very few of them feature in positions where budgeting allocation decisions are made. For example women make up only 11% of the total percentage of parliamentarians in the country and an average of 12.2% of all municipal executive positions throughout the country (CEDAW 2007:30). The following charts illustrate the situation.

Fig 4 Members of National Assembly by sex

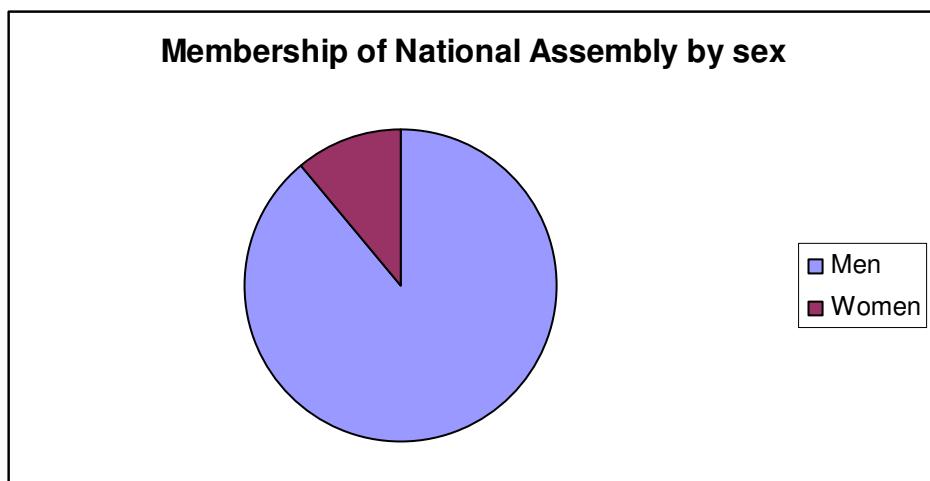
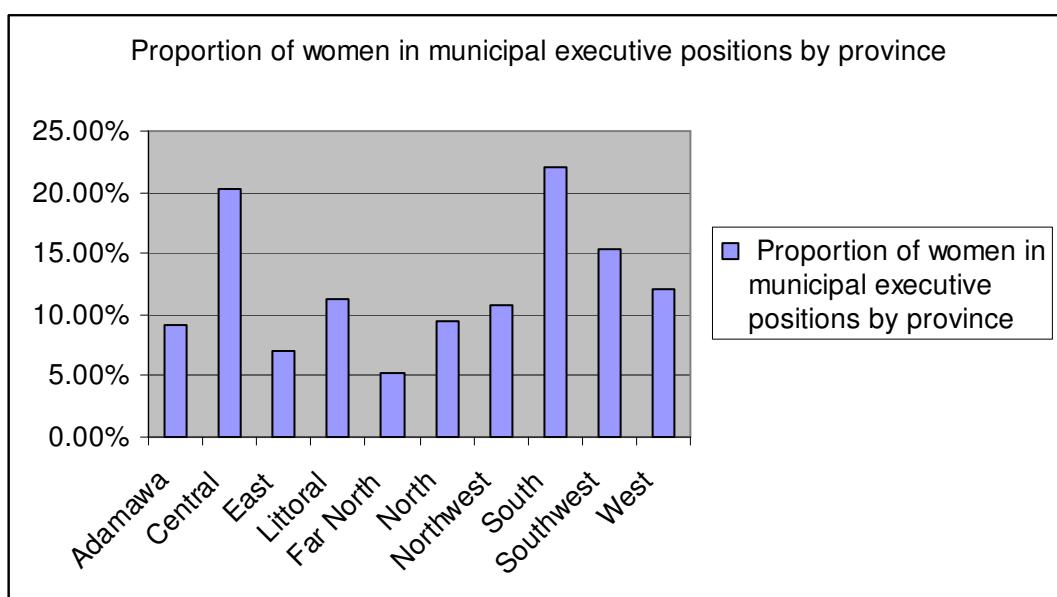


Fig. 5



Source: CEDAW Report 2007

At the provincial level the service of the Local and Community Development at the Delegation of Agriculture and Rural Development is charged with the execution of all the programmes and policies set by government at the national level. The Bureau for Women's Agricultural Programmes and Home Economics is created in recognition of the pivotal role of women in the agricultural sector and is specially geared towards promoting and enhancing their performance in this sector at the grassroots as it is believed that improved agricultural productivity can promote CD in the rural areas. It is headed by a Divisional Chief of section and has staffs that are specialized in Women's Agricultural Programmes and Home Economics and CD experts. Further down the ladder at the Sub-Divisional Level there are Community Development Agents (CDAs) who are trained technical field workers working closely with grassroots women's groups and reporting to the Sub-Divisional Delegate (Interview with R3).

The Provincial Service of Local and Community Development in the Northwest province estimates that 'over 60% of all community development programmes and projects are realized through the active participation of rural women' (R3). This is the main reason why the government has responded to this by creating the Bureau for Women Agricultural Programmes and Home Economics which also helps in capacity building for women, to improve skills and increase their numbers in decision-making positions (interview with R1). These in a nutshell are the different ways by which the Government of Cameroon through the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is helping to promote the role of women in the community development process.

Looking at the above one can quickly notice the top down approach as a major problem in the process. The approach that is still a characteristic feature of the Cameroon administrative system fails to recognize the important role of community members in contributing to the planning and execution of projects that affect their own lives. All women's programmes are planned at the central level and aimed at women all over Cameroon without taking account of the economic and cultural diversity in Cameroon and how this could affect programmes in different regions. In recent years Cameroon has undertaken to decentralize the administration and to share decision-making with the population. The National Community-Driven Development Programme (PNDP)

developed by the government to drastically reduce poverty by 2015, has as one of its objectives to empower grass-roots communities and the decentralized structures of state to play a role in their own development, in the gradual process of decentralization (CEDAW Report 2007). The PNDP at the moment is still a programme locked in government files on shelves in Yaoundé and there is no evidence from the field study of this research to show that it is having an impact at the local levels.

Moreover, the lack of a proper communication network between government and the grassroots women's organisations means that programmes have to follow the bureaucratic administrative route from the centre through the provinces, down to the divisions and sub-divisions before reaching the women. This can sometimes take years and many women's organisations never get to know if anything ever existed or not. Although the appointment of women in key positions of the Ministry has been applauded as an achievement, and as one of the ways by which the government is showing its commitment to empower women and promote their role in the CD process, critics have pointed to the fact that most of these appointment are politically inclined and have not resulted in the best qualified people being appointed for the job. Most of those appointed lack the expertise to match the position and have remained in office only to serve those who have appointed them and not doing the proper job that benefits rural women.

5.3 How the Ministry of Women's Empowerment (MINPROFF), is promoting empowerment and advancing women's status

This is currently the ministry that is charged with the empowerment and advancement of the status of women in Cameroon. What we have today as the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF) has gone through many changes over the last thirty years. Issues concerning women were dealt with in the Service for the Protection of Women under the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1975. In 1984 the Ministry of Women's Affairs was created and in 1988, Social Affairs and Women's Affairs were merged to form the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs. In 1998, the two ministries regain their autonomy and Women's Affairs was again separated from Social Affairs and the aspect of the family was detached from Social Affairs and given to Women's Affairs. In 2004, the Ministry of Women's Affairs was renamed the Ministry of Women's

Empowerment and the Protection of the Family. The main explanation for these changes is the political instability and economic down-turn that Cameroon experienced during those years. The Government of Cameroon recognizes that in order to enhance the performance of women in the community development process, women must be fully empowered to overcome the barriers which are currently a constraint to their performance. The main data that I sought to gather from this ministry was on the question of how the Cameroon government is promoting women's empowerment, which is the responsibility of this ministry. Again I used interviews and questionnaires to obtain the data from this source but also made use of documentary sources and collected some quantitative data from this ministry. This data source is also coded as (R1).

Sources from this ministry believe that women's empowerment is imperative for the development of the rural areas since women make up more than 50% of its inhabitants. They are the mainstay of the rural economy and the major food crop producers on which the whole population depends. In Cameroon's policy terms, women's empowerment means, 'giving women access to and control over resources, decision-making positions, economic and political power and credit facilities'(R1). It generally means non-discrimination in all its forms and ramifications and equal opportunity to education and employment for both men and women. The creation of this ministry is a demonstration of the political will of the Head of State, Paul Biya, who declared solemnly in one of his policy speeches in 1997 in Garoua that "Cameroonian women, I pledge to foster women's advancement and shall not fail to do so".

There is a national policy for Women's Advancement in Cameroon. This is a guiding framework for various partners in terms of defining actions to be undertaken in favour of women. The policy underscores the situation of Cameroonian women (examined in chapter 1) in the light of political, economic, social and cultural development. (MINPROFF 2005:4a).

The main mission of MINPROFF is to empower all Cameroon women and

- ❖ To ensure that women's rights are respected in the society
- ❖ To advocate the eradication of all forms of discrimination against women
- ❖ To contribute to the political, economic, social and cultural advancement of women

- ❖ To work for the autonomy of women
- ❖ To participate in the drawing up of policies, programmes that take into account gender approaches at the multi sectoral level and the strengthening of gender equality in the political, social, economic and cultural spheres (Ibid).

In Cameroon, however, improving the judicial status of women has always been one major preoccupation of the government. Throughout the years, there has been real political engagement in favour of the advancement of women's rights manifested by a legal recognition of these rights, the ratification of most instruments concerning human rights in general and women's rights in particular and the creation of a whole ministry to protect these rights (MINPROFF 2005). The legal document of Cameroon consists of regional and international conventions ratified and the national texts. These texts have all been consecrated in promoting human rights in general and women's rights in particular. The principle of gender equality has remained constant and figures prominently in these documents (MINPROFF 2005). Be it legislation or regulatory enactment, the principle of gender equality is guaranteed by national law in all areas including criminal justice, employment rights, political and economic rights, consent by both parties before marriage etc.

However, MINPROFF also recognizes that there are major setbacks that prevent women from fully enjoying their rights. These constitute the challenges that MINPROFF faces and the main tasks are all about addressing them. These include:

- ❖ Ignorance by women of their rights due to illiteracy and the general lack of access to information about what exists and where it exists.
- ❖ The lack of self confidence and self esteem and the pressure from society to abide by traditional and customary norms.
- ❖ Socio-cultural context and weak judicial system
- ❖ Lack of financial resources and ignorance of women of the right to seek judicial assistance
- ❖ Lack of mechanism for enforcing existing legislation.

- ❖ Lack of appropriate structures to accommodate or rehabilitate female victims of violence and delay in judicial procedures etc. (Expose on Women's Rights MINPROFF 2006:4).

5.3.1 What MINPROFF does to empower women

The Ministry of Women's Empowerment has designed a comprehensive plan of action in recent years which if fully implemented could truly empower the Cameroon Women within the meaning stated in this thesis and advanced their economic and social status.

- ❖ In terms of education and training, MINPROFF trains, supervises, and teaches basic trades to women in Empowerment Centres and Centres for Appropriate Technologies. It educates, sensitizes and supervises rural women in animation pools and encourages the training of girls in science and technology fields. This is seen as a step towards empowering women in the field of science and technology where they are very far behind men.
- ❖ In terms of Socio- economic advancement, it provides support to rural women, female entrepreneurs and women of the informal sector by financing income generating activities. MINPROFF also encourages women to operate in Common Initiative Groups (CIGs) co-operatives and professional groups as well as identifying and making known funding sources to women. It promotes and disseminates technologies that are appropriate to women.
- ❖ In terms of women's rights, it informs and educates women on their fundamental rights through the media leaflets and other information aids, organizes, campaigns to sensitize the public on women' rights and the need to integrate women in all spheres of development and encourages dialogue between men and women.
- ❖ In terms of study and cooperation, MINPROFF undertakes studies and research to improve women's quality of life. It encourages and negotiates partnership contacts with NGOs and women advancement oriented, associations and negotiates and draws up cooperation contracts with national and international partners and produces and disseminate statistical data on the situation of women.(Mission and activities of MINPROFF 2000:1)

The activities of MINPROFF as summarized above are carried out through its technical services which include the Department for the Social promotion of Women, Sub-Department for the Promotion of Women's Rights and Gender and at the provincial, divisional and sub-divisional delegations and in the Women's Empowerment Centres (WEC). The provincial service mainly disseminates information from the centre ministry and tries to achieve the goals set out at the centre as summarized above. Its major preoccupation is the improvement of rural infrastructure and quality of life of rural women and the fostering of individual development and effective participation in community economic development in rural areas (MINPROFF 2005). This work is achieved mainly through the Women's Empowerment Centres (WEC) and the Community Education Action Centres (CEAC).

5.3.2 The Women's Empowerment Centres (WEP)

The Women's Empowerment Centres (WEC) are specialized technical units of MINPROFF. There were first created in 1969 and has since evolved under different names. There were known as Social-Household Centre until 1977 when they became simply known as Women Centres. In 1998 due to the increasing force of women's organizations and the pressure to advance their status, the name changed to Women's Empowerment Centres to emphasize the notion of women's empowerment and its significance to the development of Cameroon. These centres are public education and informal training centres for women and girls from the age of 14 who have missed out in full-fledged secondary education. Their key mission is to provide moral, civic and intellectual training to women towards their economic, political, social and cultural advancement (MINPROFF 2005). There are short term and long term courses ending with certificates of achievement. Courses tend to focus on issues related to the key mission. There are specialized courses on Hotel Management and Hospitality, Woodwork, Sewing etc. There is also a counselling unit for reproductive health, family planning and sexually transmissible diseases (STD). WEC are funded by the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPIC) programme. In a nutshell, WEC are the centres through which MINPROFF hopes to achieve its mission stated in the preceding pages, from the grassroots. There is at least one WEC in each ten provincial capitals in Cameroon and branches in many divisional and sub-divisional capitals.

Fig 6 the Bamenda Women's Empowerment Centre



Sewing workshop. photo by Alasah 2006.



Teenage girls in work station. photo by Alasah 2006.

5.3.3 The Community Education Action Centres (CEAC)

This technical unit of MINPROFF specializes in giving short term agricultural courses to women at the grassroots level with the aim of boosting productivity. Increasing the agricultural productivity of rural women is seen as one way of empowering them as this leads to increased earning power. CEAC therefore, strives to empower women through providing them with the means to engage in lucrative agricultural activities such as horticulture, market gardening, cash crop production livestock raising and animal husbandry. CEAC also offers training courses in activities such as book keeping, poultry keeping all leading to certificates which can enable the holder to pursue higher studies in other Agricultural Training Colleges in the country.

Although MINPROFF recognizes that ignorance by women of their rights and the lack of access to information about what exists and where it exists, is a major setback preventing women from fully benefiting from government's programmes and projects (Expose on Women's Rights 2006:4), its work does not seem to be tackling this problem in a specific way. In its educational programme there is nothing specific to the needs of older women such as an adult literacy programme which could benefit rural women most. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is still a distant goal from many of MINPROFF programmes and is not among the training programmes at the Women's Empowerment Centres in the provinces. Insufficient resources continue to present the greatest problem in meeting set targets.

Although MINPFOFF was created with every good intention to foster women's empowerment in Cameroon, its work is flawed by the socio-cultural context and weak judicial system and its achievement limited by the traditional top-down approach to policies and programmes and by the lack of financial and human resources. There is still huge discrimination against women in political life. For example, in the October 2004 presidential election, 46 candidates including three women submitted applications and out of the 16 candidates selected none was a woman. Out of 1,612 candidates and alternates designated for the 2002 legislative election only 219 were women accounting for only 13.6 percent of the total number (CEDAW Report 2007:27).

There are still discrepancies between the educational attainment ratios of the two genders. In order to deal with gaps resulting from ignorance and persistent cultural practices, Cameroon has adopted a number of measures aimed at promoting gender equality in education. These include the development and implementation of an Education Sector Strategy that includes gender concerns, the establishment of a gender committee in the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) whose strategic orientation includes the elimination of all forms of discrimination against girls and women in education and the promotion of educational access for girls and keeping them in schools and the full use of female human resources (MINPROFF 2005b).

Drop-out rate among girls at all levels of education is still higher than among boys. Still fewer girls than boys complete their secondary education and in higher education the total percentage of women in all six states universities is only 38.8 (CEDAW Report 2007:26). The University of Buea has the highest percentage of women at 49.9 perhaps because the Vice Chancellor was a woman until recently. The main obstacles women face are numerous, however, inadequate financial and material resources are the most important. This accounts for the main reason why most women cannot go to school but also this is re-enforced by socio-cultural factors that continue to place women in a subordinate position to men. For example in a situation where a family cannot afford to send all children to school the preference as to who goes is always the boy because it is believed that the 'most important thing for a woman is marriage' (interview with a community leader 2005). One reason why girls' drop-out rate is higher than boys throughout the education sector is to do with the simple fact that girls are more likely than boys to discontinue because of pregnancy, to take care of a family member, or to get married at a young age.

Hence the main point to take from this analysis is that the good will of the Government of Cameroon (GOC) is seen in its policy and programmes through MINPROFF to empower women and advance their status. To achieve this goal various services and programmes have been put in place but women continue to face huge discrepancies from the socio-cultural and political domain which have kept the process slow. A detail examination of these setbacks will be the subject of analysis in chapter 7.

5.4 Organisations contributing to Women's Empowerment and CD in Cameroon

From the point of view of the GOC bilateral organisations, diplomatic missions and NGOs are considered as key partners if not the most important in the development process in Cameroon. They are a force to be reckoned with in the country and their work has reached nooks and corners still hidden from the government and enlivened the lives of many impoverished communities in Cameroon. Many communities have come to recognize NGOs and the other development partners rather than the government as the true partners to work with in the identification, planning and execution of their community projects. There is a good relationship between NGOs and the government both at national and provincial level although this relationship sometimes depends on who is in charge. A government plan is under way to form a forum of all NGOs and Development Organizations working in the capital Yaoundé in order to achieve greater cooperation and enhance performance. This is in conformity with recommendation (D:4) in the Yaoundé Declaration which states that 'National government should acknowledge the significance of NGOs by establishing structures and mechanisms at all levels better to coordinate the work of local and international NGOs and to make them accountable to the communities they serve (Yaoundé Declaration 2005 section D:4).

Most NGOs usually have specific missions and target particular groups or sectors of the society such as women, the youth or disabled. In June 2006 a Code of Conduct to promote transparency and accountability within NGOs in Cameroon was signed in Glasgow. This came at a time when the NGOs are coming under greater scrutiny both from those who wish to see them flourish and those who want their activities curtailed (.IPS 2006). The emergence of NGOs in Cameroon dates back to the 1990 law on freedom of associations. How they have grown so significantly within less than two decades can partly be accounted for by the fact that they have been quick to establish links with external structures, and also, several programmes in support of NGOs like the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), Africa 2000 were quickly set up in Cameroon. Also, the existence of Associations for Local Development (ALD) network such as the Bambui Cultural and Development Association (BACUDA) made it possible for NGOs in

the capital to find regional networks. Now it is generally believed in Cameroon that NGOs are the saviour for the masses in the local areas as their work focuses on various areas of needs, ranging from health and sanitation, education, environment, conservation, sustainability, diseases, HIV/AIDS, relief and rehabilitation, empowerment of women and the poor, human rights and freedom etc and has had much impact on the poor more than many government programmes. From all 162 questionnaires returned, NGOs were rated highest by most people for making the most contribution to community development in Cameroon and the Northwest province in particular. Only a few respondents, all of them government representatives still believe that it is the government making the most contribution to CD in Cameroon.

NGOs in Cameroon are considered as associations and have to register according to the same procedure as other associations and under the law they are considered as non-political and non-profit making. They represent one type of association specifically focused on development in different spheres. Multilateral organizations like the UNDP and NGOs like Plan International based in the capital Yaoundé also have regional or provincial offices. But there are also lots of regionally based associations in the equivalent of the voluntary organisations which deal directly with their foreign donors or partners and have nothing to do with Yaoundé.

For the purpose of this research I treated the British High Commissions (BHC) and the UNDP as examples of development organisations providing the formal framework for understanding and analyzing the case. The argument is based on the instrumental role they play not only in promoting grassroots development but also in the overall development agenda of Cameroon.

5.4.1 The British High Commission-Small Grant Scheme (SGS 1994-2004)

The British High Commission ((BHC) is not an NGO but it is classified for the purpose of this research as a development partner in Cameroon since it works with grassroots organisations to promote local development. There is a whole department of the High Commission which deals with this called the Small Grant Scheme (SGS). The main information that I sought from this source was on the question of how diplomatic missions are promoting women's empowerment and

community development in Cameroon. This source was classified under category 2 coded as (R2). The main method used here was interview although I also consulted other documentary sources. The Project Officer for this scheme was interviewed to find out how this scheme works and how it contributes to women's empowerment and to local development. His emphasis was that women have always had the support needed from this scheme 'where they have proven their worth'.

Although the SGS has now been replaced by the Bilateral Fund, many of its objectives remain the same. The scheme has been working with local communities for over 10 years now to address a number of developmental needs all over Cameroon. It has provided safe drinking water to over 50 communities, constructed and equipped over 35 classrooms, provided libraries and computer laboratories to schools and universities, improved conditions in some of the main prisons in the country and has continued to provide enormous amounts of money in support of human rights activities throughout the country. For over ten years the scheme has made significant improvements to the lives of disadvantaged and needy people in different parts of Cameroon. 'The major problem faced in implementing this programmes has been the high rate of illiteracy among rural women which makes it hard to disseminate information. This problem also makes it difficult for women to understand the requirements for funding applications to be able to submit applications that clearly express their needs'. (Interview with project officer R2). This means that many women's organisations have not been benefiting from the scheme for this reason. Although the Fund recognizes the high rate of illiteracy and communication difficulties among women as a huge problem, it is doing nothing to address this.

The Bilateral Fund has no formal relationship with the GOC or with any government department. It works directly with community groups helping them to identify priority needs sometimes giving advice on how to write funding applications. However one of its greatest weaknesses is its inability to reach out to every needy community and its inability to respond to every application to explain why it has been unsuccessful. This analysis shows that the Bilateral Fund is not a major promoter of women's empowerment in Cameroon. It does very little in supporting their community development activities.

5.4.2 The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

The UNDP is a multilateral organisation whose main mission in Cameroon is to assist the country in meeting its development targets. The Programme's office in Yaoundé is divided into a number of sub-units charged with different sub-programmes. There are four other regional offices throughout the country which are based on agro-ecological settings. My main aim of contacting this source was to gather data on the question of how development partners in Cameroon are promoting women's empowerment and their role in the community development process. The main methods used were semi-structured questionnaires and interviews. This source has been classified as category 2 coded as (R2). The main person I interviewed was the Programme's Coordinator of the Grassroots Poverty Reduction Sub-Programme. The programme aims to provide support to grassroots development initiative in the fight against poverty. Today poverty affects about 40.2 percent of the Cameroon population, 85 percent of who live in the rural areas. Most of these people are women and children who suffer from malnutrition problems, heavy workloads and limited access to social and economic opportunities (UNDP, PRSP 2005:8).

The Poverty Reduction Sub-Programme, which falls within this framework, is designed to be a means of channelling financial resources to support grassroots initiatives that address rural poverty, prioritizing areas that have not yet benefited from such assistance in the past. It aims at strengthening the technical and organizational capacities of women and the promotion of socio-economic development through economic empowerment. In considering application for funding from any group the selectors ensure that gender dimension is well taken into account. They take note of the number of women in the group and those in the executive. The sub-programme seeks to be a means of directing financial resources earmarked for poverty alleviation to the grassroots population. The main beneficiaries of the programme are rural populations organized in groups. CIG's, village development committees, co-operatives, etc. Members should represent the community and vulnerable groups such as women, youths, and the disabled.

The sub-programme is designed to:

- support community-based income-generating micro-projects based on the sustainable use of natural resources.
- strengthen the technical and organizational capacities of women, promote their socio-economic activities, and facilitate emphasis on gender in government policy making and strategies, through institutional support of relevant structures, both at the grassroots and strategic levels.
- contribute to reducing the prevalence of HIV/AIDS within local communities through education, prevention, and support to people living with HIV/AIDS and HIV/AIDS orphans; and facilitating the technical and institutional capacity building of organizations and institutions involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS (UNDP Cameroon PRSP 2005:11). The project funds are coming from debt relief within the framework of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative Programme (HIPC). Groups whose application is successful get an amount typically ranging from 900.000frs CFA to 5.000.000 CFA although in exceptional cases projects of up to 25,000,000frs can be funded. About 100 projects are set to be funded by the end of 2007 which represents an average of 10 per province.

A look at the objectives of this programme as detailed above shows a general approach to the cause of poverty at the grassroots. Although mention is made of women and gender equality there is no guarantee that women can always benefit from this programme. Although the programme recognizes that women make up more than two thirds of the rural poor population it does not have a component to address this. It lacks a specific target to women as the poorest of the poor in most communities and as the group that is working hard to combat rural poverty. Seen in this way the Grassroots Poverty Reduction Sub-Programme is of little significance to women. The Programme is attached to many government ministries making it too bureaucratic and difficult to be reached by rural women.

5.5 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has presented and analyzed data from sources that constitute the wider context of the research. The chapter began with a brief introduction and a table summarizing the organisations studied, their main mission and methods used for generating and collecting the data. I have shown how the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) is working to empower women and promote their role in the CD process through its many programmes and policies and the difficulties it is facing in implementing the programmes purported. I have also examined the key programmes of the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Protection of the Family (MINPROFF) and shown how these are aiming to empower women and advance their status. Overall the chapter has begun to examine the missing link between government and grassroots level women and the causes of the gap between policy and its implementation. It has been seen that the government has a comprehensive and well designed programme intended both to empower women and promote their role in the community development process but the constraints currently faced to implement these are many and multi-dimensional. The chapter has also analyzed data from the UNDP office in Yaoundé which runs a Grassroots Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme and it was seen that this programme is not targeted at women and its attachment to many government ministries rather than to a single ministry only helps to make it difficult for grassroots organisations to access it. The British High Commission (BHC) Bilateral Fund although it has had a huge impact on rural development in the last decade is not directly promoting the process of women's empowerment and their role in the CD process. The next chapter will present and analyze data from the informal organisations in the Northwest province that constitute what I have referred to as the 'the case' in this thesis.

Chapter Six

A Presentation of ‘the case’ and data analysis

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will describe and analyse data from the informal organisations in the Northwest province that together make up what I have referred to as ‘the case’ in this study. These are mainly the NGOs, and women’s groups or organisations. Other supplementary sources have been discussed. A brief profile of each of the NGOs has been presented followed by a section each on how NGOs are promoting CD and women’s empowerment in the Northwest. This was thought to be easier since all women’s NGO have common objectives and carry out similar activities. Data about the various grassroots women’s groups varies slightly in content reflecting the minor differences in their sizes and scope of activities.

The Northwest province is a geographical structure and it was only possible to study this by first studying the subunits that make this up. Hence, the different organisations and their inter-relationships constitute the ‘case’. The argument here is that this methodological approach gives voice to the research participants that are the grassroots women and a better understanding of the crucial issues the research is dealing with. I did not approach the participants with preconceived ideas but gave them the chance to express their own views. Secondly, the study of individual cases within the case has not only provided valuable and robust data but has also enabled a better understanding of the case. The individual cases exhibit similar characteristics in terms of their objectives, activities, and problems thereby making it easy to classify them as ‘one whole,’ constituted in the Northwest Province of Cameroon. The table below is a summary of the different organisations studied showing their main objectives and the methods that were used in generating and collecting the data from them.

Table 2. Summary of organisations studied in the NWP and methods of data collection.

Organisation	Main Mission	code	interview	questionnaire	Docs/
Provincial NGOs	Promotion of local development in the province, women's empowerment and women's economic and political rights.	3	6	12	3
Provincial service of Com. Dev	Execute policies on agriculture and local development in the province. Provide technical and other assistance to groups/individual farmers	3	2	8	1
Delegation of MINPROFF	Implements policies for the empowerment of women in the province. Assistance to women's projects.	3	2	8	2
Akum Progress Women	Self-help and economic empowerment of members	4	2	9	1
Harmony Ladies Bambui	Economic empowerment and advancement of members. Assistance to needy orphans in the community	4	2	10	1
Union of Bafut Women	Economic empowerment and advancement of members' status and cultural development.	4	2	8	1
MOWOCUDA	Women's empowerment and CD	4	1	4	
SUFF WYANE	Economic empowerment and CD		2	7	
Graduates of Buea University	Academic advancement of every member of society	5	3	8	
Bayam Sellam	Self-help	6	1	7	
Community leaders	Community development	6	3	6	
Total			26	87	9

6.2 NGOs –‘The main pilot of development in the Northwest Province’

The Northwest Province has a large number of development NGOs, mostly based in the capital Bamenda town and sometimes with divisional offices. Many of them are local but some are also national and international. Collectively, they have been recognized as the ‘main pilot’ of development in the province or the catalyst that speeds it up and therefore, an indispensable partner in the process (interview with R3 2005). Northwest NGOs try to address a number of developmental issues ranging from basic needs such as education and health, nutrition, gender equality, women’s empowerment and women’s rights, human rights, disease prevention particularly HIV/AIDS, orphans and widows, violence against women and street children, sustainable development, and increasing agricultural productivity. NGOs in the Northwest Province have remarkably influenced development in the province by moving beyond the traditional top-bottom approach to an inclusive one where grassroots organisations now mastermind development in their communities. The point is reinforced by the following quote from Fonjong:

Local and international NGOs have moved beyond the mere design of top to bottom policies to ‘grassroots’ approaches in helping women participate fully in national life and, therefore, are fighting inequality and poverty which are household curses in Cameroon (Fonjong 2001 :223).

A large number of NGOs in Cameroon are still dependent on external donors. Only a few have strategies for internal fund raising to continue to sustain their activities. The implication of this is that when funds cease coming for whatever reason, the NGO and its activities collapses leaving many people disappointed and frustrated. This is by far the greatest problem faced by most NGOs in the Northwest Province. This has been the case with NGOs like AWICO which in the late 1990s was doing great work in promoting women’s communication but which collapsed after the donors ceased funding. There are two main types of NGOs in the province: women’s NGOs whose work is geared towards addressing the plight of women in every aspect and NGOs that have a women’s component such as widow’s rights.

I selected and worked with six women's NGOs in the Northwest province during my field work. My selection criterion was based mainly on the main mission of the NGO which had to be in line with the mission of my research. This means that the six devoted all or most of their resources to the advancement of women's status through community development and women's empowerment. The methods used were interviews, questionnaires, documentary sources as well as focus groups. Provincial NGOs have been coded as category 3 sources represented as (R3). I have already explained in the methodology chapter how these methods were designed to elicit the data required in answer to the main question under investigation. Most Northwest NGOs consider financial information and the staffing situation to be sensitive information and prefer not to release this to researchers. I shall only briefly present a profile of each of the NGOs below and the area they cover followed by the common programmes and activities which they undertake to foster women's empowerment and their role in the CD process.

6.2.1 Community Initiative for Sustainable Development (COMINSUD)

This NGO originated from the Democracy and Empowerment of Women Project which also has its roots from the UN Decade for the Advancement of the Women. (1975-1985). At the end of the UN Decade for the Advancement of Women the World Council of Churches put in place the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women.(1988-1998) to build on the UN weaknesses. The Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC) was involved in this initiative. At the end of the decade some key challenges remained to be addressed which motivated the formation of some groups of which COMINSUD became one. This NGO covers five of the seven administrative divisions of the Northwest Province. Its main source of funding comes from the German organisation 'Bread for the World' and from local sources. Its main objective is to empower local women economically and socially and improve their life chances.

6.2.2 Grounded and Holistic Approach for People's Empowerment (GHAPE)

"The price of poverty is lives lost, economic opportunities forgone and setbacks in human development including the spread of HIV/AIDS are too high to be ignored" (GHAPPE coordinator 2005). GHAPE is a non-governmental organisation founded in 1998 and works in the Northwest province with

headquarters in Bamenda. Its mission statement states that 'GHAPE works towards a society where the poor especially women and young people are empowered to develop their potential, creativity and skills as productive and dynamic members of their community, and participate fully at every level of development both individually and collectively, promoting values' (interview with GHAPE coordinator 2005). They aim to make resources accessible to the poor including micro-finance, to fight poverty, ignorance and diseases and to improve the quality of life of the poor. GHAPE only covers two of the seven administrative divisions of the NWP. Its funding comes from local sources and foreign donors.

6.2.3 Women's Initiative for Health Education and Economic Development (WINHEECAM)

This organisation was founded in 1997. The idea was that of Drs Munro H. Proctor and Tih Pius, both graduates of the Boston University School of Public Health through their work experience with rural women in Cameroon. They observed from their work that many rural women in Cameroon suffer because they cannot support themselves economically. To address the issue they decided to start up a micro-enterprise similar to the Grameen Trust in Bangladesh. The aim is to empower women economically and enable them maximize their potential. The organisation is registered as a Common Initiative Group (CIG) attached to the Cameroon Baptist Convention CBC but works as an NGO. All of its funding comes from the parent organisation in New Hampshire USA called KWIHEED.

6.2.4 Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association of Cameroon (MBOSCUDA)

This organisation was formed mainly to represents one of the ethnic minority groups in Cameroon, the Mbororo. These people live mostly in the highland regions of the country and are mainly livestock raisers. They are generally not interested in formal education. For long they have been left out of the development process due to the high illiteracy rate especially among women of this tribal group. They lack land ownership titles and are the most excluded and exploited group of people in the Northwest Province. Since 1990 significant moves have been made towards challenging this wider process of exploitation and exclusion (Duni et al 2005). MBOSCUDA is a national organisation created in

1992 with headquarters in Yaoundé and provincial secretariats in all ten provinces. Its main activities are focused on women of this group throughout the Northwest Province. This organisation is funded by Village Aid UK and COMIC Relief.

6.2.5 Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV)

The Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) has been working in Cameroon since 1963. It has five teams or centres covering all ten provinces of Cameroon. The Highland team has its head office in Bamenda which covers the Northwest, The West and Southwest Provinces. SNV provides advisory services to civil society organisations, local councils and the private sector. SNV is dedicated to ensure a free society where people enjoy pursuing their own sustainable development through strengthening the capacity of local intermediary organizations. This is achieved through a participatory strategy which includes consultation, training, mobilization and the dissemination of information and knowledge to intermediary organizations and local councils. (SNV BAMENDA 2005) SNV is funded by the Dutch Government.

6.2.6 German Development Service (DED)

DED is a non-profit oriented organization with a diversified range of personnel, national and international, put at the disposal of its partners. Its main mission is to support the development of the capacities of local non-governmental organizations in Cameroon to ensure their efficiency and participation in local, regional and national development processes. The main goal of DED is to increase in a sustainable manner the influence of civil society considered to be a motor of change, in decision-making processes, in decentralization, local development and natural resources management. Their main areas of work include poverty reduction, realization of democratic principles by strengthening civil society and decentralized entities, civil conflict management, self dominated sustainable development and conserving the natural resources. DED also works in organizational management, project management, fundraising strategy, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation, gender, networking and advocacy (DED 2004). Its main partners include Development Associations, NGOs Networks, Federations and Cooperatives working in the fields of Human Rights promotion,

Governance and Natural Resource Management. DED is funded by the German Government.

6.3 Economic empowerment of grassroots women by North-West NGOs

One of the most common objectives of all NGOs mentioned above is the quest to empower grassroots women economically and otherwise. Economic empowerment is viewed as a solution to poverty alleviation and a stepping stone to socio-political empowerment. The general approach to achieving this common to all NGOs is that of direct engagement with the community, participation and involvement in the process from planning to implementation of projects. The argument is that 'first women need to look after themselves well, educate themselves which is not the case right now, before they can think of competing with men in the community and in political life' (interview with R3). This also explains why the efforts of most NGOs are mainly geared towards increasing women's access to credits, loans and grants to improve their living conditions through income generating projects and petty businesses.

Capacity building programmes and trainings to provide new skills in book keeping, computer literacy and adult literacy are also among the wider programmes of NGOs all aimed at increasing their economic opportunities and earning power. All Northwest NGOs are speaking the same language about community development and women's empowerment summarised in these words: 'improving the living standard of women, their intellectual and literacy level and to enable them to be self reliant' (DEW 1998:7). It is their long term goal to enable women to gain greater control over material, knowledge and resources and eventually challenge the ideologies of discrimination and subordination and transform the institutions and structures through which unequal access over resources is sustained and perpetuated.

Challenging the ideologies of discrimination and transforming the institutions and structures of unequal access over resources are seen in this case as long term goals and not one which they hope to achieve in the immediate future (DEW 1998:4). This limited view of women's empowerment is what we have seen expressed by different quarters in Cameroon throughout this research. This further strengthens one of the recommendations of the Yaoundé Declaration that

‘the African Union in partnership with NGOs and the community need to develop a new declaration on gender rights and similar concepts like women’s empowerment in Africa which should be adapted to local conditions and subsequently press for its inclusion within national legislation frameworks (The Yaoundé Declaration 2005 section A: 2). The mission of most NGOs therefore is to enable grassroots women to have access to basic needs and move out of the poverty circle.

6.4 Socio-Political Empowerment of grassroots women by Northwest NGOs

Although it has been argued above that most of the work and resources of NWP NGOs is geared towards the economic empowerment of grassroots women, efforts at achieving some level of socio-political empowerment are still being made. For example some of the NGOs like Al-Chris-Wov work with traditional leaders in places where custom marginalizes widows considerably. It tries to lobby for some of the burden on widows to be lifted and their human rights and access to their late husband’s property restored. In some places like Mezam Division adult literacy programmes run by NGOs have helped some women to gain a level of literacy which has enabled them to win seats in local councils (interview with R3). They also provide training programmes to sensitize women on their political and universal human rights and on issues in national legislation such as divorce and inheritance that concern women in particular. Some of the NGOs like WINHEECAM and COMINSUD are also actively supporting other local groups that are working to eliminate domestic violence against women and other human rights issues.

6.5 How North-West NGOs are promoting Women’s Role in Community Development

Improving the status of rural women in the Northwest province is the major preoccupation of all development agencies in the province particularly women’s NGOs. This is seen as vital because of the efforts which women are making and their contribution to the national economy even without support. This is why many local and international NGOs have identified themselves with the plight of Northwest women and are determined to change the situation for the better (Fonjong 2005). The main activities of NGOs in the North-West Province (NWP)

particularly those that were studied during this research are their role in promoting grassroots initiatives thereby leading to community economic development. They focus on particular groups of women and try to address specific developmental and social needs such as the provision of basic education and health facilities like health centres, free medication, medical equipment and the training of health personnel. They work with women's groups at the grassroots helping them to identify their own needs, provide funding in the form of grants or loans on an individual or group basis and providing relevant training to enable the women make the most out of the grants or loans. For example 'NGOs' projects focus on the provision of credits, capacity building, self employment etc which are gradually lifting the hopes of many families in the study region, (Ibid).Capacity building is viewed as a major aspect in the programmes of NGOs as it helps in improving skills for better performance and greater achievements by women. Women NGOs also focus on 'increasing the participation of women in development activities, organizing them and facilitating their access to the factors of production, technology, agricultural innovation, the marketing of their products through micro-projects' (SNV Cameroon 2005). Women's NGOs have furthermore provided employment opportunities on a part or full-time basis to a number of rural women through projects such as the SNV Teze oil Mill. Training provided by some of these NGOs in the production and marketing of local income generating commodities such as soap, body oil, candles and the processing of some food stuff such as soya beans has also provided employment for some (SNV Cameroon 2005).

The above analysis shows that women's NGOs play a pivotal and practical role in improving the status of rural women in the NWP. They have improved and sustained standards of living especially where the state and private sector have failed to act and have reached nooks and corners that could never be accessed by the government and given hope and real lives to thousands of rural women. These, NGO have in no small way transformed many communities and individual women lives not only as providers of efficient and effective services but more so as real agents of change and mobilization of local productive resources with the one goal of transforming the socio-economic system of the society (Fonjong 2005).

NGOs in the NWP have done far more in advancing the socio-economic status of rural women than their government partners. Where the government has failed to meet local needs NGOs have been there to fill the missing link thereby helping to lessen the impact of governments' failed programmes on rural women. This, research argues that Northwest NGOs appear closer to rural women in meeting their basic needs far more than the government is doing. Most NGOs programmes and activities are practical and relevant to rural women's needs and aspirations and are also more involving and engaging than those of government. While the government might be spending more resources in planning and designing broad based programmes which require complex procedures before implementation, NW NGOs directly tackle the practical needs of rural women thereby making themselves more popular than the government in the rural areas.

However, they have not achieved these without problems and setbacks. One of their major setbacks is limited financial and human resources. Most of these NGOs rely heavily on external donor's funding which tend to impose very stringent conditions that must be met for funds to continue to flow. It is a common phenomenon for NGOs in the Northwest to collapse abruptly as a result of donor's failure to provide funding as in the case of AWICO earlier mentioned. This situation has caused frustration and indebtedness to many individuals and groups in the area. The limited funding which most NGOs get means that they are not always able to meet the ever increasing needs of the rural communities. It also limits their ability to recruit sufficient and well qualified staff capable of delivering efficient services. One of the NGOs' Coordinators I met during field work explained the situation in the following words. "We don't always get enough funding which means that we cannot employ the number of staff we require to do good work. This makes our programmes suffer. At times we feel sorry for the women in the rural areas because we are not doing the work we are supposed to be doing as we do not have enough staff and the money" (interview with R3).

Another setback is that most NGOs tend to have broad outlines of programmes and objectives that they hope to achieve without taking into consideration their limited funding. This is seen from their governing document. They attempt to do so much with such little resources thereby wasting resources which should have

been directed in one particular area of need to make a greater impact. Fonjong (2001) has commented that most NGOs lack adequate funds as a result of donor fatigue and are constantly under pressure from both donor and beneficiaries to produce specific sets of outcome. This research believes that what most NGOs at this level need to do is to restate their missions and objectives focusing their work on particular areas of needs which can realistically be achieved with their limited human resources.

The lack of cooperation and networking among most NGOs in the NWP is a major weakness that was identified during the research. There appears to be more competition rather than cooperation among some of them and there is yet be an official forum for Northwest NGOs where they can meet to discuss their work in the different areas of development, as agents of change and partners in the development of the province. In view of this the research postulates that in order to achieve better sustainable development, networking among NGOs in the Northwest and other development agencies as well as cooperation with local government institutions in finding lasting solutions for women's problems is a categorical imperative. The lack of cooperation among NGOs and local government departments and other development agencies has led to a situation of duplication of services in some communities, overlapping roles and conflicts between different organisations all of which constitute a waste of resources. For example WINHEECAM tries to tackle the issue of women's empowerment and to address their education and health needs at the same time. In the same way COMINSUD is concerned with increasing women's access to resources, addressing their health needs and increasing their representation in power structures. These examples illustrate a situation of overloading and duplication. It is still the case that some NGOs who are serving the interest of donors impose certain projects onto communities which are not among the priority needs of that community. For example in some NWP communities like Bambui, donors have come in eager to sponsor projects such as afforestation whereas what the people prefer first is safe drinking water. This point is illustrated by the following words:

I have visited villages where at a time when the village women are asking for better health facilities and lower infant-mortality rates, they are presented with questionnaires on family planning and in some instances where women would like piped borne water in the village

they are faced with researchers asking questions about Power and powerlessness in the household (Pala 2005:300).

So, the top-down approach of development planning is still a characteristic feature of some North-West NGO that are perpetuated by donor interest.

6.6 Grassroots Women's Groups.

These are the main informal organisations constituting the case and therefore, key sources of data for this research. I used interviews, focus groups and questionnaires to gather data from the women's organisations in relation to the question about what can be done to enhance women's performance in the community development process in the Northwest province. I shall now present a profile of the groups here with an analysis of the data stating their mission, their main activities and views on the key research question.

6.6.1 The Akum Progress Women (APW)

Akum is a small village located some two to three miles from the Bamenda town. It is actually the last village you pass before getting into Bamenda town from the main high way from Bafoussam in the west. Interestingly, Akum is also known as 'small London'. The reason is that most of the house servants who served the colonial masters in Bamenda during colonial rule were from this village. During the summer while their masters were returning to London for holiday they also returned to their village which they called London.

APW is a group of twenty three native women founded in 1996 out of the desire for self-help and collective or common initiative. Membership cuts across all sectors of the community and includes simple illiterate women, women with elementary education, secondary and high school education up to graduate women in professions such as teaching. The main criterion for membership is honesty judged by character and general reputation in the village community. The main goal of APW is the economic empowerment of its members. It has the following objectives:

- To fully exploit the advantages of operating as a group such as gaining access to credits and other funding sources for the benefit of the members
- Operate income generating businesses such as trading, farming and animal husbandry

-Actively participate in the development of Akum by operating economic activities that bring development and raise awareness among other women of the advantages of engaging in useful economic ventures (Constitution of APW: 4)

APW undertakes a wide range of activities. These include:

- a) Socio-cultural activities such as visiting and celebrating with members when they have new born babies, paying condolence visits to members who are bereaved, assisting in village development activities, cultural dances and celebrations.
- b) Participation in women's activities such as national and international women's day celebrations, sensitization workshops on gender issues of development and empowerment.
- c) Engage in the trading of food items and commodities of basic necessity, and small businesses concerning the transformation of agricultural products
- d) Run a small thrift and loan scheme into which members can save and borrow for self-help and individual economic activities. Engage in food crop farming and animal husbandry. (interview with president of APW Nov. 2005).

Akum Progress Women undertakes two main projects for sustainable income generating. This includes the farm project and the animal husbandry project.

For the farm project, they jointly own a plot of land which is distributed into portions for every member. Each member cultivates their portion and at the end of the year crops harvested are sold and a financial contribution is made into the group's account. For the animal project, animals such as pigs and rabbits from a grant scheme are distributed to members who have to raise them in their own homes. They benefit from the waste products of the animals which are very good organic manure or fertilizers. When the animals are ready for the market they are sold and the money comes into group accounts while the member gets token compensation.

Akum progress Women have also envisaged an ambitious project that if realized could change not only the lives of its members but that of the entirely community. This is the Women Food Cooperative Centre. A piece of land has

been acquired for this and some development has been done on the land. Funds are now needed to set the building going. The food cooperative will provide space for Akum women to store their perishable food products and find a suitable market for them instead of selling them cheap just because they are no places for storage. This project if realized would increase the women's income since almost all of them at one time in the year have to throw away food stuff that cannot be stored because of space.

6.6.2 Major Setbacks of the Akum Progress Women

The lack of sufficient funds to finance all their ambitious and self-reliant projects is their major setback (interview with President of APW Nov. 2005). For its 10 years of existence, this group has not benefited from any funding from any Cameroon government sources despite being at the heart of the provincial capital and making applications every year. The group has however, benefited from limited funding from other NGOs such as Women Information and Coordination Centre (AWICO) the German Development Service (DED) and the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO). The second major problem of APW is the lack of basic education by all members. (Ibid). This creates a problem when it comes to basic training on some income generating projects, the dissemination of information and the general problems faced by those who cannot read and write. It also means that roles that can only be played by those who are literate have to remain with some members for years and others end up not being able to participate in major group roles.

Apart from this; the group also feels that they need more education on improved farming methods, improved species, more self-reliant projects such as the production of animal feeds locally and minor food processing (focus group discussion Nov 2005). They believe the government and NGOs can provide this skills and training. Moreover, APW also feels they need computer literacy as a tool for getting information for funding and other resources for women. During the research period none of its 23 members was computer literate and the group has no website or an email address. They feel that this is a huge hindrance for communication with the outside world especially in this globalized world where the internet has undermined geographical proximity. Skills on project identification and writing are an expressed need of this group. They believe good

project identification and writing skills would benefit them in writing good projects and attracting funding for the benefit of their members and the larger community (focus group discussion Nov 2005).

In spite of the above catalogue of problems the group prides itself for a number of outstanding achievements over the years. These include:

- ❖ Empowerment. APW believes that they have empowered themselves. This simply means that they have achieved self-confidence in themselves and in what they do, are capable of speaking when they should, have improved on their quality of lives besides undertaking income generating activities which other women around are incapable of. The group is seen as a model in the community and is one of the most recognized in the division taking part in national events.
- ❖ Finance: The group started with no money but now has an account with the credit union with hundreds of thousands CFA which continues to grow yearly.
- ❖ Education: They have achieved a substantial level of education and training on various skills such as improved farming methods, animal husbandry, home management and simple book keeping, leadership etc from some of the NGOs in the province.
- ❖ Above all, APW believe these other achievements have helped to improve the quality of their lives and their families and further successes will do even more.(interview with president of APW Nov.2005).

6.6.3 Harmony Ladies Bambui (HLB)

Bambui is a village of some eight thousand inhabitants lying along the Bamenda Fundong Road about seven miles northeast of Bamenda town. It is a major road junction in the province and a major educational centre. It is also the administrative headquarters of the Tubah Sub-Division which is made up of three other villages.

Harmony Ladies is a group of mainly local women based in Bambui and registered as a Common Initiative Group (CIG) since 1999. It has twenty seven registered members with seven of them living in Bamenda or Douala. Members come from various occupational and educational backgrounds

including small village traders with only primary education, to category 'A' civil servants with degree level education. The Ladies are, therefore, one of the most educated and well organized women's groups around taking part in national events. Their objectives are as follows:

- ❖ Contribute and exchange ideas to improve their quality of lives and that of the community
- ❖ Identify and assist the needy in the community especially orphans of primary school age.
- ❖ Empower members and get them to participate in the development of the community
- ❖ Build the capacities of members in various areas through regular training.(constitution of Harmony Ladies 2005:5)

Their main activities include:

- ❖ Assisting needy orphans in primary schools
- ❖ Capacity building and training awareness on gender related issues and better community and family life
- ❖ Income generating activities
- ❖ Monthly meetings and financial contribution
- ❖ Contribution of funds for the group's project.
- ❖ Participation in national and international events such as Women's day celebrations.(interview with group president Dec.2005)

Their main project is the needy orphan's projects through which they are striving to ensure that each child in the community gets basic education to enable them to cope through life. This is in line with goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the UN which aims to achieve universal primary education by the year 2015(UN MDGs 2005). This is the one thing that makes Harmony Ladies different from other women's groups around. It is not common to have a local group with such an objective of trying to help other local people who are not members with such commitment with money from private pockets. This makes the group outstanding in the area as a group with the highest humanitarian objective.

6.6.4 Harmony Ladies Major Setbacks

The lack of sufficient funds to finance all their ambitious and self-reliant projects is their major setback. For its 7 years of existence, this group has not benefited from funding from the Cameroon government or any NGO around the province despite being so close to the provincial capital with all the NGOs and other organizations that could help (interview with group president Dec. 2005). Funds for its project are raised by members from their yearly dues and sometimes from appeals to other kind hearted individuals around the community. This is never enough to meet up with the increasing number of orphans in the Bambui community today partly as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic which is affecting almost every third world community.

The second major problem faced by Harmony Ladies is that of custom and tradition which restricts activities on certain days of the week and the general marginalization and subordination of the woman. This limits their access and control to resources such as land and houses and to decision-making positions in the community in which they are members (focus group discussion Dec. 2005). Customary beliefs about the position of the woman in the society place heavy burdens on the woman in the household as wife, mother and home manager. This happens even with professional women like doctors, teacher's nurses who are still required by some men to take up these functions in full after the days work while the man relaxes.

Harmony Ladies believe that one of their main problems is the lack of information about what is available in terms of funding sources and general information on women's issues (focus group discussion Dec. 2005). They have identified the lack of computer knowledge by members of the group as a major setback. Although a comparatively very educated group of women, none of them is computer literate and consequently the group has no email address, not to talk of a website. The Ladies believe that computer literacy would enable them to access information about where to get help for their activities as well as other online resources on women related issues. It would generally boost their self esteem and make them feel more empowered (focus group discussion Dec 2005).

Further to the above, Harmony ladies feel that one of their major handicaps is the lack of skills on project planning and writing. This skill would enable them to design good community projects and target the right funding sources with the right application. This appears to be a common problem faced by most of the women's groups and they all believe that government departments and the development NGOs are failing them by not meeting this need (focus group discussion Dec 2005).

The limited education of some of the members is also a problem. It makes it difficult at times to disseminate information and when it comes to training and seminars some find it hard to follow the training. It also means that some members cannot take up certain roles such as those of a minutes or financial secretary that require an average level of literacy ability (interview with group president Dec.2005).

6.6.5 Views on women's Empowerment

Harmony ladies believe in women's empowerment as a necessary condition for women to play a greater role in the community and nation as a whole. According to their constitution, women's empowerment means 'giving women the same opportunities which men have to be able to rule not only to be ruled, to assume leadership positions in the community and make decisions not only to take them' (HL constitution 2004:5). Above all women's empowerment to them also means freedom to socialise with peers and undertake beneficial economic activities instead of just relying on their husbands for everything.

However, over the years, the group has made remarkable progress by improving the quality of lives of its members through the induced regular savings which has consequently guaranteed every member a certain yearly income for home improvement. The Ladies believe they have successfully empowered themselves through their activities and have gained a level of recognition from the community. They are now seen as a model from which other women's groups can draw a very good example and are often invited to provide training or give talks to other women's groups. Some of its members are now in top decision-making positions in the community such as board members of the local credit union. They have become the highest borrowers in the credit union and the most prompt

payers. Harmony ladies believe that they are reasonably empowered in so far as their own understanding of empowerment is concerned. For example they can do most of the things which only about two decades ago only men could do such as having credit union accounts, and making private savings, paying children's school fees and hospital bills and undertaking major investments in businesses and on land purchases. The Ladies are seen as a truly successful group of women by the rest of the community.

6.6.6 The Union of Bafut Women (UBW)

Bafut is a big village along the Bamenda Wum Road just about 8 miles northwest of Bamenda. This group is based in an area called Agyati. It is one of the largest and oldest of all the groups I worked with during my fieldwork with forty eight registered and active members. It was founded in 1988 and the members are women of Bafut origin or those who are married to Bafut men. Their education level varies quite widely and includes members who have never been to school, those with only primary education up to degree holders in different disciplines and walks of life. The group now has a branch in Bamenda town which tries to operate on the same principles as the mother group.

Objectives:

- ❖ Improving the quality of life of its members and the community
- ❖ Promoting education in the community
- ❖ Actively participating in the development of the community
- ❖ Promoting the culture of the Bafut village (constitution of UBW 2004:3

Their main activities include:

- ❖ Monthly meetings to save money for projects
- ❖ Regular work on the project site
- ❖ Participation in village cultural activities such as annual festivals
- ❖ Participation in national and international events such as Women's Day
- ❖ Participation in training seminars, workshops for capacity building,

Organized by Government, NGOs and researchers (interview with group president Dec 2005)

6.6.7 The Palm oil project

This is the main investment and key project of the UBW. This project started with the group some 20 years ago. At the moment, the palm trees have started producing the nuts ready for harvesting and pressing to obtain palm oil. Palm oil is the main cooking oil used by most households throughout Cameroon especially rural households. Absolutely no cooking can be done without palm oil. It is both a food item and an ingredient that no household can do without. The chief of the village generously gave land to the women who used most of it for this project. At the moment what is needed is intensive labour and funds to get the projects to its final state; that of producing oil from the palm nuts. The women are unable to provide this or to raise the funds to pay for the labour. They are therefore, appealing to the government, development NGOs and other donors and individuals to come to their assistance. The project if realized would not only change the lives of members but that of the entire community. It would provide employment for some people, lower the cost of palm oil and make it available to all and generally boost the economy of the area. They need the following assistance:

1. A pressing mill for pressing the nuts to obtain the oil
2. A warehouse for the mill and storage for the finished product.
3. A vehicle for transporting nuts from the site to the mill
4. Improved roads to project site.

These are the requirement for the project to start running although it is still possible to start if all these are not in place. Members and family support in labour and minimum financial contribution has always been guaranteed and adds to these requirements.

6.6.8 UBW view on women's empowerment

According to the UBW women's empowerment is 'about the exercise of equal power and opportunity with men in the home and the community which should enable both men and women share responsibility in accordance with needs and ability. 'men should not enjoy certain privileges alone just because they are men and women should not be left in minor positions just because they are women'(interview with group president Dec. 2005). Women's empowerment therefore, is about giving women the same opportunities as men in education, employment, community leadership and in property ownership. UBW also

emphasise that women's empowerment is not about women taking up men's traditional rule in the society as family heads and traditional rulers.

6.6.9 Problems and major achievement of UBW

The major problems faced by the UBW do not seem to be different from those faced by the other women's groups already examined (interview with president of UBW Dec 2005). The lack of adequate funds to finance projects and achieve their objectives remains the issue at stake. So far, the group has never benefited from any financial support from the government or any development NGO since its creation. UBW also faces the problem of lack of information about what is available and where. They are limited in the village and interact very little with other groups around that may be more mature and have access to the sort of information needed (Ibid). Although UBW has highly educated members such as degree holders, these like those of the other groups already examined are not computer literate. UBW like the others has no website nor even an email address and their means of communication with the outside world are therefore, very limited. They lack the tools and the mechanism to follow up any letter or application made for funding or any assistance. Also the limited education of some of its members makes basic skills training and the dissemination of certain information difficult.

The Unionists see male domination which continues to be accepted in the community as unfair and think that power should now be shared with women taking part in major decisions both in the homes and community since their contribution in both the household and community have now increased (focus group discussion Dec. 2005). Most women now have taken up major functions in the household such as the education and health of its members; construction projects etc but men still maintain the control. They should be allowed to build houses and own them, collect rents, buy and own land for any purpose. This is still not happening in a majority of areas (Ibid).

The Unionists believe that they have contributed to improve education in the community. Through their regular savings which guarantees every member an extra income each year, they have been able to keep their children in school instead of them falling out for lack of fees as the case is with others. The saving

schemes gives loan on a very minimal interest which members have always benefited from to carry out private business investments or home improvements. This has remarkably improved the quality of lives of the members and their families. The group stands out as a symbol of the Bafut culture and is recognized as the best in the promotion of culture through its participation in cultural events, dressing style and general presentation in public. Their palm oil project if fully realized would be the first of such a development project realized by women in the community. It is a project which not even men have conceived. These achievements make the UBW members believe that they have attained a substantial level of empowerment and recognition from the community. Generally most women would not be allowed to do some of the things that they have done and still doing such as the palm oil project (focus group discussions Dec.2005).

6.7 Moghamo Women Cultural and Development Association (MOWOCUDA) BATIBO

This group is by far the largest of all the women's groups that I worked with during the field work of this research. Though based in the village of origin Batibo in the Northwest province, MOWOCUDA covers the national territory with branches in most of the big towns and cities like Yaoundé, Douala, Bamenda, Bafoussam, Buea etc. There are about sixty registered members in the home branch. MOWOCUDA is an example of a women's group that has grown from being part of a male dominated development association to an autonomous development organization run entirely by women for their benefit. The membership is mixed including all women of Moghamo origin and those married to men of Moghamo. Some are illiterate women based in the village while others are highly educated women in top civil service jobs or businesses in the country. (interview with group Secretary Jan.2006).

MOWOCUDA has the following objectives:

- ❖ To empower rural women and enhance their economic and social status.
- ❖ To assist and encourage the development of the community by women
- ❖ To promote and preserve the Moghamo culture and
- ❖ To promote and maintain unity and progress among its members.

Their main activities include;

- ❖ Monthly branch meetings to encourage regular savings by members

- ❖ Fund raising events at branch and national levels
- ❖ Income generating activities by branches and individual members
- ❖ Participation in community development and socio-cultural activities
- ❖ Participation in national and international events such as Women's Day.
- ❖ Adult literacy classes for rural women (constitution of MOWOCUDA 2004:3)

6.7.1 Main Project: Batibo Women's Empowerment Centre (BWEC)

MOWOCUDA is the first women's organization in the province to have set up an empowerment centre for its members. Women's Empowerment Centres as mentioned before are normally set up financed and managed by the government. But seeing the benefit it could bring to its members and knowing that waiting for the government may be waiting for too long or even wasting time, this women's organization has taken a step ahead. This confirms what has been said earlier that most development in the Northwest province has been realized through community initiative rather than through any planned action by the government. The BWEC is an initiative by the women themselves and has been realized with funds mostly raised locally with some assistance from HELVETAS the Swiss International Development Organization with head office in Bamenda. The empowerment centre is a physical symbol of their belief in the importance of women's empowerment. This women's group believe that women need to be empowered in order for them to be able to make a greater contribution towards the economic development of their community. Without empowerment, women will remain in the lowest positions of society where their talents will only be wasted' (interview with group Secretary Jan. 2006). The WEC is a multi-purpose centre which will provide facilities for adult literacy classes which have already begun, a meeting hall, a domestic science laboratory, a computer literacy centre, a counselling service for women and an industrial section that will accommodate a palm oil pressing mill for the production of palm oil and lots more. Currently, the infrastructures have been complete and what is lacking to set it running in full scale are the various equipment and machineries. This at the moment is the major problem of MOWOCUDA for which they are seeking assistance from all angles. Also the centre is about a mile away from the main electricity supply and they will need funds to draw electricity into the centre.

From what has been said so far, it is to be expected that MOWOCUDA faces the same problems like the other women's groups. The empowerment centre should have been functioning in full scale by now if the funds to equip it were available. In 2006 two applications for funds were sent to the UK High Commissioner small grant scheme and to the US Ambassador self Help fund but neither was successful. The major problem of MOWOCUDA, therefore, is to acquire funds and get the empowerment centre, which hopes to change the lives of Batibo women, running. The group also faces the problem of illiteracy of most of its members especially those based in the village branches. The problem of illiteracy precludes the dissemination of essential information for women and their development. Furthermore, poverty on a large scale is an issue which makes it difficult for most members to meet up with their yearly financial engagement to the association (interview with the group Secretary Jan. 2006).

Tradition and custom which continues to encourage male domination in all domains of socio-cultural life within Moghamo remains a huge problem. It prevents some women from enjoying full affiliation with women's groups and the benefits it offers and continues to place women in a subordinate position thereby preventing them from exercising their full potential for the development of the community. High bride price and the notion that a woman is a man's property remains a reality in this community in spite of the education level of most of its members and has prevented many young people truly in love from living their dream (interview with group Secretary Jan 2006).

Over the years, MOWOCUDA has been influential in all village development projects and has worked in partnership with the main development association in the village to realize most development projects including the recent sub-divisional hospital. However, the most recent single achievement of MOWOCUDA is the Women's Empowerment Centre, soon to go operational.

6.7.2 Nshoff-Wayne

Nshoff Wayne is the local name for the women's organisation of Kedjom Ketingu, a Village in Tubah Sub-Division Northwest Province. Shoff Wayne is a national group with branches in most major towns and cities in the country but with headquarters in the village Kedjom Ketingu. There are about 60 members in the

village branch. Its membership comprises career women, business and local women based in the village. It was born out of the main village development organisation more than ten years ago when it was felt that the women could make greater achievements if given the power to work on their own and have control over their resources.

6.7.3 Objectives:

The main objective is to empower the women of Kedjom Ketingu economically, politically, socially and otherwise through the following means:

- ❖ Encouraging the development of self-esteem in the women and discouraging them from inferiority complex
- ❖ Encouraging initiative and creativity in agricultural production
- ❖ Give the female children the opportunity for education and to encourage dropouts to catch up in literacy through adult literacy courses.
- ❖ Improve the living standards of the women by providing, economic social and health education for all.
- ❖ Develop management skills and talents geared towards self help and income generating activities.(NSHOFF-WAYNE constitution 2005:4)

6.7.4 Activities and main development project: (The Kedjom Community Resource Centre for the Advancement of Women)

Shoff Wayne women carry out similar activities like other women's organisations already discussed. These include regular meetings to encourage savings by members, social activities, education and training seminars for various skills and fund raising events. The most recent national fund raising event took place on August 13th 2006 when the sum of over 4 million FRS CFA was raised (equivalent of £3,500) towards their main project. This project is called the Kedjom community resource centre for the advancement of women. Although it has not taken the name Women's Empowerment Centre like the others we have seen it is nothing short of that. This is an ambitious 50 Million France CFA (about £45,000) project which hopes to change the lives of women in Kedjom Ketingu village. The centre when complete will comprise a multi-purpose community hall, an adult literacy section which is already running in the half completed building, a domestic science laboratory and various training rooms. The centre is an initiative of the women themselves and has been funded up till

date with funds raised by the women locally. So far, Shoff Wayne has made two applications for financial support to complete the centre to two of the biggest embassies in the country the UK and US but has received negative responses (interview with group president Nov 2005).

It is therefore, to be expected that the major problem of Shoff Wayne is financial. They need funds to complete the centre which is a sustainable development project. The common problem of high illiteracy among the local women is also an issue and this is what the literacy programme attached to the women's centre hopes to tackle. I have to say here that throughout my research activities in Cameroon I never saw enthusiasm to study among older women any where else than in the Shoff Wayne local women. When I visited the centre where adult literacy is already going on in a half completed building, I was flabbergasted by what I saw. The hall was packed full with women some as old as 78 years of age yearning to be able to read and write. They sang welcome songs to me in English and French and read a welcome report in perfect English. I felt greatly honoured but regretted my inability to support the initiative. The organisation is proud of its achievement over the years which include awareness creating among local women which has given some of them more self-confidence. This is seen in the way that many of the women now are taking the initiative for self improvement, engaging in income-generating activities and generally taking responsibilities (interview with group president Nov.2005). Above all the Kedjom Community Resource Centre for the Advancement of Women is by far their major single achievement. Although not yet completed, it stands out as a symbol of their concerted efforts over the years and a promise of a brighter future for the Kedjom women.

6.7.5 Rural Women's perception of Empowerment

Rural women's notion of women's empowerment as presented in the above account is limited to the idea of increasing women's economic opportunity and enhancing their social status which means freedom of association and choice in education and employment and other economic activities. Although in some of their definitions there is the mention of equality with men, this is far from meaning sharing equal power with men or dismantling the institutions of male domination which continue to exist in this society. The research also found this

belief still popular among most rural women that men are stronger, braver and capable of doing more than women. This is why they believe women can never become equal to men. Women's empowerment from the point of view of most Cameroonian women particularly those of the Northwest province is about freeing them from various cultural constraints and giving them a chance to utilise their talents and live a better life than they are living now. It is more about the freedom of women who are totally dominated by their husbands or society norms so they can have a say over their own money and some decisions that affect their lives. From this perspective, it is clear that the notion of women's empowerment popular among Cameroon women is still naïve compared to western notions of empowerment as examined in chapter three which goes beyond basic freedom from cultural norms to include equality with men, reproductive, marital, and property rights.

6.7.6 Miscellaneous Sources

I mentioned in chapter two that community development is a very familiar concept in Northwest Cameroon. People here live by it and believe in it. It was a bit difficult to select the sample and I still find it useful to include among those considered the official participants for this research ordinary men and women who are working for community development in the NWP. This has not only extended the data sources but has also provided useful data that would give strength to the analysis. Under this category I will consider community leaders and village development workers, graduate from the Department of Women's Studies of Buea University and a special group of urban women called 'biyam Sellam".

6.7.7 Community Leaders and village Development Workers

Most of these are men serving in various leadership positions within the Village Development Committees (VDC) or Associations. They generally believe that 'the role of women in the community development process has increased, is increasing and should be encouraged' (from questionnaire by a community leader). They recognized the primary role which women now play in the community, admitting that they are now fast taking up most of the roles traditionally thought to be exclusively for men within the family or community such as building houses, purchasing land, cash crop farming and animal husbandry and other big

economic ventures. Some of them are more educated than their husbands. Others fear this increasing role of women will lead to a further break down of the tradition and custom which is holding everyone together and the effect of which may be devastating (interview with community leader).

It has been noted that women are better at managing family finance. Now, they constitute the greatest number and most regular savers in the community credit union scheme (interview with community leader Jan. 2006). This group also believes that women have been greatly empowered considering the position which some of them hold in the local community and in the country at large but argue that empowerment must not undermine custom and tradition to which everyone owes respect by reason of their ancestral heritage (interview with community leader Jan 2006). However, many of these men and women believe that most women are not yet ready to take up more responsible roles and decision-making positions in the community as they are still largely under educated and lack the confidence to lead other women and men. They need the education first and then to build up the confidence, by copying other women's example, which is merely a matter of time but surely to happen. They recognized most of the problems already mentioned which most women's groups are facing and support the view that women need more support from the NGOs the government, community leaders, village chiefs, and families in order to achieve more from their grassroots initiatives.(questionnaire by community leader).

6.7.8 Buea Graduates from the Department of Women Studies

These are surely a new group of Cameroonian women and men with a vision to lead the rest of the women folk in Cameroon to their highest state of advancement. They have got the education needed for this but for now lack the opportunity. Most of them are still unemployed or not employed in the right jobs. Perhaps one reason for the few opportunities being open to them in the public sector is the fear of what change they may bring if given the chance. In my interview with one of them I was told about the difficulty they faced in going through the Women's Studies course which is seen as a radical subject meant to indoctrinate women with ideas that will encourage them break off their marriages, disobey tradition and custom and try to do things they shouldn't do. It was especially difficult for the first batch of students on this course some of whom

actually ended up in divorce with their husbands (interview with a Buea graduate Jan.2006).

Women's Empowerment according to the graduates is about creating their awareness on issues that directly concern women and helping them to develop their full potentials freely and discretely and gaining that self esteem and confidence which everyone needs to function in a free society. This they believe is still a long way to come but the awareness creating has gone far. Most participants in this category believe that Women's Empowerment is crucial for the advancement of the status of Cameroon women and for the national economy considering the role they already play and their proportion of the total population. They also believe that the GOC is awake and active on the issue of women's advancement judging from recent programmes including the creation of special ministries for women and the many women-tailored programmes already mentioned. In many other ways compared with the past, the government is showing more commitment to empower and advance women's status in Cameroon and the future of the next generation of women in Cameroon is surely going to be far brighter than today (interview with female graduate from Buea Jan. 2006).

6.7.9 The 'Bayam Sellams'a special group of urban women entrepreneurs

'Bayam Sellam'is the local name given to a group of urban women entrepreneurs. Their role in the informal sector in Cameroon and their contribution to both the rural and urban economy is worth noting. They include women of all ages and backgrounds with over 90% of them being those with very little or no education to fetch them a paid job in the formal sector. However, the trend is fast changing and those in the big towns and cities like Bamenda, Douala and Yaoundé have an increasing number of high school leavers and graduates (Fonjong 2004). They usually start with an initial capital of 5000 FRS (about £4.50) or less. They are either married, single, divorced or widows.

Although the history of the emergence of this group is not known and very little is documented about them except passive mentioning in all forms of writings, it is possible to imagine that they started emerging in the 1980s when the economic crisis started hitting the Cameroon public and became increased in the mid 1990s

at the time when the hardship in Cameroon was at its peak. Salaries beginning with those of Catholic teachers were axed by more than two thirds and later those of public servants except the military. The Francs CFA was devalued and the inflation rate went up to three figures. Most urban dwellers lost their jobs and found it better to return to the villages where houses and food are cheaper or even free; car owners stopped driving or even in some cases sold their cars as they could no longer afford to fuel them. It was practically impossible for people to adjust immediately and start coping with one third of the salary they had been earning for several years. There is growing predominance of the informal sector activities in developing countries in the fight against poverty. Ever since most of these countries embraced the IMF/World Bank SAP individual and collective contributions to family and community welfare have been vital. The informal sector provides a means of survival both to those men and women displaced from the formal sector and to the women who primarily dominate the sector (Fonjong et al 2004).

This situation compelled many women who had been based in the towns and cities and had to continue to be there, but having no salaried jobs, to start thinking of a way of augmenting family income. Those who could find farmland nearby turned to farming food crops while a majority started buying and selling foodstuff to make a meagre profit thus the name 'Bayam Sellam', as opposed to those who produce and sell. Food crop marketing has always been open and is operated by private individuals, especially women (Baye 2003).

Their main daily activities include the following:

- ❖ The buying of local food stuff, from remote villages for reselling in the towns and city markets.
- ❖ Food and fruits vendors in towns and cities
- ❖ Fish smoking for reselling
- ❖ Operators of restaurants, cafes and food stores in various corners of the town and cities
- ❖ Formation of small saving groups, and 'Njangis' (RCA) to encourage a saving attitude among members.
- ❖ Regular saving in the main Credit Union House (Fonjong 2004:18)

Today, Bayam Sellam is a well known group of urban women who are a force to reckon with. They are the most regular savers in the urban Credit Union House and some of them among the wealthiest women in the towns and cities (interview with Credit Union Accountant Dec. 2005). Bayam Sellam believe that their main achievement lies in the fact that they have succeeded in increasing family income substantially, thereby improving the quality of life of their family members and the community (interview with Bayam Sellam lady Jan 2006). They help to enliven the lives of those in the communities where they buy while simultaneously making life easier for the urban dwellers by supplying sufficient food. Thus, they are in a small way helping to redistribute income in the economy. Some Bayam Sellams have succeeded in sponsoring their children and even those of relatives to higher education which would not have been possible with the income of the man alone. In this case they are the brain behind the increasing literacy rate in the country. Their savings have increased the lending capacities of the Credit Unions and Banks which is a boost to the economy. Their activities provide full-time employment for them.

They face a number of constraints in their day-to-day activities which require government intervention to ensure a smooth running. In the first instance, they are not an organized and registered group like the other women groups. They are considered as less productive unreliable and unimportant to the national economy (Soetan 1997). Consequently in Cameroon and the Northwest province in particular, most government policies neglect the importance of providing them with an enabling environment to operate and grow (Fonjong and Endeley 2004).

One of their greatest problems is the lack of space on which to operate. They tend to operate on road junctions, in front of big shops and banks, in front of their homes and at motor parks and face the problem of constant harassment by the urban council. Poor transport networks which force them to take unbearable risks to areas almost inaccessible are also another huge problem. 'Transportation of commodities and the role of the intermediaries including the rent-seeking behaviours of the forces of law and order are shown to be the major handicaps of food marketing' (Baye 2003). At the national level several Ministries, including Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Trade and Industrial Development, Transport etc are supposed to cooperate and have some influence on the system

but unfortunately this is not the case. Some Bayam Sellams are still not able to get access to credits for bigger economic ventures and some have difficult and unsupportive husbands or relatives who are only looking for ways to extort their running capital and stop them from operating.

6.8 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented and analyzed data from the sources that constitute the 'case' in this research. I began with a summary of the organisations dealt with, and their main missions followed by a brief profile of each of the women's NGOs studied. I have analyzed data from NGOs under two main themes; namely how they are empowering rural women in the Northwest and how they are promoting their role in CD. I have shown that the major preoccupation of women's NGOs in the NWP is economic empowerment which is mainly about improving the living conditions of rural women through the provision of basic welfare facilities and increasing their earning power through income generating activities. Socio-political empowerment also falls within their area of wider interest through which these NGOs are working to improve the human rights of rural women, especially those of widows and reduce the incidence of domestic violence and all forms of abuse of women.

In the area of CD I have also shown the many grassroots projects which these NGOs are carrying out with rural women and how these are contributing to their leadership roles in CD process. Capacity building and training on new skills and income generating projects as well as easy access to credits, loans and sometimes grants all fall within the wider areas of work and emphasis of the NGOs programmes. These have remarkably improved the lives of thousands of rural women and are beginning to put many of them in influential positions in their communities. The major setbacks which women continue to face in this domain, namely their general lack of access to the factors of production such as land their low level of education and subordinate positions remain the greatest challenges to be addressed. I have examined some of the setbacks which the women's NGOs face in trying to carry out the work to include their ever limited financial and human resources and their broad outline of objectives by which they are often attempting to achieve so much with so little.

I have discussed each of the five women's organisations studied separately, bringing out their main mission and object, their main project and activity as well as their view on the key question under investigation in this research. I have discussed the views of other ordinary people in the area under study with the aim to extend data sources but also as a way to show that community development in the Northwest province is the concern of everyone. It is not only something of the NGOs, and government or development agencies. It is something that everyone believes in and sees it as the only way of life for the people.

Finally, from this chapter the main missions or object of Northwest NGOs which is to build the capacity of rural women and improve their living conditions have been examined. The main projects and activities of the NGOs are geared towards enhancing the performance and influence of rural women in the community. This chapter has therefore answered one of the research questions about how NGOs are empowering women and promoting their role in the CD process in Northwest Cameroon. The next chapter constitutes a more in-depth analysis of the key findings of this research.

Chapter Seven

Gaps between Policies and their implementation in Achieving Women's Empowerment and Community Development

7.1 Introduction:

This chapter will further analyze the key findings of this research bringing out clearly the implications which these have on rural women in the North-West Region and for future policy for women's advancement in Cameroon. To continue it is necessary to recapitulate the main research questions here again. (1) How and to what extent are Government policies in Cameroon and development organisations promoting the role of rural women in the Community Development process? (2) Why is women's empowerment important for community development in Cameroon North-West? (3) How can the capacity of Northwest women be enhanced to enable them to contribute to and benefit more from their community development activities? Chapter five dealt with the first two questions extensively. It was shown in that chapter how the government through the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Protection of the Family and the Department of Local and Community Development has put in place several policies and programmes in support of women's advancement throughout Cameroon including the Northwest Province. In general, it was shown in chapter five that the programme framework of the government in support of women's empowerment and their role in the CD process appears genuine but the constraints are many and multi-dimensional. In a nutshell, questions one and two have been answered in chapter five. Chapter six specifically focused on the second part of question one and showed how NGOs are promoting CD and women's empowerment in the NWP. What remains to be done in this chapter is to extend that answer with an in-depth analysis of the factors that this research has found to be preventing government' programme from effectively being implemented at the grassroots. In doing so this would also provide answers to the third question.

Factors to be analysed in this chapter will include the issue of inadequate government resources, political factors which play a significant part in influencing the allocation of resources to different regions of the country which in turn affects rural women will be examined. Socio-cultural factors such as the

patriarchal nature of the Cameroon society and its general perception about women and what should be their role in the society is a major finding in this research and will be analysed in this chapter. Furthermore, illiteracy and the lack of information and communication technology (ICT) have been identified through this research as a major setback that limits the ability of rural women from benefiting from available resources provided by the government and other development partners. Women's absence in positions of major decision-making has emerged as a major finding in this research which explains the reason why they are still not able to benefit more from available government resources. The views of rural women and many other respondents have been united on the question of how we can enhance the capacity of North-West Women so that they can contribute and benefit more from the community development process. This finding would also merit a deeper analysis in this chapter. Statistical data in the form of tables and graphs will be presented to substantiate the verbal accounts from interview and to give strength to the analysis.

7.2 The Lack of adequate resource as a setback for government's intended programmes for rural women

It might not be a surprise to any one that this issue has come out as a major finding in this research because the problem of inadequate resources is a growing crisis in every nation including the developed and developing countries. One of the challenges facing the UN in the area of development cooperation is the problem of inadequate resources (UN 2002). Official sources in Cameroon have confirmed that the government is practically not able to meet the needs of every community but that it is only doing its best to achieve as much as it can with the limited resources. A key informant from the Department of Community and Local Development had this to say. 'The government is never going to do everything because our resources are always limited. We try to satisfy everyone but it is impossible. That is why we spend a lot of resources to mobilise the communities so that they can provide for themselves not just wait for the government' (interview with R1). A second informant from the same department had a similar thing to say 'Our budget is always limited but we try to distribute what we get from the ministry so that everyone gets something. But this is not always possible and we sometimes feel like we are letting down many of the groups at the local level' (interview with R1). These informants representing the

government mirror the situation which is faced by every state department in Cameroon.

Although the problem in recent years has been exacerbated by the bad practice of public funds embezzlement by the very people who are entrusted with the duty of managing them for the benefit of the poor, the fact still remains that the GOC is at present not capable of providing both the financial and human resources needed to meet the needs of the rural women. The government currently lacks the technical staff well trained and drilled in the various departments as the need requires as well as the logistic and finances needed to carry out the normal daily task of government which could see women's conditions at the grassroots level improved. This will be illustrated below through an examination of the staffing and financial situation of the two ministries under study. The government is also incapable of recruiting or training more staff, lacks the infrastructure with which to operate normally and the institutional mechanisms necessary for improving existing standards. In acknowledgment of this fact one of the key government informants in Yaoundé said this 'We do not only lack the finances but sometimes we lack even the tools with which to do the work such as the means to travel to the field and equipment to work with in the office (interview with R1). This point illustrates sufficiently some of the factors creating the gap between policy and implementation and the grassroots level. A break down into the following sub headings will help to illuminate each aspect better.

7.2.1 Financial deficiency

The government's lack of adequate finances to run its planned programmes for rural women is by far the most important factor that continues to widen the gap between policy and what is actually implemented for rural women. The GOC operates with a tight budget which limits its ability to allocate sufficient money to the ministries which work with grassroots women. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) is considered a key ministry but its budget always less than 1% of the national total. Consequently the Department of Local and Community Development whose work is mainly with the rural population never gets any reasonable amount. The following table depicts the situation:

**Table 3: The Department of Community and Local Development
Share of ministerial budget**

Year	Total for Ministry	Dept of Local & Comm. Dev	% of total
2008	4,706,640,000Frs	92,973.000Frs	0.0198
2007	4,414,164,000Frs	82,973,000Frs	0.0188
2006	5,527,981,000Frs	82,973,000Frs	0.0150

Source: Department of Local and Community Development (2008)

The above table shows the budget of MINADER for the past three years and the share of that budget received by the Department of Local and Community Development. The amounts which for the three year period represents less than one percent of the total for the ministry is for the whole country. If for example we take the 2008 budget and break it down into the ten provinces in the country what each province gets will be less than 10,000,000 FRS (about £11,000). This is obviously insufficient to manage a government department in a country like Cameroon. Although the department of Local and Community Development gets a substantial amount of the funding for most of its projects for rural women from external funding sources like the UNDP and other bilateral organisations it still remains the case that central government funding is essential as it can almost be guaranteed while other funding sources depend on a mix of different factors and terms and conditions. This table, therefore, demonstrates the severity of the financial constraints which prevents the GOC from fully implementing its grassroots programmes for the benefit of rural women.

The budget for MINPROFF for 2007/2008 was 5,000,403,000 FRS (Cameroon Tribune November 2007) (just about £6m) for the whole country. Most of this budget is spent at the central service of the ministry in Yaoundé. The Northwest Provincial delegation gets an undisclosed amount which is used in running the delegation which includes all equipment, transport, field programmes and sometimes part-time staff employed by the delegation to assist their work. Looking just at the total for the ministry it is possible to imagine what an insignificant amount the North-West will receive from the total and how far that could go. The amount is never sufficient to meet office needs let alone supporting projects in the field which is what is supposed to be happening.

7.2.2 Inadequate personnel and training opportunities:

As a result of lack of adequate finances the GOC is unable to train or employ a sufficient number of staff in all departments to facilitate the work that needs to be done. Staff shortage is one of the major crises facing most government departments as the following words of a government dignitary echoes: 'Most of our departments are under-staffed and this makes it difficult for effective work to be done. Sometimes we find it difficult to send staff to the field because the office will be without some body which is also not good' (interview with R1). Staff shortage means that rural women don't normally get the technical assistance they need from the government be it in the area of agricultural improvement, in income-generating activities or development training. Opportunities for further training through professional schools or in universities are limited as are those for professional development.

The delegation of MINPROFF Northwest province has only 14 staff. (Interview with the provincial delegate, 2008). According to the Delegate at least 30 are required to do effective work. There are meant to be at least five technical services to be headed by a chief who should be an expert in the field but none of these is actually operating. These are; (1) the service for the social promotion of women, (2) The service for family well-being, (3) the service for administration and finance, (4) the service for economic promotion of women and (5) the service for data collection. A drastic lack of finance to recruit or train staff has left this delegation running for more than three years without the key departments that are supposed to make it function properly for the benefit of rural women. The situation of MINPROFF Northwest is only one example of the many worst cases throughout the country.

7.2.3 Inadequate infrastructure and working material

In most government departments the basic infrastructure and working equipment are lacking. Dilapidated buildings and furniture create an uncondusive working environment which inhibits effective work. The lack of modern office equipment such as computers, printers, telephones and internet greatly slows down the speed of communication. Even though the world as a whole is already experiencing the advanced stage of computer and

communication technology most public offices in Cameroon are yet to begin enjoying the advantages of this. A senior member of government had this to say:

Most of our infrastructures are still underdeveloped and we are not yet fully equipped with the tools necessary to do effective work. Most offices don't have computers or vehicles for field trips' (interview with, R1).

These analyses clearly portray the limitations of government in its efforts to empower rural women in the Northwest Province of Cameroon and promote their role in the CD process. Financial deficiency leading to a severe lack of trained personnel and a good working environment are crippling government efforts to achieve its mission to empower women and promote their role in the rural community. To put it bluntly, the GOC is currently unable to mobilise sufficient resources to meet up with its many ambitious programmes particularly programmes to empower women all over Cameroon and improve the living conditions of rural women.

7.3 Politics and Corruption as a hindrance to government's purported programmes for rural women

Politics in Cameroon is characterised by firm division between English speaking people called Anglophones and the French speaking people called Francophones who are dominant in numbers and powers. Tension between the two started increasing since the 1990s when multi-party politics was introduced with the main opposition leader John Fru Ndi being an English speaking Cameroonian. The general perception is that the French majority are marginalising the English minority even though the two English speaking provinces are very rich in natural resources contributing about 40% to the GDP. The divisions between the French and English speaking Cameroonians is the main political factor affecting programmes intended for rural women from being translated into action for their benefit. Apart from the two main political divisions, ethnic and regional divisions perpetuated by nepotism and the politics of self interest are also a great danger and threat to grassroots women's programmes. This factor is enwrapped and entangled in the corruption problem. Professor Ajaga Nji (2000) has posited that any discussion about gender and development in Cameroon would be incomplete without mention of corruption because of the involvement of both women and men in the act. Ajaga Nji (2000:218). He believes that corruption thrives in Cameroon because there is great inequality in the distribution of wealth and

allocation of resources, manufactured by the political leadership and the prevalence of gender segregation in the distribution and resources allocation relationship. There is rather a strong and instinctive attachment to family clan, or tribe and other social relationship against a strong sense of national unity or the common good which makes those in authority see themselves as serving the groups or individuals with whom they have social ties rather than the general public. The public office is seen as a means to gain access to wealth to enrich oneself and support family and friends and not for public service. Positions in government are determined through a combination of know-how, party loyalty and ethnic and regional background. The following words echo the situation vividly:

When a so called illustrious son or daughter of an ethnic group or region is appointed to a high position in government usually by Presidential decree, the appointment could be reward for the individual's support to the further entrenchment of the Biya regime (e.g grassroots organising effort on behalf of the president's party CPDM) or reward to the ethnic group for which the individual is a member for support granted in past elections exercise (Mbuagbo 2004:1)

Sometimes such appointments could also serve as bribe in advance for anticipated support during an up coming election or crisis that the individual or ethnic group would be expected to support the president. Regardless of the reason for any such appointments there are always high expectations from the ethnic group or region for their son or daughter to deliver to them through projects such as new or improved schools, hospitals and other health projects piped water supply, electricity and roads etc. Failure to provide all or most of these would normally result in mounting pressure on the individual and eventual withdrawal of support.

These being the situations it can be seen that many people appointed in high positions to serve the entire country or region assume office with already a special group or individuals to serve. With the limited resources available, there would be no chance for women's group not from the region to benefit. Rural women's groups that have no form of connection to people in high state offices are the greatest losers from this kind of political mafia. They are least likely to benefit from any assistance from government without any strong links to the person in the office in charge of disbursing funds, equipment or technical

assistance. Sometimes they are required to pay for services that have been paid for by the state and meant to be free of charge. Ajaga Nji writes:

My own research experience in Cameroon illuminates this point, further. For example I found that agricultural extension agents often require poor women cultivators in rural villages to prepare a chicken and keep a bottle of whisky on the day the extension agent are to visit the farmer's field (Ajaga Nji 2000:218).

Five of the women's groups that were studied for this research were selected randomly around Bamenda. It was found that none of them had benefited from any government funding or technical assistance or equipment in the last four years. One of the group members, a well learned lady, testified that 'the reason is that our group has no one in high office to fight for us. Other groups that have people in high offices or good connections get assistance every year' (interview with, R4). Amin (2000) has similar experience as she writes: 'The people in decision-making positions try to take resources to their regions and ignore the other areas. So areas with very few people in decision-making positions get very little resources. Even foreign aid gets diverted continuously to specific regions of the country. For example women in some rural areas have been taught different income generating activities by experts sent to their areas while others have never had the opportunities (Amin 2000:161).

As seen from the above examples, grassroots women are most disadvantaged in this political game as most of them lack what is commonly known in Cameroon as the 'conaisseur'¹¹ and the negotiating power through the bureaucratic system. Since everything depends largely on knowledge of what exists, where it exists and who to contact, there is little chance of getting anything on the basis of merit alone.

The UN has recognised corruption as a destructive element in economic performance that undermines employment opportunities and clouds prospects for poor people.

The burden of petty corruption falls disproportionately on poor people. For those without money and connections, petty corruption in public Health or police services can have debilitating consequences.

¹¹ A French word from the verb *connaître* which means (to know). In Cameroon the word is used to mean the ability to know or be able to approach many people in high government offices to lobby or press for your needs or that of your group or community to be met.

it biases government spending away from socially valuable goods such as education and undermines public service delivery (UN Annual Report 2001:102).

However, interethnic competition and public service corruption is not a peculiar thing to Cameroon alone. It is a phenomenon common in most other developed and developing countries in the world.

Racial and ethnic prejudice has commonly led to inter-communal warfare such as the US government policy of expulsion and extermination of Native American, Fascist Germany annihilation of 6 million Jews, the 1994 ethnic conflict escalated to genocide in Rwanda (Kegley and Wittkopt 1999:183)

The belief system and tradition that incites ethno-regional politics in Cameroon is varied and often overlapping but is based mostly on cultural, linguistic and religious orientations. 'Because indigenous people are scattered not only within the state boundaries but also across them, they form transnational cultural domains that share a common intellectual heritage and place higher value to ideals other than patriotic loyalty to particular states' (Kegley and Wittkopt 1999:180). These analyses clearly demonstrate the extent to which corruption and the politics of ethno-regional segregation, self aggrandisement and client network promoted by the country's political leader may undermine most of the government's intended programme to empower and uplift the status of rural women in the Northwest province and promote their role in the CD process. The policies and programmes already analysed show on the surface that there is the intention to do something but that corruption may pose by far the greatest threat to any programme.

7.4 The Socio-Cultural and Legal Aspect.

In Chapter one I examined the socio-economic status of the Cameroon Women and that of the rural women in the North-West region. What I am going to do in this section is to show further how the patriarchal nature of the Cameroon society has been found by this research to be a key factor contributing to the relegation of women to subordinate positions. It has been found that despite the intention to promote more women to positions of responsibility and major decision-making especially those that execute women's programmes, many of them are still occupied by men. The coexistence of customary laws and national legislation in almost all regions of Cameroon including the North-West region

whereby Customary Laws tend to supersede national legislation is a great hindrance to the success of any programme of government. These customary laws have continued to exclude women from land ownership, inheritance rights, and the right to basic education in favour of early and sometimes forced marriages. The International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAW 2006) observed that despite a Supreme Court decision recognising women's rights to be granted land and the existence of Cameroon Law of succession, discriminatory customary inheritance laws still dominate. The customary laws prevent female children from inheriting real estate from parents on the grounds that the female child normally leaves the family to join with the husband's family. Sikod (2007) postulates that 'the ability of women to own land is further aggravated by the customs and tradition of the various tribes. In most areas of Cameroon the woman is seen as the property of some other person (the man) who will collect her by marriage. In these areas the customary justification of this fact is that property cannot inherit property' (2007:67). Similar attitudes towards girls have been found in studies in other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. For example in Ghana 'girls are denied education partly because it is perceived that while households bear the cost of their education, their benefits accrue to their husbands' (Abane 2004:49)

Furthermore, it has been found that there are still many customs in the NW which prevent women from obtaining credits or loans or engaging in any business to improve their lives without the husband's consent. One woman puts it this way: As a woman I cannot sign for a loan by myself. My husband must be present to sign for me' (focus group discussion with a rural woman). Moreover, conditions for credits and loans always require collaterals such as lands and houses which most women cannot afford. This adds to their economic marginalisation as they cannot exercise full economic rights. The Civil Status Registration Ordinance (No 81-02 of June 1998 Article 74 (1) states that a 'married woman may exercise a trade different from that of her husband' but Article 74 (2) however, adds that 'the husband may object to the exercise of such a trade in the interest of the marriage or their children'. This virtually gives the husband absolute authority to decide what the wife can do including joining a group or association, undertaking any business activity or venture that she may wish to undertake to improve her life and that of the family. The following words also support this

finding: A woman must ask permission from her husband before carrying out any economic activity. When she is refused permission there is nothing she can do about it" Amin (2000:5).

Instances of women being refused by their husbands from carrying out any form of business or income generating activity to improve their lives are very common throughout the study region as are cases of husbands not wanting their wives to improve their education for fear that they may come to challenge their authority at home. Group affiliation which has become a source of power and empowerment for many rural women is still a privilege that many rural women are yet to start enjoying. A similar situation has been found in a study of women and community work in Taiwan. According to that study one woman said this:

We don't dare to organise large-scale activities because on the one hand we are afraid of getting involved in political issues because such issues are beyond our ability, and on the other hand, our husbands disapprove those kinds of activities. What we undertake are small scale activities Concerning the needs of daily life (Yen 1998: 173).

Cultural norms discriminate against women in education, giving advantage to the male over the female especially in secondary education, even when the female is brighter and has more chances of succeeding than the male. This experience of a village man tells the story: 'I thought that it was better for my male children to have a good education because they will be able to bring back riches to me when they finish and get a good job. I did not send any of my first female children to secondary school, but when I realised the boys were not doing so well I decided to give my last girl a chance and she is the one who has lifted me high. I am now living because of her and I regret what I did to my other girls. But I cannot turn the clock back' (Conversation with village community leader 2006.)

These analyses show how the inconsistent legal system and its lack of a mechanism to enforce legislation and socio-cultural norms constitute an impediment to women's empowerment and their role in the community development process in the Northwest province. We have seen how gender discrimination is deeply embedded and reinforced by social attitudes that continue to exclude women from taking the same opportunities as men in social, economic and political life. In particular, the exclusive right of men to refuse

their wives from engaging in any form of activity for self improvement undermines the fundamental human right of women; the right to exercise choice as a full and equal human being. Access and control over the factors of production such as land, capital and the right to think independently and exercise choice and fulfil their potential is fundamental for women's empowerment. It has been shown how many rural women in the North-West Province are still lagging on these and therefore, unable to take advantage of any programme by government or NGOs intended to empower them and foster their role in the community.

The UN Annual Report 2001 highlights the importance of the rule of law in the overall economic performance of any nation and in poverty reduction. But unfortunately although the rule of law can benefit poor people in many ways, laws and statuses are not always geared towards protecting the interests of poor people but rather those of people with political power and considerable strength (UN Annual Report 2001).

7.5 Women's Absence in Positions of major Decision-Making.

The absence of women in positions of major decision-making that affect their own lives has been found to be a major constituent element of their inability to benefit fully from government programmes and those of other development partners to advance their status. Many other research and findings in Cameroon have testified this. "In Cameroon women make up more than 50% of the population but do not usually have a say in major decision-making that are taken, not only in the households but also at national level: decisions that affect their own lives and their relations with men" (Sikod 2007). In the structural context, Cameroonian women hardly do accede to management positions in most institutions. The female perspective is almost absent in the design and implementation of products and services, a problem whose root causes can be traced back to training, cultural barriers and traditional beliefs system' (UN Department of economic and Social Affairs).

Customary gender norms and values often lead to political, legal, economic and educational inequalities that perpetuate women's lack of resources, control over decision-making and participation in public life. Greater political representation could help change this (UN 2001). From the national through the provincial to

the divisional and village levels women are very lowly represented in positions where decisions about who gets what and when are made. Budgeting allocations are voted in parliament. The Cameroon parliament with 180 seats has only twenty women representing 11% of the total. Even though the argument can be made that their literacy level is lower than that of men, 11% does not represent the percentage of literate women in the country who are capable of gaining parliamentary seats. The following table shows the staffing situation of the department of Community and Local Development where it is claimed most women have been appointed to positions of decision making.

Table 4 Staff of the Department of Community and Local Development

Year	Actual N0	Male	Female	% of female
2008	39	24	15	38.46
2007	37	26	11	29.72
2006	49	28	21	42.85
2005	91	74	17	18.68

Source: Department of Community and Local Development (2008)

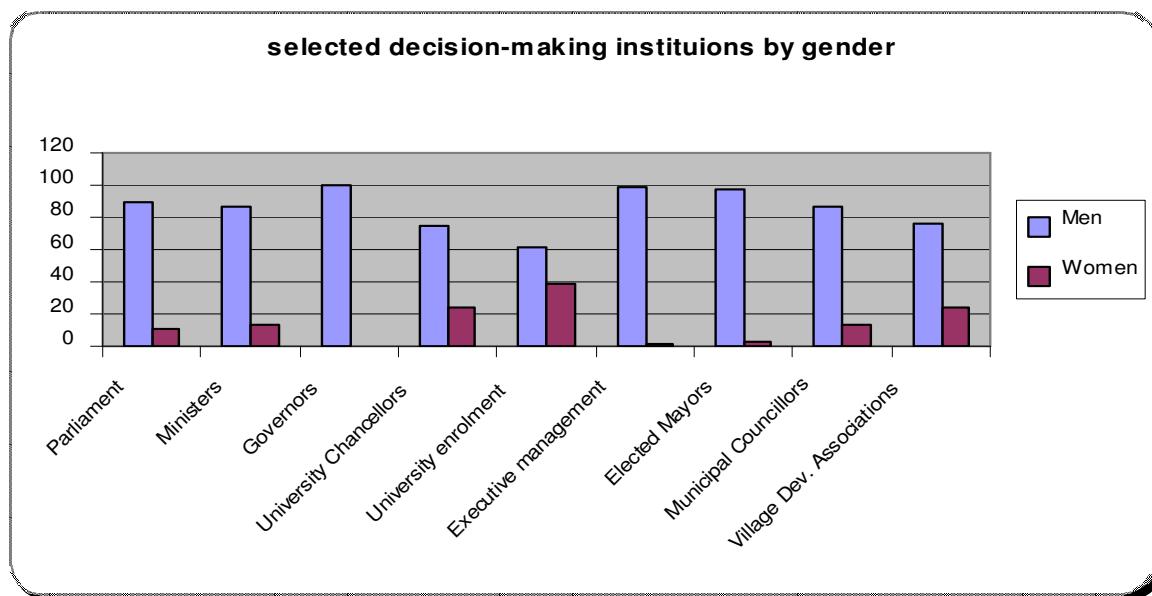
The above table shows that men are still dominating even in ministries and departments that are in theory said to be women's ministry. Even though a majority of those involved in agriculture and making the most contribution to it are women their numbers in departments that make decisions about agriculture are still below national expectation.

According to data from the CEDAW Report (2007:21) the proportion of women in positions of responsibility such as directors and similar in central ministerial services was 12% in 2002 and increased to only 15.1% in 2005. There are presently only 6 out of nearly sixty cabinet ministers in Cameroon who represent merely the traditional women's ministries such as Women's Empowerment, Social Affairs and Basic Education. None of them has ever been appointed in a key ministry such as national education, finance or territorial administration. At the provincial level, there is no woman Governor or Senior Divisional Officer, no woman Mayor or Village Head. In Civil administrative services and managers only 1% of the total number is women. The percentage of women who actively

participate in high level economic decision-making remains low. (Ibid). At the diplomatic level only one woman has ever been an ambassador in Belgium and she sadly died in December 2006. These power gaps within households and across all sectors of the public and private institutions have serious repercussions not only on resource allocations and the economic situation of the rural women but also on their social status. The ability of women to negotiate decisions that affect their fertility depends in part on their access to economic income and the choices that are created through literacy or formal education (Sikod 2007).

The above are some of the key positions in the country where power and resources are controlled. The gross absence of women in these positions means that their interests in general and in particular those of the poorer rural women are hugely neglected. In spite of their number in the population and their contribution which has aptly been described as the backbone of the rural economy, cultural attitudes and beliefs about women's capabilities are still making it difficult for them to be trusted with major responsibilities where they can influence change in their favour. 'Legal systems can constrain women from becoming independent economic actors' (UN 2001). The tables below show the representation of women in selected areas of power and decision-making.

Table: 5 Decision making institutions by gender



Source: compiled from fieldwork and the 2007 CEDAW Report.

The situation of leadership and decision-making in the business sector is the same as above. The following table captures this.

Table: 6 Distribution of Heads of Businesses by gender 2005

Sector	Men	Women	% of women
Trade/Commerce	451	15	3.2%
Industry	316	6	1.8%
Building & public works	324	8	2.4%
Services	408	22	5.3%
Mines & Energy	42	0	0%
Timber	104	1	0.9%
Agriculture	104	3	2.3%

Source: Adapted from Stella Nana 2006. Journal of Women's Studies Vol.1 November 2006:159

The absence of women in positions of major decision-making is one of the main concerns of professional women's associations in Cameroon such as the International Federation of Female Lawyers (FIDA). During a round table conference in Buea in April 2006 the FIDA president said among other things that it 'is the organisation's task to remove some of the barriers and challenges holding women back. She added that "we want to stop being a talk shop and move forward to do something concrete. Not all women can be in power but we should push those with leadership skills' (The Postnewsline April 2006). Some of FIDA's objectives include capacity building for women, and examining the impediments of women in decision making. These words clearly echo the plight of women all over Cameroon and also highlight the fact that they face numerous barriers in the attempt to free and make themselves useful for their country.

Poor legislation combined with gender biases, based on a catalogue of cultural beliefs have been shown to be the main factors excluding women from power sharing and decision-making in Cameroon and the Northwest Province in particular. Their very few numbers in these positions explains why better decisions that could change their lives are scarcely made and also why resources that are needed to implement already planned projects are never reaching many of the grassroots women. Gender gaps in access to resources and services are a major obstacle to women's development. 'Poor women face a double disadvantage in access to resources and voice-they are poor and they are women' (UN 2001:118). An increase in the number of women in decision-making positions will help influence the way resources are allocated in favour of the womenfolk. It could also facilitate the process of legislation in matters that concern women most such as the Family Code in Cameroon which has not been ratified more than ten years after it was elaborated.

7.6 Illiteracy and the lack of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

The high rate of illiteracy and lack of information and communication technology (ICT) among rural women has been found to be a major setback which explains why women are unable to benefit from the programmes of government and other development partners. The high rate of illiteracy among rural women has been noted by all government departments and NGOs as a key constraint in their

work with rural women and a contributing factor to the failure of programmes. Education is both the means and the end for development. It empowers people, gives them the voice, enables them to know their rights and duties as citizens of any society to which they belong. Education greatly strengthens women's ability to perform their vital role in creating healthy households, increases their ability to benefit from health information and make good use of health services (World Bank 1993). 'Education and skills are the commanding heights of the modern global economy' Allen and Thomas (2000:7).

In Cameroon, Sikod (2007) has referred to it as a 'doubled-edged sword which makes it possible for women to get out of their traditional roles through engaging in activities hitherto reserved for men'. Formal education has been recognized as the only institutional mechanism through which women can really develop their skills and knowledge in order to become more productive and able to overcome the problem of social injustice in all its forms and ramifications that they currently face. Cameroon rural women and those of the North-West province in particular are among the poorest in the country. The main cause of this persistent poverty has been identified as the lack of education. Increased investment in their education and lifelong learning is therefore essential if they are to be empowered to contribute more to the development of the country and eliminate poverty.

According to the CEDAW Report (2007:37) the literacy rate for all women in Cameroon is 60% as opposed to 70% for men. However, this percentage is not proportionate across all ages and regions of the country. The rate in rural areas is far lower than in urban areas and still lower among older women age 50 and above than between women aged 15-49. The literacy rate among older women above the age of 50 in the North-West is 30% one of the lowest in the country. Another problem is that most of the women in rural areas who after primary education have never had the opportunity for any further training or jobs that require literacy skills tend to lose these with time and age. It was discovered that many women above the age of 40 with only primary education are unable to take up functions in their groups or community such as minute secretaries, financial secretaries or any role that requires writing and calculating skills. Many of them simply lack the confidence as they doubt their ability to take up roles of

responsibilities within the group or the community. This also explains the reason for their massive absence in positions of responsibility within the community and country already discussed in the last section.

Despite measures undertaken by the GOC to improve the education of girls and women throughout the country which include free primary education through the elimination of fees for public primary schools and a scholarship award with a mandatory 40% for girls, (CEDAW Report 2007), the education level of women is still falling short of that of men, mainly due to a complex combination of structural and socio-cultural constraints already discussed in the last section. Closely linked to this is the lack of a forum or mechanism for exchanging information among rural women and networking with the outside world. In this globalized world where modern information technology has led to the death of distance and narrowing the world down to what is commonly referred to as the global village, rural women in the Northwest province are still a long way from taking advantage of any of these modern communication technologies notably computer literacy. The World Bank has noted that 'equitable access to information and communication technology can be an important tool for empowering women' (World Bank 2005). Building women's capacities and improving access to information technology and markets is fundamental to achieving women's empowerment and advancing their role in the community. 'Women's empowerment is central to the elimination of poverty and ICT can address poverty related issues such as lack of access to education, health services and lack of information on agricultural productivity' (Hafkin 2003). Where women lack basic information about credit facilities and market outlets for agricultural products, ICT can bridge this gap. 'By the use of ICT women can broaden the scope of their activities and address issues previously beyond their capacity'...it can deliver potentially useful information such as market prices for women in small and micro-enterprises. (Jian 2007). Access to ICT is by all means a key requirement for women's empowerment and the advancement of their role in the community development process in the North-West.

According to data collected from this research about 90% of women in the rural areas of the North-West are still without access to basic information technology such as computer the internet and mobile phones. The mobile phone is now the

most common accessible form of communication technology available throughout the country. But poverty is the main factor preventing many from owning them. As said earlier, the mobile phone is breaking boundaries and making things happening for rural women who own them in the North-West region by facilitating communication between group members and exchanging market and other business information. This study found that of the five women's groups with a total of over 200 members only about one third the number own mobile phones or have access to landline telephone facilities at home or access to a phone. Less than 2% of the number are computer literate or have email addresses. None of the five groups studied has a website or even an email address. But the interesting thing is that more than half these numbers are happy to undertake courses in computer literacy and other skills if offered the opportunity. They complained that the government and NGOs are not doing anything about this. They are aware of the benefits which this could bring to them as individuals and to their groups and communities which include the ability to access information about funding and women's development issues on the internet and be linked to the entire world of information. The table below shows the percentage of women who have access to the most common tools of communication now available in the Northwest Province namely the mobile phone and internet.

Table: 6 Women access to basic communication tools

Groups	Numbers	Mobile phones	computer literacy/email	Total %
Harmony	23	10	2	52.17
APW	21	8	1	42.85
UBW	48	12	2	29.16
MOWOCUDA	56	15	3	32.14
SHUFF WYANE	65	18	4	33.84

Source: Compiled from interviews

Note about the table: The total represents the percentage of women from one group like Harmony ladies who have access to any form of communication;

mobile phone or computer. It is not only the percentage of those who have mobiles or are computer literate.

The UN Information and Communication Technologies Task Force has lamented that 'nowhere is the digital divide more pronounced than in countries of the African continent. Africa is the most unconnected in an increasingly connected world...ICT offers a remarkable opportunity and set of tools for achieving substantive progress (UN ICT Task Force 2006). In Cameroon ICT is yet to find its place in the curriculum of schools across all sectors of the education system. It is still a prestigious subject to which only a few secondary schools can offer limited access. Community access to computers and the internet is out of the question even in urban centres. Those who have access are the prestigious rich in the towns and cities. According to the CEDAW Report (2007) the GOC is adopting several measures to promote the education of women and girls but ICT is not mentioned at all and there doesn't seem to be any comprehensive plan to incorporate this into the curriculum of schools across all sectors of the system in the near future.

Rural women not only lack access to modern ICT which is faster and cheaper to connect them to the entire world around them but they also lack a forum for local information transmission such as local newspapers, radio and television through which information about development and women's issues could be obtained locally. The absence of such an information forum makes it difficult for them even to know what resources are available around them, which government departments or NGOs are offering what for their benefit and when is the right time to apply for any available funding or assistance. The research has also found that many of the women groups just at the vicinity of Bamenda were not aware of the many government services available in Bamenda town and what these offer. Many did not know where the Delegation of Women's empowerment which looks after their needs is located or who the delegate was. The research workshop that I organised at the Delegation of Women's Empowerment which brought together Women Group Leaders, NGO Coordinators and Government Delegates, gave many of the women leaders the first opportunity to meet with the some of the heads of services who are working for them and to know more about what they were offering.

Drawing from the above, it could be postulated that the illiteracy of rural women in the Northwest Province is a major drawback which accounts for their inability to benefit fully from the programmes planned by government and other development partners. Illiteracy is compounded by the lack of ICT and local information forum that could facilitate access to locally available resources and services for their benefit. Illiteracy sometimes involves the lack of opportunity for formal education and sometimes the lack of opportunity to continue to exercise one's literacy after leaving school for a long. The task facing the GOC is to create more opportunities for everyone to have an education and also a social system that enables everyone to have the chance to continue to exercise their education after leaving school.

7.7 Rationale for Empowering Women and enhancing their capacities in the local community.

It seems almost obvious from the literature in chapters 3 and 4 and from what has hitherto been said about women in this thesis, why it is essential that they should be empowered and their community roles enhanced and promoted. One of the reasons is to do with the instrumental role they currently play in the community and the benefits of empowerment understood by most participants in this research to mean the means to gain greater access and control over resources and the ability to maximise their potential for their improvement and that of the community. This section of the thesis will present and analyse accounts from women mostly in the North-West of how they believe empowerment would benefit them and why they think it is crucially important for them to be empowered. Almost all of the women contacted during this research showed some awareness of the fact that they do not have the same opportunities as men and would want the situation to be improved. They may not be fully aware of how bad the situation is but certainly do have a notion of the inequality that exists and the idea that empowerment would make things better. Here also I will present and analyse accounts from official sources and from other participants in the research about what they think the rationale for empowering women is and why this is essential.

The general consensus among most participants in this research is that women need to be empowered so that they can have a chance to make more contribution to the development of Cameroon and the North-West in particular. One of the Women's Group leaders put it in this way, 'If women are empowered, they will have greater opportunities for work in better positions. This will give them the means to make more contribution to community development projects and the up keep of the family' (R4). The emphasis here is on economic empowerment and the gains of these to the community and family. Another woman said that 'Mismanagement of funds can be reduced if a woman is the president and treasurer of community projects' (interview with R4). This statement is based on the view that women's managed projects are more successful than men's and that women are less corrupt and better financial managers than men. This is not only a claim but has been proven in many instances in the North-West region where many of the women's wings of the Village Development Associations (VDA) have been more successful in their villages than men. But also others like Ajaga Nji (2000) have argued that both men and women in Cameroon are corrupt. An example is the Batibo Women's Empowerment centre worth millions of Francs CFA which is the efforts of women alone and the CFA 50.000,000 Kedjom Ketingu Women's Centre which is now near completion. Another rationale why women should be empowered is given here by one women's group member; who says 'when a woman fully gains her empowerment, she becomes the light in the community in all aspect; she can lead, counsel, guide, coordinate and manage community programmes much better' (interview with R4). This supports the view that empowerment would bring out the best that is in every woman and enable them take up various responsibilities in the community now mostly performed only by men.

From the perspective of a government official, 'empowerment would enable women address their problems by themselves, it would enable them gain promotion into leadership positions within the community, improve their living conditions and that of the community' (interview with R1). The Coordinator of one Women's NGO presents her account of why women should be empowered in the following words 'empowerment is the inspiration which every woman needs to understand their problems better and to be the first to begin working out solutions for them' (R3). This view brings out the idea that women must be the

first to begin looking out for a solution to their problems and that men can only assist in the solution if women themselves know what they want and are taking the lead in addressing their plight.

Enhancing women's capacity is also seen as one way of helping to enable them achieves the best from available resources. Many women identified capacity building and incentives as a prime need which could enhance the current level of their performance. For example, a senior member of women's group said this: 'in order to improve on their present level of achievement women need support from various quarters, such as the village head for land, the government and NGO for training in adult literacy, financial incentives and grants and technical advice'(R4). While some of the above can be seen as short term solutions, education is seen as the ultimate that will eventually eradicate women's problems. Other opinions hold that financing the economic activities of women such as farming and trading, providing women specific health facilities and more micro-finance schemes would also enhance their capacity to improve on the current level of achievement. Mobilisation is also seen as one of the ways by which performance could be uplifted as it is believed that some rural women are slow because they are not mobilised enough to know how much strength and potential they possess.

These accounts presented in the people's own words and language summarise the findings of this research on the question of why women should be empowered and how their capacity could be enhanced. Multiple views have been expressed here but they all culminate in one thing: a belief in the importance of the economic benefits to the women, their families and the community. The point has also been stressed that at the local level, the village head or traditional leaders as the custodian of land have a major part to play in enhancing women's performance by making land available to them when they need it. The Government and NGOs need to do more through technical, material and financial assistance.

7.8 Summary and Conclusion.

This chapter has summarised the key findings of this research. In the first place, resource deficiency in the country has been pointed as the capital reason accounting for why women in the rural areas are unable to get enough support

from the government. This point has been supported by verbal accounts given by key government officials at interviews. It has been shown how the problem affects every state department including those in the capital Yaoundé and how the situation gets worse with offices in the province some, of which can only manage with less than half of the total number of staff required. The political divide and corruption have also been presented and analysed as a key finding in this research. Here it has been shown how the nature of the Cameroon society with its two political divisions and multicultural nature is itself a problem and how most appointments to positions of responsibility are based on support for a particular political party or reward to an ethnic group or region, rather than on competence and qualification. Consequently those appointed tend to utilise the limited resources available to satisfy the needs of their regional or ethnic groups and themselves and less attention is paid to communities or groups that do not have any kind of informal link to those in power. The corruption element simply explains how some individuals in public offices misappropriate funds for personal gains leaving the common people for whom the funds are meant to be directed in continuous poverty and misery.

Socio-cultural factors combined with the inconsistent legal system in Cameroon have been seen as a major combined factor which continues to determine the subordinate position of Cameroon women. Statutory and customary laws coexist and customary laws which generally put women in second position to the men tend to override states laws making them a mere piece of fine writing that serve no purpose. Generally, women have to succumb to the conditions that society or their husbands place them in and husbands can decide whether or not their wives can further their education, or engage in any business or social activity. The absence of women in positions of major decision-making has emerged as one of the fundamental factors that explain the reason why rural women are not reaping in full measure the promises made to them by government. It has been shown how across all sectors of the Cameroon society women are grossly absent in positions where decision-making about resources allocation such as Parliamentarians, Senior Financial positions; key Ministries, Governors, Mayors and Village Heads are made. This explains why the needs of rural women in particular continue to be massively neglected.

Furthermore women's illiteracy, their lack of information and communications forum and ICT is another crucial finding in this research. It has been shown that a majority of the rural population are women most of whom are illiterate and lack access to some of the most modern means of communication now available such as access to the internet and mobile phone. Illiteracy prevents women from gaining employment in paid jobs in the private and public sectors or to be self-employed. It prevents them from taking up positions of decision-making in the community where they might be able to relocate resources to meet their own needs. The lack of ICT skills and other forms of communication and information technology such as radio, television or newspapers prevents even educated women from accessing essential information for their development and self advancement as well as information about what resources and opportunities are available locally and when and how to access them.

Finally the chapter has also looked at the rationale for empowering women and enhancing their capacities to achieve more in the community. A cross section of views from women, women's group leaders, community leaders, and government officials has been examined and the general consensus is that women need to be empowered to enable them take up the same opportunities that are available to men. This would increase women's earning power which would enable them make more contribution to the community and development of the country. Empowerment would also help women ascend to key positions of decision-making where they can relocate resources to deal with women's specific problems.

Chapter Eight

Discussion, recommendations and conclusions

8.1 Introduction:

This chapter will discuss some of the main themes that have emerged throughout the research process to show how these relate to the key findings. It will also draw out the implication of these to the thesis. Recommendations for policy makers and other development partners in Cameroon as well as for rural women will be made. General conclusions will then be drawn based on the key findings of this research.

8.2 Women as the 'backbone' of the rural economy

The idea that women are the 'backbone' of the rural economy in Cameroon has been elegantly expressed by most government informants and NGO Coordinators throughout the research. This recognition is crucial because it at least means that the government and the other development partners are aware of what rural women are doing even if efforts to move things forward are being undermined by a mix of other factors already discussed in the previous chapter. The research findings have revealed how vehemently the GOC is trying to support grassroots initiative by women and the many constraints it is facing in actually putting policy into concrete action and making action speaking louder than words. These constraints which range from the deficiency in government resources, through socio-political factors to the problem of women's illiteracy, and their absence in positions of major decision-making, seem to offer little glimmer of hope for the government or the rural women that anything will change in the foreseeable future. With the recent down turn in the economy, increasing inflation that has led to the prices of basic commodities and building material sky rocketing, rural women are again being faced with the situation of the 1980s when the effects of the World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) hit them in particular. The hard task ahead is for the GOC to look for other alternatives to achieve its ambitious programmes if women are to remain in the driving seat for rural development. One such alternative could be to review policy and seek ways of mobilising resources from within and without so that more can be made available for use. Helping communities to identify their economic and social capital resources and how these can be put into use for their development can offer a better cheaper alternative for the government than trying to satisfy every

community with limited central government funding. This does not seem to be happening yet for most communities in the North-West. The GOC has already initiated the ‘community-driven development’ approach which laid the groundwork for the National Community-Driven Development Programme (NCDDP) and the Community Development Support Programme (PACD). All these are aimed at building partnership relationships with the State, civil society, the private sector and other development partners by strengthening the capacities of grassroots communities (CEDAW 2007). Financing projects and activities initiated by local village development committees based on community development plans, community resources or the Rural Community Development Support Fund (FADCR) is part of what this initiative hopes to achieve. These are very ambitious plans by the government; well intended but which lack not only the means but most importantly the mechanism for implementing them effectively. What the GOC needs to focus more on is not only the policies but also the strategies for policy implementation. Many of the reasons, the government is failing to achieve its programme intentions for rural women are not only due to the total lack of resources, but the ineffective management or utilisation of what is available.

It has been shown that customary laws and social norms which support male domination in most Cameroon cultures particularly the North-West constitute one of the impediments for rural women’s progress. Again the big issue here is about there being no formal method of enforcing national legislation that protects women against the traditional customary laws. The national saying that ‘when elephants fight it is the grass that suffers’ has been made clear in the situation of the rural women who continue to suffer as the giants of the country struggle among themselves to amass as much wealth as possible from what is referred to as the ‘national cake.’ Recognising the position of rural women as the ‘backbone’ of the rural economy is essential but not sufficient to uplift them from the blight of poverty unless the government is able to do the following:

8.2.1 Better strategies to ensure resources allocated to rural women are channelled to reach them.

This would involve ensuring that people, both men and women, appointed to key positions that deal with women’s specific projects are those who sympathise

with the situation of women and are prepared to make a contribution to improve it. It is a fact that not everybody in Cameroon feels that women need to be empowered or that they need to be given an increasing role in the community. If such people happen to be in positions where they are supposed to promote women's programmes they would actually work against them. It may be difficult to know who such people are especially in a country where the education is still very general and there are very few fields of specialisation. Increasingly however, the University of Buea, Department of Women's Studies is now offering the Cameroon society a new breed of intellectuals with knowledge about the women's world capable of filling the present gaps. Thus, a key question here which could be a potential question for future research can be what strategies are needed to ensure that resources allocated to meet rural women needs are actually channelled to reach them?

8.2.2 Better mobilisation of the local communities

There are obviously more resources that can be generated from every local community but this depends on how well the communities are mobilised to get the best that is in them. The idea of the Rural Community Development Support Fund if well developed could mean that each local community has to have its own development fund into which the members contribute and the government supports it with a fixed percentage of what the community is able to raise. Say for example that if the percentage that the government is to contribute to the fund is 10, a community that raises 100,000 FRS gets 10% of that which is 10,000 FRS while the one which raises 500,000 FRS gets 10% which is 50,000 FRS. This could be a very big incentive for rural women's group if they know that the more money they are able to raise the more they get from the government. Some NGOs and local credit unions are using this method as an incentive for rural women's groups. The more money that a group raises the more they get as a loan or grant. Developing strategies for mobilising local communities to get the best that they can offer is imperative. How this could actually be done is again another subject for future research. Encourage bridging social capital through networks that promote national unity, encourage inter-regional cooperation and discourage regional differentiation in national life in all its forms and manifestation is crucial.

8.2.3 Better mechanisms for enforcing legislation and punishing defaulters.

It sounds absurd to say that in Cameroon, those in authority do what they want. But if we consider the fact that in the mid 1990s this country was actually branded the world's most corrupt country by the German NGO Transparency International, it might not be too surprising. There is yet to be a strong and reliable mechanism for enforcing the laws of the country particularly laws that protect women and ensure their equal rights with men. Many people in government can abuse their positions in any way and will still be able to cover this up and go free. The higher up you are in the government hierarchy the better placed you are to get away with misappropriation and inefficiency. Unless this changes and the government is able to win back the authority to handle and deal with those who default and bring down state institutions the situation will remain the same. The impact of all these are felt by the very poor, who are mostly the women in the rural areas. There have been recent attempts to combat corruption through a national programme called the anti-corruption campaign headed by the Prime Minister and Head of Government himself. This programme that has been running for the past five years doesn't seem to be making any difference. In 2004 there was a major reshuffle in government whereby many new ministries were also created and some old ones had to relocate. These processes of relocation for some ministries took more than a year during which most staff of these ministries had no place of work but were being paid. This is just an aspect of the poor planning which is a feature in the system causing waste of resources. There is a general lack of public accountability perpetuated by those in higher authority which has consequently led to public loss of confidence and a situation of lawlessness where no one cares about their duty except for themselves. Restoring the authority of the state over its institutions and employees remains an uphill task for the GOC at this moment in time. This is vital if any programme of development for the rural women is to be successful.

8.2.4 Promote more women to higher positions of decision-making.

The key to the solution of women's problems is women themselves getting involved in decisions that affect their own lives. Unless the more basic questions of who controls, exploits organises and makes decisions about economic resources is addressed women will continue to be relegated to the lowest echelons of the

economic hierarchy. It is now generally accepted that development is best achieved if the population is massively involved in the plans and objectives and can clearly see its benefits. Young (2007) postulates that 'one of the ways to achieve this is structuring the decision-making process in such a way as to ensure widespread consultation at all levels of society about development goals, the process by which those goals are to be reached and the resources needed to achieve them' (Young 2007:373). Women's absence in positions of major decision-making has been seen as a key factor contributing to government's failure in implementing its programmes for rural women. This will continue to be the case unless a more practical initiative is taken to ensure that this is not only in principle but is actually happening at all levels of the local regional and national hierarchies. Strengthening women's decision-making positions across all levels of the national echelon right now, is certainly a huge challenge owing to the fact that many are still illiterate or not educated or trained to the required standard. In spite of this, increasing women's quotas in prestigious state positions remains a prerequisite for their empowerment and consequent enhancement of their socio-economic and political status.

8.3 Community development, the 'main engine' of change in the rural areas.

The idea that CD is the only means available for government to achieve development at the grassroots has been widely acknowledged by many government and NGO sources throughout this research. Some of the government informants affirmed that 'CD is a total approach to development' and the government is unable to make any development advances in the local communities except through this means. The claim that CD is a total approach to development is still grand even within the UN as evident in its definition of 1962 quoted earlier in chapter two which is still the same today. This research has also shown how the practical meaning of CD is understood throughout the case study region, the North-West of Cameroon. But the question that needs to be asked at this stage is whether CD is actually still such a grand approach to development or is something of the past. Some writers believe that CD has had its moments in the past and the normal position of CD today is a line department in parallel with others such as agricultural extension or health and often with a limited budget. (Curtis 1995). This is true to an extent but only with reference to

particular contexts. It has been shown throughout this research how the government, NGOs and the people are passionate about CD. Although the budget is limited it does not in any way suggest that the importance of CD as the main engine of development is not being recognised.

In fact, it can be argued that in Cameroon and the North-West in particular CD has survived since the colonial days as the main parameter for development despite some of its criticism. A major criticism concerning social equality believes that self-help is often socially unjust. Some quarters in Cameroon argue that that when it comes to contributing to village development activities the poor do the work while the rich reap many of the benefits particularly from activities such as road building'. While the rich may be benefiting more there is no evidence that the poor are refused any benefit. In most North-West communities, charges for village projects are decided on the basis of ability to pay. Working class men and women often pay a higher levy than village-based people who have no profession or job. They are also given the choice to pay in labour supply, in material or any form of gift. There is always a different levy for women and young adults. All these are attempts to include everyone's contribution to the project so as to give everyone a chance to boast and enjoy its success.

Another criticism that CD has survived though the decades is that of political influence. Self-help groups within the local community are often well organised and can be an ideal organisation for political capture. A group of people wanting something is seen as a potential cluster of votes that can be easily won by either giving them what they want or simply promising in exchange for their votes. This is a very common phenomenon in Cameroon politics and community life. It reinforces the idea of motion of support¹² discussed in chapter seven. Political influence has dismantled many community groups and united some throughout the Northwest province but the spirit of CD has remained alive and active among the people and is still the people's total way of life.

¹³ Motion of support is a manoeuvring tool used in Cameroon politics whereby when a region or an ethnic group needs favours from the ruling government they would write an open letter pledging their unflinching support to the ruling government which is usually presented by the most senior elites of that group in an organised ceremony. The government is then expected to respond to this open gesture by later appointing someone from that region to a senior position in government normally after an election in which the region must have fulfilled their pledge by a massive vote.

Since the colonial days CD in the North-West and Cameroon in general has changed in two main ways: First there has been a decreasing reliance on central government owing to the unreliability of government funds and the general perception that there is no money with the government. The complex bureaucratic system and its complicated method of allocating resources to community groups has greatly reduced the effectiveness of government in co-ordinating CD programmes that meet the needs of the people. This perception about the role of central government in CD is also common in other Sub-Saharan African countries. In Ghana for example,

many people especially the poor regard the more political, economic and social institutions as remote and impersonal instead of reinforcing or integrating clan-based communities as units for implementing community programmes, politicians and bureaucrats have through a series of organisational and ideological changes weakened and in some cases eliminated the power base of local leadership (Campfens 1999:314-315).

Hence, communities since the early 1990s have increasingly relied on their ability to raise the funds needed for any projects they wish to embark on. This also explains the proliferation of Village Development Associations (VDA) and regional elite groups such as the North-West Elite Association. These associations have become a different kind of regional government in their locality and what they have achieved is remarkable and would never have been achieved with government funding. In the area of Education they have constructed and equipped, primary, secondary and high schools through the Parents Teachers Association (PTA), in health they have constructed and equipped many district hospitals provided piped water supply to village communities and constructed roads and markets.

The second main change to CD since the colonial days has been the influx of non state actors such as NGOs into the scene. The contribution which NGOs have made to CD in the North-West particularly from the early 1990s has been overwhelming. The role of Women's NGOs in local development in the North-West Province was discussed in chapter six. NGOs have also triggered the formation of Community Based Organisations (CBO) and Common Initiative Groups (CIGs) all of which are strengthening CD as the main driver of change in the local community. As mentioned earlier, the GOC has clearly acknowledged

the pivotal role of NGOs in the socio-economic development of Cameroon and is lending its unflinching support to the NGOs course. There is some evidence of collaboration and mutual support between some national NGOs and government departments but a majority of the NGOs based in the NW carry out their work independent of government departments and there is an overlapping and duplication of roles and programmes between different NGOs and government. There is yet to be a formal national forum of NGOs and government which could help to reduce the tension between some NGOs and the government, increase collaboration and reduce the waste of resources through duplication of programmes. The one main issue that needs to be tackled at the moment is that of prioritising community projects, ensuring their sustainability and making them meet urgent needs. This is often a difficult task because for most communities in the North-West Province that are only just beginning to see the light of day a number of their needs such as piped water supply, health centres, schools and electricity etc can all be seen as priority needs. Where do we begin with limited resources?

8.4 Policy and research in community development and women's empowerment

Research activities in the fields of CD and women's empowerment in Cameroon has been sparse and varied and do not appear to be centrally coordinated. There is no policy guiding what sort of research needs to be carried out in the field and by who. Without government sponsored research in an area where the government seems much committed it is doubtful how the government hopes to be rightfully informed about the shortcomings of its programmes and how to overcome them. As a result, what is in print in the form of research is mostly individual initiative. There is substantial meso and micro level research in the NW which seeks to understand more about the role of rural women in the community, their basic needs and how to meet these. Research on micro-finance agricultural extension programmes and income generating projects have helped to inform NGOs about the main areas of needs and have to some extent been used to formulate rural development policies and programmes for the rural areas. Most research on technological innovation in agriculture and the rural areas have been conducted by foreign researchers, private bodies and NGOs. These have not often been made available to the GOC so they can use it for policy

and improvement. There is therefore, a vital need for policy on research particularly in areas of CD and women's empowerment for only in this way can the government be fully informed about the drawbacks that are preventing programmes from being implemented. Research related to CD at the macro level would also involve the analysis of general issues related to the environment and sustainability, resource availability and the socio-economic nature of a region in terms of its population, and gender roles in development. Only through research can the government gather sufficient knowledge about the actual needs of rural people and how this can be met.

8.5 The Cameroon North-West Experience of CD and Women's Empowerment

In chapter four it was mentioned that the North-West Region of Cameroon is quite familiar with the word community development. The long history of CD in the region which dates back to the pre-colonial days and the formalisation of CD in the 1970s through the creation of a formal department in the Ministry of Agriculture was seen as a renovation and not as something new as it appeared to be in East Cameroon. The North-West has been practising CD in one form or another for approximately more than one hundred years now. With the new wave of change beginning mainly from the 1990s which has seen new actors into the scene it can be said that the North-West has survived three main eras of CD namely the pre-colonial, the colonial and now the post-colonial and therefore has much from its experience to share with the rest of Cameroon and other Sub-Saharan African countries with similar characteristics. It has been acknowledged by official sources in Cameroon that CD is 'a thing of the Anglophones or the NW', meaning they alone know how to plan it, organise and manage it. They have succeeded more than any other region in the country through the projects that have been realised over the years. All these have come through as a result of their adherence to the values of CD namely, solidarity, participation and democracy and the belief in their strength and what they are capable of achieving. This is one thing that the North-West can share not only with the rest of the country but also with other developing countries.

8.6 Women's Empowerment and Community Development and Factors Preventing Programmes from being translated into action at the grassroots.

Factors that prevent programmes from being effectively implemented at the grassroots as analysed in chapter seven are multi-faceted. Although resource deficiency has been viewed as the major contributing factor to government's inability to translate words into concrete action for the benefit of rural women, it has also been shown that there are other causes that continue to make the situation bad as it is. This research has shown that both the government and the educated population are strongly in support of women's empowerment and the need for their role in the community to be enhanced. The main reason is to increase their economic opportunities, the benefit of which would accrue to the family, the community and the country's development at large. The government is the leading body in the country in the process of empowering women and strengthening their role in the CD process and appears to have some useful ideas about what needs to be done in order to achieve this, but is hugely handicapped by a severe lack of financial, material and human resources. Community development is generally seen as a stepping stone to national development, or as a government informant puts it 'the total approach to development'. As such it is crucially important that women who make up about two thirds of the rural population should be at the forefront. Women's empowerment is therefore, one of government's strategies to achieve national development from the grassroots level. From this perspective, women's empowerment and CD in Cameroon are therefore, two complementary processes that are essential for the achievement of any genuine development in modern Cameroon. There are categorical imperatives if Cameroon is to meet its development targets in the first quarter of this new millennium particularly the target to halve world poverty by 2025.

Understanding the factors that prevent programmes from being implemented to improve women's lives at the grassroots helps in identifying and proposing solutions that could help address the situation. Financial resources and political factors are crucial in determining whether grassroots women get what is promised to them or not. Therefore, these should be seen as countervailing forces or the steam that has to move the engine if women's issues are to be adequately addressed. Our understanding of Women's Empowerment and CD and factors

preventing programmes from being implemented helps in appreciating the limitations of these not only in the North-West but the rest of Cameroon and some Sub-Saharan African countries that exhibit similar characteristics.

Factors preventing government programmes from being effectively implemented for the benefit of rural women at the grassroots mirror the major limitations of trying to implement western concepts such as empowerment into different socio-cultural contexts. Often western views assume that empowerment like all other concepts such as gender equality, liberal democracy, can easily be implemented following certain procedures. These views hardly take cognisance of the implications of socio-cultural, political and religious diversity of many developing countries as well as infrastructural and resource availability. For example, one of the greatest constraints in trying to implement programmes in Cameroon is the cultural diversity with its instinctive attachment to ethno-regional values rather than national or common good. This is one of the reasons why the Yaoundé Declaration recommended 'a new declaration on gender rights in Africa' which will take into consideration local tradition and socio-political realities of the African countries. (2005 A: 2).

Therefore, the key issue with regard to the concepts of CD and women's empowerment is that context matters and what can work for one society may not necessarily work for the other. Even developing countries themselves vary widely in their level of social and economic development and can hardly be compared as a set of homogeneous nations.

8.7 Examining Government's intentions to empower women

From what has been hitherto discussed from the genesis of this thesis, one conclusion could be that, the GOC can pride itself for the endeavours it is making to advance the status of women in Cameroon and to help deliver them from the bondage of poverty. The creation of a special ministry for women headed by a woman is great and is seen from one perspective as a sign of seriousness and dedication to the course of women's empowerment. However, some critics believe that this might only be a camouflage by the government intended to placate foreign donors with no genuine intention of doing more than the minimum for women. Thus, the idea of a Women's Ministry may only be a symbol of deceit both

for the Cameroon women and Western donor organisations who wish to see what policies and efforts exists for women's empowerment as a condition for aid packages. Although this criticism cannot be overlooked, this research believes that there is genuine commitment on the part of government as far as empowering women and promoting their role in community development is concerned. Evidence of government's commitment is seen not only in the creation of ministries and departments to carry out this work but also in the budget allocated for this every year however limited it might be. The current inability of government to achieve its objectives to empower women and increase their influence in the community is mainly due to the problems discussed in the previous chapter and one has no reason for thinking the government's intention isn't genuine. This research believes that what remains to be done is for the government to consolidate current efforts and implement the recommendations made in this thesis and this goal will be achieved.

8.8 General conclusion.

This study has involved empirical research into the policies and programmes of the GOC and other development organisations geared towards empowering women and promoting their role and influence in community development. The North-West province was chosen to be the case study not as a representative of Cameroon although it is argued that the findings made can broadly be applied to other parts of Cameroon. The findings have been used to discuss and modify understandings of CD and women's empowerment in developing countries. My position as an insider-outsider researcher was discussed in chapter 2 and I acknowledge the potential biases that this might have had in the entire process of data collection and the findings I have made in this research. As Fook (1999) argues 'the researcher is unavoidably located politically, culturally and socially and his or her experiences, perceptions are necessary mediated through the lens of their own body... (1999:14).

In chapter 1 the background, the problem and the theoretical framework which laid the route map for the research was clearly articulated along with the key questions of the research. Chapter 1 also presented an overview of the socio-economic situation of women in Cameroon highlighting the significance of CD as the main approach to development in Cameroon as well as the instrumental role

which women play in the process especially in the rural areas. Chapter 2 presented the philosophy and methodology for the research including the field work process and encounters, justifying the rationale for the use of each method. Chapter 3 mainly reviewed literature related to the topic drawn from a wide range of sources including standard text books, official publications and journals. Chapter 4 examines how the concepts are related to the Cameroon context. It is shown that CD especially in the case study area is not only a familiar term but one that the people live by it while women's empowerment throughout Cameroon including the NW is a concept that is yet to gain prominence and be respected in the same way as CD. Local views and perceptions about women's empowerment are seen to be radically different from western conceptions and focus mainly on economic opportunities and basic welfare services. Chapter five began to answer some of the key research questions by analysing data from official sources which form the wider context of the research. These are the Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development and Women's Empowerment. Chapter six examines data from the formal and informal institutions that make up what has been referred to as the case in the research. This chapter also brings into focus the activities of NGOs and women's groups in the case study area and show how these are piloting development in the NW which is the reason why they should be enhanced and promoted. Chapter 7 analyses the key findings of the research, the factors, the major constraints or impediments that the GOC is facing in trying to deliver its planned programmes to empower women and promote their influence in the rural communities. Finally, this chapter recapitulates the main points in each chapter, discusses relevant issues to the topic, makes some recommendations and concludes the thesis.

The main findings of the research analysed in chapter 7 reveal that the major constraints faced by the GOC in translating its programmes into concrete action at the grassroots level are centred on resource limitation and socio-political factors. Therefore, the key to overcoming these constraints depends by and large on a radical change in political will across all quarters of the political hierarchy, a change of mentality on issues such as ethno-regional differences in favour of a strong national spirit and a reformation of socio-cultural norms that would eradicate gender differentials in all domains of community, regional and national life. This does not seem to be a goal that would be achieved in Cameroon in the

foreseeable future and therefore the future for women in Cameroon becoming fully empowered remains bleak. Although this research has shown the scepticism of the general male opinion in Cameroon regarding the issue of full empowerment of women from the Western perspectives, it is nevertheless, agreed that economic empowerment is imperative for women as this would benefit first the family, the community and the country as a whole. Women throughout the research are seen as passionate about the cause of empowerment and their role in the community but not about equality with men. Perhaps this zeal and enthusiasm is what will take them to the next stage.

In Cameroon, and the North-West region in particular, women's empowerment has become a buzz word within development organisations and women's groups and is gradually just beginning to find its place in the political agenda and the public and private media. Even though there is a whole cabinet ministry devoted to this it is arguably not a major political or social issue at the moment. Only when women's empowerment will become an issue of debate high on the socio-political agenda of the country will there be a shake down that will bring about the expected change.

Appendix 1

a) Self introduction

My name is A.A. Alasah. I am best known as Alphonse. I come from Bambui in the Northwest Province. I am a PhD research student from the University of Southampton in the UK. I am just at the beginning of my second year into the programme which will be mainly undertaking field work. My research is about women and community development in Cameroon. I shall be focusing on rural women's organisations in the Northwest Province with the main aim of seeing how important these women are to the development of their communities and whether their role has been recognized by the government and being adequately supported or not. I will also be seeking to know what the major setbacks are in their community development efforts and what can be done to enhance women's capacity so they can achieve more.

I have come to ask if you would be willing to be interviewed as part of my data collection process because of your position and role as---- I hope that you will be willing to assist me as much as you can in getting the information that I seek. If you agree to be interviewed, the interview will be tape-recorded but your identity will be kept anonymous. I have a consent form for you to read and sign to confirm that you fully understand the purpose of the research and freely accept to give this interview. You also have the right to discontinue the interview at any stage you wish without it affecting your rights and entitlements to services. After you have signed the form we shall begin.

Thank you.

Name: A. Alphonsius Alasah, School of Social Science, University of Southampton, Highfield Southampton, SO 17 1BJ, England-UK

If you have any comments to make about the way this research is being carried out or about the manner in which this interview has been conducted, please contact:

Name: Professor Lena Dominelli Email ld@socsci.soton.ac.uk

Consent Form

I consent to participating in this research conducted by **Akogutuh Alphonsius Alasah** of the University of Southampton UK.

I agree to being interviewed and having this interview tape-recorded. I understand the purpose of this research project and that all information that I provide will be kept anonymous.

Tapes and transcripts may be shared with Alphonsius supervisor only where required and no more. Also extracts from interview may be used in Alphonsius thesis or other written publications and oral presentations.

I also understand that my involvement in the research is on a voluntary basis and I can withdraw at any time without any penalties being incurred.

Name.....

Sign.....

Date.....

Appendix 2

Semi structured Interview Questions for the various respondents

a) Interview questions for members of government working at national offices in Yaoundé.

Q1. What does community development mean for you?

Q2 How important is community development in Cameroon?

Q3 who are the main actors involved in community development in Cameroon?

Q4 Is women's role in community development being recognized and supported by government?

Q5 How is this role being recognized and supported role?

Q6 What resources are available in supporting this role?

Q7 Are there any problems you face in organizing women?

Q8 What kind of relationships exist between you and other development organisations working to promote women' role in community development in this country?

Q9 How effective are these NGOs in promoting women's role in community Development?

Q10 Is community development practice in Cameroon today different from the Practice in colonial days? Please, explain what the difference is if any.

Q11. What does women's empowerment mean in policy terms?

Q12 How important is this for community development?

Q13 Do you have any other area you wish to comment upon?

b) Questions for provincial Delegates and NGOs Coordinators in the Northwest

Q1 First, I would like you to please describe your role in this position.

Q2 Which categories of people do you work most closely with in the province? or division?

Q3 How many women's organisations are actively working in this province or division for community development?

Q4 How do you relate with them?

Q5 What does this number of organisations tell you about women's role in Community development?

Q6 Are there major challenges in working with women? If yes how are you working to overcome these?

Q7 Do you think that women's role in community development in this province is well supported by legislation and in practice?

Q8 If yes, how well do you think that this is properly supported?

Q9 What does the empowerment of women mean to you?

Q10. Are there major setbacks women face in their community development efforts?

Q11. Are there practical ways of enhancing women's capacity? in developing their communities? If yes what are these?

Q12 Are there any other comments you wish to make about this research or your work on women's role in community development?

c) Questions for Women's Group leaders

Q1 Can you please describe your job as president/coordinator of this Organisation/group?

Q2 What are your main objectives?

Q3 How are you actually working to achieve these objectives.

Q4 How do you know whether you are succeeding or not?

Q3 Do you have problems as a group/organisation? If yes, what are these?

Q4 What kind of support do you receive as a group from:

- a) the government? b) NGOs
- c) the family d) other organisation

Q5 Do you think that this is enough support? What more needs to be done?

Q6 What strengths do you have as a group of women?
how do these differ from those of men or youth?

Q7 what do you think you need in order to do better and achieve more as a group?

Q8 Is there any way in which the traditions and customs of your village/tribe are hindering your work and progress as a group of women?

Q9 What do you understand by women's empowerment?

Q10 How important is it for you to be empowered as a group?

Q11 How would empowerment change you as a group?

Q12 Do you have relationships with other women's group/organisation outside of your village or division?

Q13 How are these relationships like?

Q14 How is your group/organisation funded?

Q15 What other supported is needed?

Q16 Are there any other comments you wish to make about this research or your work in community development?

d) questions for Community Leaders

Q1 First I would like to know about your role and responsibility to the community that you belong to/govern.

Q2 How is community development organized within your council area?

Q3 What are your priorities? Who sets them?

Q4 Do you have any strategies or policies for women's involvement in this division?

Q5 Are these written down and available in copies?

Q6 Is women's empowerment part of your strategy?

Q7 If yes, how are women's empowered?
in this council area?

Q8 Does the council give support to women in their community development efforts?

Q9 What kind of support is this?

Q10 Are there setbacks that women face in their community development efforts in this council area?

Q11 What are these setbacks?

Q12 How do you get funding for your projects?

Q13 What are your future needs in this council?

Q14 Are there any other comments you would like to make about this research or your work in this council?

Appendix 3
Example of questionnaires

**WOMEN's EMPOWERMENT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN
CAMEROON. A CASE STUDY OF RURAL WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS IN
BAMENDA NORTHWEST PROVINCE**

A.A. *ALASAH*
Doctoral Research Student

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON-UK

Questionnaires for members **of women's groups and organisations in
Bamenda North-West.**

Respondent's personal details.

Sex M/F (please circle one)

Village and province.....

Occupation.....

Age (please tick one only)

13-19
 20-29
 30-39
 40-49
 Over 50

Educational qualification. (Please tick your highest level of education)

Primary.....
 Secondary.....
 High school.....
 Tertiary (e.g. TTC, Nursing training etc).....
 Higher education (e.g. University, ENS etc).....

Languages spoken. (Please tick all languages spoken and specify mother tongue)

Mother tongue.....
 English.....
 French.....
 Pidgin English.....
 Other..... (Please specify)

Normal residence

Where do you normally reside? (Please tick all that apply)

In a village.....
 In a town.....
 In the city (Yaoundé or Douala).....

1. How important is it for you to be a member of this group/organisation?

.....
.....

2. What do you benefit directly from being a member?

.....
.....

3. What difference does it make to you being an ordinary member of this Organisation?

.....
.....

11. What problems do you face as a group?

.....
.....

12. What is your understanding of women's empowerment?

.....
.....

13. Do you feel empowered? **Yes/No**

14. Please explain your answer.

.....
.....

15. Is there anything that your village community leaders like the chief, village council or mayor can do to help your organisation?

Yes.....

No.....

16. Please, explain in what ways they can support your organisation.

.....
.....

17. Do you think that it is important for every woman to belong to an organisation?

or group like this? **Yes/No**

18. Please explain why?

.....

Do you have any general comments to make on the topic of community development?

.....
.....

General questions

1. What is your understanding of the word community development?

.....
.....

Is community development the same as community work?

.....
.....

Who are the people that you think contribute more to the community development process than others? **(Please, use a scale of 1-5, where 5 is the highest and 1 the least)**

Women....	F) Government.....
Men.....	G) NGOs.....
Youth....	H) World Bank.....
Church	I) UNDP.....
Schools	J) Others.....(please specify)

Do women play the same roles as men in promoting the community development process? If no how does their role differ?

.....

5. Do you think women should be given the same opportunity as men to be leaders in the community? If yes how?

.....

6. If no why not?

.....
.....

7. In your view, who is responsible for promoting the community development process?

(choose one or more)

Government....
The members of the community....
The government and the people...
The local council and the people....
Others.....(please specify)

8. Who should make important decisions about development in your community? (choose one or more)

Community leaders
Community members and leaders
The government and community leaders...

The government and community members
Women.....

9. Who has carried out the most successful community development projects in Your community so far? (choose one or more)

The community members.....

The government.....

Women.....

NGOs..... (Specify)

Others..... (Please specify)

10. Do you feel left out or involved in the community development process in your

Community? Yes/No

11. Please give reasons for you answer.

.....

12. Is the government helping women in their efforts to develop their communities?

Yes/No

13 Please give reasons for your answer.

.....
.....

14. Do you think that women are sufficiently involved in the community development process? Please give reasons for your answer.

.....
.....

15. What activities would you like to see women do in the community development process?

.....
.....

16 How can women be helped to play a greater role in community development?

.....
.....

17 What is your understanding of women's empowerment?

.....
.....

18. Should women be empowered? If yes, how should they be empowered and By who?

.....
.....
19 How can women's empowerment help in the process of community development?
.....
.....

Please, make any additional comments on the topic of community development that you would like to make.
.....
.....

Thank you for completing these questionnaires. You have taken part in a research project that I hope would add to the stock of existing knowledge and could lead to improving the lives of women in our community in the future.

Questionnaires for senior government officers in Yaoundé such as directors/directresses, chiefs of bureaus for community development.

Respondent's personal details.

Sex M/F (please circle one)

Village and province.....

Occupation.....

Age (please tick one only)

- 13-19
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- Over 50

Educational qualification. (Please tick your highest level of education)

- Primary.....
- Secondary.....
- High school.....
- Tertiary (e.g. TTC, Nursing training etc).....
- Higher education (e.g. University, ENS etc).....

Languages spoken. (Please tick all languages spoken and specify mother tongue)

Mother tongue.....
English.....
French.....
Pidgin English.....
Other..... (Please specify)

Normal residence

Where do you normally reside? (Please tick all that apply)

In a village..... (please specify)
In a town..... (please specify)
In a city.....(please,specify which)

1. What is your understanding of community development?

.....
.....

2. How important is community development to the national economy of this country?

.....

3. Who are the main actors in community development in Cameroon?

.....
.....

4. What is the role of women in the community development process in Cameroon?

.....
.....

5. How does the government recognise and promote these roles?

.....
.....

6. Are there setbacks for the government in promoting women's role in community development in Cameroon?

.....
.....

7. Can you specify what these are?

.....
.....

8. Are there some geographical regions more developed than others in the country?

.....
.....

9. Please, give reasons if this is the case.

.....
.....

10. Is the government doing anything to achieve a balance in development in the country so that some areas don't get too advanced while others remain underdeveloped?

.....
.....

11 How is the government trying to achieve this?

.....
.....

12 What role do other organisations play in community development in Cameroon?

a) NGOs.....

.....

b) World Bank

.....
.....

c) UNDP.....

.....

d) Others (please specify)

.....
.....

13 How are their roles and activities different from those of government?

a) NGOs.....

.....

b) World Bank

.....
.....

c) UNDP.....
.....

d) Others
.....
.....

14. Is women's role in community development in Cameroon adequately supported by legislation?

Yes.....
No.....

15. Please give reasons for your answer

.....

16. What resources are available to these women?

a) for funding

.....

b) for training

.....

c) for building capacity

.....

17. What mechanism does the government use in measuring women's output in community development?

.....
.....

18. What is your understanding of sustainable community development?

.....
.....

19. Is community development in Cameroon sustainable? Yes/No

20. Please, give reasons for your answer

.....
.....

21. What leadership characteristics do you look for in organisations that aim to work
for women in the community development process?

.....

22. What does women's empowerment mean in policy terms?

23 How important is women's empowerment for community development in Cameroon?

24 Is the government supporting the process of women's Empowerment in Cameroon?

25. Please explain how

General Questionnaires

Who are the people that you think contribute more to the community development process than others? (Please, use a scale of 1-5, where 5 is the highest and 1 the least)

Women....

F) Government.....

Men....

G) NGOs.....

Youth...

H) World Bank.....

Church

I) UNDP.....

Do women play the same roles as men in the community development

3. Do you think women should be given the same opportunity as men to be leaders

in the community? If yes how?

6 If no why not?

.....

7. In your view, who is responsible for developing the community? (choose one or more)

Government.....
The members of the community....
The government and the people...
The local council and the people....
Others.....(please specify)

8. Who should make important decisions about development in your community? (choose one or more)

Community leaders
Community members and leaders
The government and community leaders...
The government and community members
Women.....

9. Who has carried out the most successful community development projects in your community so far? (choose one or more)

The community members.....
The government.....
Women.....
NGOs.....(specify)
Others.....(please specify)

10. Do you feel left out or involved in the community development process in your community? **Yes/No**

11. Please give reasons for your answer.

.....
.....

12. Is the government helping women in their efforts to develop their communities?

Yes/No

13 Please give reasons for your answer.

.....
.....

14. Do you think that women are sufficiently involved in the community development process? Please give reasons for your answer.

15. What activities would you like to see women do in the community development process?

16 How can women be helped to play a greater role in community development?

17 Should women be empowered? If yes, how should they be empowered and by Who?

..... How can women's empowerment help in the process of community development?

20. Please, make any additional comments that you would like to make on the topic of community development.

Thank you for completing these questionnaires. You have taken part in a research project that I hope would add to the stock of existing knowledge and could lead to improving the lives of women in our community in the future.

Appendix 4

Example of coding technique

Interview with Mr. G. N. N. Director of Local and Community Development Yaoundé 30/11/05 (Respondent Code R1)

Q1 could you please briefly describe your role in this position?

As Director of Community and Local Development, I am the main technical person of the department responsible for coordinating the affairs of the department. I supervise all other staff, run the budget of the department and together with other specialist staff of other offices in this department draw up programmes and see to their implementation. I also follow up all programmes and report to the minister.

Q2 Can I ask you what is your understanding of community development?

Community Development is about moving people or a community to a point. It is about stirring them and getting them involved in decisions that affect their community. It is about giving people roles of leadership to manage and sustain the development of their own community. **(DCD)**

Q3 How important is Community development for Cameroon?

Community development is very important for Cameroon because it acts as the bulldozer or catalyst that speeds up local development. It is the approach to development that is most welcome by the people because it tends to get them involved in the planning and execution of projects. Government sees it as liaison between the people and central government. **(ICD)**

Q4 who are the main actors involved in CD in Cameroon?

These include beneficiary communities, the villages, various Community Based Organisations (CBO), NGOs, Elites Associations and the Government. **(ACD)**

Q5 How is the Government supporting women's role in CD in Cameroon?

The role of women is very important. There can be hardly any development without the involvement of women. **(WRCD)** The government has recognized this and is supporting it in various ways. There are recent policies drawn up to favour women's involvement in development throughout the country. The government wishes to increase the quota of women involved in decisions-making. Already most staff of this department are now women because they understand other women better. The government is also trying to target women in most development projects and to increase their percentage and numbers in all development committees. **(GPFW)**

Q6 What resources are available for promoting women's role in CD and do you think that women are adequately being supported?

Resources available to promote women's role in CD include financial, material and technical resources. (**RFW**) The government tries to give financial assistance where possible. We also provide assistance in the form of material to some women's groups, but most assistance is technical though some of our well trained staff. But not all get the support needed at the right time. There are always inadequate resources and not all government's action can be satisfactory to all members of the community. We recognize this but we are always working hard to do our best. (**IGR**)

Q7 How is women's empowerment understood in policy terms in Cameroon?

Women's empowerment is about placing women in a position for their opinion to be heard. It is about improving their financial status and low education and giving them leadership roles. It is not about struggle with men over power or position. (**DWE**)

Q8 How important is Women's Empowerment for CD in Cameroon?

Women's Empowerment is important because it is essential to have another voice in the development process in Cameroon. Women make up more than half of the population and constitute a force in the development process. Women have been recognized as the backbone of the rural economy responsible for production of most of the food that feeds the nation and export some. Women's Empowerment will increase their influence in the community and they can contribute more to the development of the country. (**IWE**)

Q9 What major problems do you face in your role in promoting women at the grassroots level?

The major problem is the lack of adequate finances from government. The lack of technical personnel, basic equipment and logistics are also some of the problems. Socio-cultural factors such as men dominating their wives and local customs and traditional practices are among some the many problems faced in this position. Also most women in the rural areas are illiterate or have very low levels of education which makes communication and training very difficult. (**CP**) Political factors also affect my work in this position. For example some appointments of staff are influenced by political factors and the distributions of resources for development are also sometimes dependent on political factors. (**FCG**)

Q10 How is your relationship with other development partners and stakeholders involved in CD in Cameroon?

All government departments relate well with all the development partners in Cameroon. We have good relations with bilateral organisations such as UNDP and the other big NGOs. We sometimes try to get involved in their activities for collaborative purposes in order not to work in diversity and duplicate functions and waste resources. Government is trying to sign a convention with the NGOs about this. Most NGOs are doing very well but a few have been ineffective wasting resources. (**RNGOS**)

Q11 Do you have any question to ask me or any comment about this research?

What I have to say is that your research topic is very interesting and will be very useful for Cameroon. Government cannot do all and Community Development has to do the rest with government support. So it is very important subject for our country. What people achieved by themselves is well looked after rather than some thing just given or imposed to them by someone from outside. Good luck with your research. (IOR)

Explanatory notes about the interview

I explain below the meaning of the codes used above to identify the important points from this interview that have form the basis of my theoretical framework for the thesis.

Key to Codes:

R1 Stands for all respondents representing government sources from Yaoundé

ACD Actors in Community development

CP Communication problem

DCD Definition of Community Development

DWE Definition of Women's Empowerment

FCG Factors causing the gap between what programmes purport to deliver and What is actually received at grassroots.

GPFW Government policy for women's advancement

ICD Importance of Community development

IWE Importance of Women's Empowerment

IOR Importance of the research

RNGO Role of NGOs in the development of Cameroon

IGR Inadequate government resources to meet everyone's need

RFW Resources available to women

WRCD Women's role in Community Development

Appendix 5

Interview schedules

The following interviews were conducted throughout the study

1. Provincial Delegate of Women's Empowerment (F)	28/10/05
2. President Akum Progress Women (F)	31/10/05
3. Divisional Delegate of Women's Empowerment (F)	03/11/05
4. President Harmony Ladies Bambui (F)	26/11/05
5. Provincial Chief of Community Development (M)	09/12/05
6. Chief of Bureau for Community Development (F)	09/12/05
7. President Union of Bafut Women (F)	11/12/05
8. Treasurer Batibo Women (F)	12/12/05
9. President Al-Chris-Wov (F)	14/12/05
10. Coordinator COMINSUD (M)	14/12/05
11. Coordinator GHAPE (M)	16/12/05
12. Coordinator WINHEECAM (M)	16/12/05
13. Coordinator SNV (F)	16/12/05
14. Secretary MBOSCUDA (F)	18/12/05
15. DED Representative (F)	25/11/05
16. President SHOFF WYANE (F)	27/01/06
17. Community Worker Bamenda (F)	26/01/06
18. Social Worker Bamenda (F)	26/01/06
19. Bayam Sellam (F)	15/01/06
20. President Tubah women's Forum (F)	20/01/06
21. BACUDA women Representative (F)	05/12/05
22. BACUDA President (M)	03/12/05
23. Buea University graduate (F)	23/01/06

24. Buea University Graduate (M)	23/01/06
25. Staff of Women's Studies Dept. Buea University (F)	23/01/06

Interviews in Yaoundé

26. Director of Community and Local Development (M)	01/12/05
27. Director of local Engineering (M)	02/12/05
28. Chief of Bureau women's Programmes (F)	02/12/05
29. Chief of Service for the promotion of Women's Rights (F)	02/12/05
30. Senior staff in charge of Local development (M)	05/12/05
31. Deputy Director of Community and Local Development (M)	05/12/05
32. Chief of Service in charge of Women's Rights (F)	05/12/05
33. Chief in charge of Women's Entrepreneurship (F)	06/12/05
34. Chief in charge of Women's Projects (F)	06/12/05
36. Project Coordinator UNDP (M)	17/01/06
37. Project Officer BHC (M)	17/01/06
38. Village development worker (M)	22/01/06

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