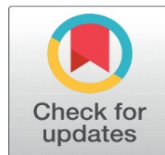


URBAN DECENTRALIZATION AND QUALITY OF LIFE: INSIGHTS OF TOURISM SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS IN CAMEROON

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ABSTRACT

One of the main objectives of tourism development (TD) is to enhance the quality of life (QOL) of communities and stakeholders. The enhancement of tourism activities can progressively enhance the popular possibilities for community regeneration. Decentralization in the tourism sector will enhance the livelihood of residents and stakeholders. This study aimed at investigating how decentralization in the tourism sector can enhance and improve the life of tourism stakeholders and the local residents. This research is a qualitative research that involves the stakeholders from various public and private tourism sectors in both the English and French speaking regions in Cameroon (both control by a single government). In addition, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with relevant key informants. The results indicate that tourism is still at its unawareness and infant stage. Vital outcomes suggest that, while respondents generally agreed that decentralization has many positive benefits on tourism stakeholders, such benefits are often concentrated at government level (centralized), or contained within privately owned businesses. The lack of decentralization sharing can be attributed to the low level of involvement of residents and stakeholders in the sector, unsuitable management practices that promote neither inclusiveness, nor the nomination of resident. The study recommends that policies and strategies that encourage urban development should be decentralized rather than centralized in the country, to ensure that the appropriate structures are put in place for the equitable distribution of the economic benefits to resident to enhance their quality of life. This paper is to demonstrate how well decentralization can enable and improve the life of tourism stakeholders.

Keywords: Decentralization, Urban Areas, Tourism, Development, Cameroon, Stakeholders

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1. INTRODUCTION

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, tourism has been the fastest growing industry in the globe today and has played a significant role in the economic impact. In 2019, about 334 million people worked directly or indirectly in tourism [UNWTO. \(2020\)](#). The enhancement of tourism activities can progressively enhance the popular

possibilities for community regeneration. When a country or community becomes tourism-oriented, depending on the stages of tourism development, it will increase the number of tourists visiting that area [Sharpley and Telfer \(2015\)](#). Over the past years, the governance structure of Cameroon has not been transitioned from a central to a decentralize structure, and as of 2019, local communities now have no authority to make decisions about urban planning and development, with these changes in governance system, there is the inability for decentralization to function smoothly. Decentralization in the tourism sector will enhance the livelihood of residents as well as that of the stakeholders if properly implemented [Kimbu et al. \(2022\)](#). According to [Sutiyo et al. \(2020\)](#), decentralization means transferring power and responsibility from the higher to the lower levels of government “closer to the people”. It can also be referring as the transfer of authority from a central government to a sub-national entity, [Lambright \(2022\)](#). In this case, decentralization means you give the total freedom to the tourism councils to manage the funds, resources and the government comes at the end to examine if all works have been properly executed. The tourism councils choose the plans and make all the studies, and then funds are transferred to the councils. There are many instances where tourism plans are formulated at the top level and implemented by those at the lower level has not gain any desired outcomes. The reason for this is that the formulation of plans by the central government might be out of the needs of the stakeholders and is not based on detailed knowledge of the local environment. Once the tourism sector can greatly focus and embrace the system of decentralization instead of centralization, the stakeholders are likely to experience positive impacts, decisions are made in a timely manner, and the stakeholders are motivated. In other words, once a communal becomes a tourist most visited place, it can improve the daily lives of the local residents and can be transformed by the existence of the overlapping numbers of tourists and tourist-oriented activities [Eluwole et al. \(2022\)](#) depending on the phase of tourism development (TD) in their communal.

The past years, the effects of TD on QOL of residents have gained extensive consideration [Woo et al. \(2015\)](#) such as testing the bond amongst tourists’ QOL and travelled skills or attitudes. In the other direction, researchers focused on TD and its consequences on QOL of local residents in tourist destinations, but very few studies have elaborated on the aspect of decentralization in the tourism sector. Hence, the current study will expand and throw more light on centralization and decentralization in the tourism sector and its impact on the stakeholders and the local residents. Adopting the system of decentralization will maximize the potentials and aid destinations’ stakeholders without conciliating the short and long-term environmental, social, and cultural principles of the destination, [Liu et al. \(2020\)](#).

The development of tourism has been perceived to be a process of associating and developing a huge amount of the sub-Saharan Africa location [Mbaiwa \(2005\)](#). In spite of the fact that tourism is one of the fast and increased growing industries in the world today, Cameroon encountered several pitfalls and trials in this industry, unlike joblessness, increasing poverty rate, severe political instability, bribery, and exploitation, etc. Cameroon is still an emerging economy that the level of security is at the minimal rate. The tourism sector in Cameroon functions under a centralized structure of government that is the department of tourism and leisure (MINTOUR) and it has an effect on the enhancement of tourism. Decentralization in tourism can play a major role in promoting and enhancing tourism activities and good governance. Decentralization may not always be applicable in every case, most especially with standardized, routine, and network-based services. It can lead to the damage of economic of scale, control over limited economic possessions by the essential authority. Executive responsibilities may be given to the locals, without

sufficient economic assets and make reasonable supply of service area more challenging. Decentralization can be more complex in coordinating of national policy and may allow functions to be captured by the local communities. Essential national matters and ultimately has the authority to redesign the system if decentralization systems are not functioning effectively. With decentralization, there is a higher level of transparency of the state activities as stakeholders and communities can better comprehend the state activities at the local level, [Natision et al. \(2022\)](#). It is vital to note that decentralization does not mean that all authority and powers should be dedicated. The top authorities may retain a core of functions over essential concisely; decentralization in the tourism sector can have good and bad effects on the participants and the residents. Looking at decentralization from the positive point of view, it can make ways for different ideas and opinions of the stakeholders as well as a beneficiary for the states, [Yakymchuk et al. \(2021\)](#). The residents can also participate in the decision-making process. From the negative point of view, decentralization reduces economies of scale in the arrangement and plan of the state's services and creating a forum for mismatch among the spatial incident profits for the state's services. For the past years, decentralization has become the widest movements in the world of development. Decentralization enables the states to be more responsive to local needs by allowing different levels of consumption to the preference of homogeneous groups, [Ino and Watanabe \(2021\)](#). Numerous researchers such as [Zinyama \(2021\)](#), proposed that decentralization of TD (e.g., from central to indigenous residents' administrations and societies) is a necessity to ensure effective TD in most countries in Africa. The main objective of TD is to frame and device strategies that offer high-quality tourist experiences and high quality of life for the local community [Obradović et al. \(2021\)](#). Achieving this goal has become a vital challenge in Cameroon in particular and Africa in general. Tourism has been a vital economic approach for many societies which they have taken this advantage to improve their quality of life [Liang et al. \(2021\)](#). Tourism development can be seen as a tool for enhancing and promoting economic growth and even development by generating of charge for exchanging currency, increased and enhance job opportunities, an attraction of external assets or investment, and advancement of financial freedom [Khan et al. \(2021\)](#). Tourism development has been seen to improved resident financial prudence; invite external investments and improved community infrastructure as well as the quality of life of residents.

1.1. RESEARCH GAP/CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

Numerous studies have examined the impact of tourism development on guests' quality of life or the local population. Some studies research the interface between tourism development and sustainability and also deal with rural areas. However, there is a need for further research to identify subjective and objective urban decentralization on the quality of life of stakeholders and local residents. Also, current developments (e.g., urban decentralization on the quality of life) make increased attention to the tourism development of urban areas even more important [Brandl et al. \(2021\)](#). Therefore, this paper attempts to bridge the gap between urban decentralization of tourism and its impact on residents' quality of life.

Tourism was not well developed in Cameroon during the 80s. In those days, West African Airline was not well operated. The ruling president at that time decided to establish Cameroon Airlines in order to boost the tourism sector. This opens up to touristic sites such as the Waza Nationwide Country Park in the

northern parts of Cameroon and the sector started to develop. The encouragement of the local airlines brought in tourism development, enabling people to move from the villages to the cities. Tourism can help to boost the economy if more attention is paid to tourism development and planning.

The country is one of the richest nations in West African in relations to natural possessions unlike timber. On the other hand, the country is still facing several glitches which slows down the growth of tourism and thus affecting the local communities, [Njinyah and Pendati \(2021\)](#), such as no substantial structures, insufficient structures for the growth of an effective tourism sector, lack of good transportation network or system and healthcare facilities, persistent poverty which is still to be eliminated. Security protection and wellbeing, tourism info or materials, facilities are also absent, making it problematic to offer standards of facilities and services which TD entails. With the Anglophone crises, English speaking Cameroonians are being killed massively by the French Cameroon government because they are demanding for their rights to rule and owned their own territory. There is also a lack of economic resources to finance tourism development projects in Cameroon and lack of educated human resources in the tourism sector.

1.2. AIM OF THE STUDY

In the light of the above framework, the purpose of this paper is to scrutinize how decentralization in the tourism sector can improve the QOL of tourism stakeholders and resident. Despite the potentials of tourism and its developments, just a slight consideration has been paid to decentralization tourism plans in order to enhance development in Cameroon. The government of Cameroon should focus on decentralization instead of centralization in order to promote development and create more vital opportunities for the stakeholders. The government of Cameroon focuses mostly on party-political and commercial, financial desires, forgetting to know that tourism is the fastest growing activities in the world as well as in the sub Saharan in general and Cameroon in particular. Therefore, this study will furnish and bring out a strong image of glitches and drawbacks that are linked to TD and centralization instead of “decentralization” in Cameroon, especially, in relative to the community sector as the vanguard of TD. This research will involve participants from various public and private sector representatives. This will cover some selected regions from both the French and the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, such as Yaoundé, which is the capital of Cameroon, (French speaking region), Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon (French speaking region) Bamenda and Buea, (the two English speaking regions).

Cameroon trade and industry has encountered and experience some shortcomings due to the occurrence of many situations backgrounds sustaining its financial activities. There is substantial dysfunction, shadowed by the poor justification in the unit of plans, unsatisfactory circulation in regional growth. The nation has reexamined and review its expansion process notably by mainstreaming into a wider and outsmarting strategy agenda. The nation of Cameroon functions under a resilient scheme of a centralize administration or regime, thus making the result development to be very sluggish and slim, thus having a little or no significant in enhancing the quality of life of residents. Utmost assessments are prepared by the officials of tourism and then enacted on the cloistered sectors and the participants or investors. If choices made can be highly decentralize or from the bottommost to the top slant and linking all participants and the local community in this practice, then there will be a lot of possibilities to descend from tourism and its development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. DECENTRALIZATION CONCEPT

It has been widely agreed that decentralization can enhance policymaking. It makes policies more responsive to the stakeholders' demand (a facet which sometimes abandon by centralized tourism planning [Scott \(2021\)](#) takes local differences into account empowers local residents and other stakeholders [Gohori et al. \(2021\)](#), and strengthens political accountabilities [Zhu and Zhao \(2018\)](#). Decentralization can also enhance tourism performance of regions by invigorating competition, [Weng et al. \(2021\)](#) among governments that have to use their resources efficiently to outshine alternative tourism destinations. However, the help of decentralization are hardly contend, [Webster and Ivanov \(2014\)](#), and they may not emerge as expected due to several factors such as lack of local economic resources [Ha and Kumar \(2021\)](#). Incompetent regional governance, or failure in condition among the main stakeholders [Sengupta et al. \(2021\)](#). Decentralization can also pave the way to tourism development and planning by allowing the stakeholders to act on the behalf of the central government. It will also improve regional performance in the tourism sector. Decentralization should be implemented in the tourism sector in Cameroon because it will lead to greater economic growth.

Decentralization can also refer as the effort to bring cooperation to the lower levels of the organization. In the process of decentralization, only broad powers are reserve at the top, such as the power to plan, organize, direct and control. Decentralization is just the opposite of centralization. In the process of centralization, authority is mostly concentrated at the top level of management. In a large organization, decentralization should be reinforced so that the decision-making process can be faster and better. Since decisions do not have to be referred up through the hierarchy. It also provides opportunity to learn by doing decentralization also gives room for good atmosphere, where there is freedom to make decision, freedom to make judgments and freedom to act. Decentralization is a natural development when the organization grows large and complex, [Cheng et al. \(2021\)](#).

2.1.1. QUALITY OF LIFE CONCEPT (QOL)

Other disciplines, along with psychology, sociology, and gerontology, considers the quality of life in marginally contrasting terms, such as happiness or joy, psychological well-being, subjective well-being, life satisfaction, quality of life, [Mouratidis \(2021\)](#). Those words have been used conversely. In order to better elaborate on this, quality of life can be defined or elaborated in different ways [Purwanto et al. \(2021\)](#). It is quite problematic to distinguish between such terms as "well-being", "welfare", and "happiness or joy" [Tsurumi et al. \(2021\)](#). QOL simple refers to as one's satisfaction with life and feelings of contentment, happiness, or fulfilment with a person's experiences in the world. It also reflects individuals' views and feelings about their lives. Different individuals may anticipate identical situations and circumstances differently. Therefore, many researchers argue that QOL is the appropriate research ever from the perspective of people [Choe et al. \(2021\)](#). The non-economic actions of TD, such as QOL, have concentrated more in tourism effect studies and works [Uysal et al. \(2012\)](#). Nowadays, local residents rely or depend on tourism development to enhance their standard of living; this can be elaborated through the individual's life domain [Roberts et al. \(2022\)](#). Researchers

have pinpointed seven of the famously used life domains such as physical well-being, healthiness, efficiency, closeness, welfare and security, community, and emotion, happiness. These seven areas of subjective well-being were agreed and implemented not only in theoretical QOL studies but also in tourism studies (e.g., [Kim et al. \(2013\)](#), [Moscardo et al., 2013](#), [Woo et al. \(2015\)](#)). Furthermore, the QOL scale that has been extensively acknowledged with items of QOL needs to be reconsidered. First, healthiness and household (family) life had been incorporated and added in the different other QOL scales (e.g., [Kim et al. \(2013\)](#), [McCabe & Johnson, 2013](#), [Woo et al. \(2015\)](#)) and has gained the uppermost occurrence in numbers.

Household/Family lifetime is a vital aspect, especially in the Asian population [Wang et al. \(2021\)](#). Household/Family life could be grouped into a universal family operational and dyadic link within the family [Wang et al. \(2021\)](#), measure against three instruments: “family relations,” “family actions/events,” and “family pay/revenue” [Guo et al. \(2013\)](#). Therefore, a neighbourhood or a communal within a pleasant-sounding locality, access to excellent teaching and health amenities and services can also captivate rich people and tourist. Therefore, “community health situations,” “schooling/teaching situations and expansion/ growth,” and “amicable locality” can also be extended to the new QOL measurement. We can also comprehend the fact that when a locality/community or neighbourhood converts to a tourist location, residents or local inhabitants have more interaction with visitors and can create encounters with new individuals, who may become decent friends/families. This will donate to the locals/residents’ emotive happiness/comfort and helps to promote QOL [Berbekova and Uysal \(2021\)](#). numerous research, which has been carried out on the effects of tourism, indicate that TD could help enhance communities’ social amenities, such as recreation facilities and parks [Mahmoudi et al. \(2022\)](#). These social developments will enhance fair pricing for vacation/relaxation amenities/service in communities. These new establishments mean more employment opportunities and better salaries for the local residents, the creation of infrastructure and superstructures, fair prices for leisure, entertainment and better wages for the local community. Water, air, soil, and noise contamination happen regularly in many tourism communities are closely linked to the community’s daily lives. Most of these studies have gained the attention of the tourism impacts, adopting objective indicators of community quality of life [Mahmoudi et al. \(2022\)](#). In this case, one can say that the effects of tourism on the community/residents affects numerous stakeholders and one of the vital stakeholder classes is the community residents. There is a need to better comprehend how tourism affects community residents’ general sense of wellbeing and emerging tourism with the objective of enhancing residents’ QOL.

2.1.2. DIMENSION OF QUALITY OF LIFE (QOL)

Quite a number of academic works/papers have developed broad domains or dimensions of QOL, while analysing and synthesizing many years of QOL studies, hypothesized that the following dimensions and indicators seem to seizure the body of the study on QOL [Kori \(2021\)](#):

- 1) Feelings and psychological well-being: safety, spirituality, happiness or joy, freedom from stress, self-concept, contentment.
- 2) Interpersonal and social relationships: intimacy, feelings, family, interactions and connection, friendships, supports.

- 3) Material well-being, such as jobs and economic security and safety: ownership, financial stability, security, food, jobs, possessions, social economic status, shelter.
- 4) Personal advancement, capability, and ambitions: education, skills, and abilities, fulfilment, personal competence, deliberated activity, advancement.
- 5) Physical well-being, like wellness and recreation/leisure: health, nutrition, recreation, mobility, health care, health insurance, leisure, activities of day-to-day life
- 6) Self-determination, personal curb, and decisions: freedom, choices, decisions, personal discipline, self-direction, personal goals/values
- 7) Social inclusion, dignity, and worth: acceptance, prominence, supports, work environment, societal activities, roles, volunteer activities, residential environment
- 8) Rights, such as privacy: privacy, voting, access, due process, ownership, civic authorities

In the past decades, QOL has a vital issue with a wide range of discussion in the tourism and hospitality literature. Residents are likely to acknowledge tourism potentials in their various societies and communities that later on change their lives and their way of thinking, ready to embrace new changes such as multi-culture. There is a huge aspect of QOL definitions and models. Most definitions and models stated that joy, life satisfaction, and well-being are closely related to QOL. [Logan \(2021\)](#) stated that people general life satisfaction is the function of others satisfaction sphere like community, work, family, recreation and leisure and every realm is a function of its sub-territory.

2.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Earlier studies linked the growth and expansion objectives with community level of participating process [Siakwah et al. \(2020\)](#). In addition, community tourism has expanded the consideration of tourism researchers due to its potentials and hidden accomplishment of development and expansion outcomes in enhancing the QOL of the local residents. Tourism development and community participation can result in improved community well-being or the QOL of residents since they are guided by shared interests. Tourism development and community development can be achieved and successful through the formation and creation of formal and informal relations, empowering the residents to act on community-wide goals. Different types of theories have been mentioned linking to community development such as Interactional Theory, Stakeholders Theory, and Social Exchange Theory. According to the Interactional Theory [Matarrita-Cascante et al. \(2012\)](#), the residents work collectively in achieving community or organizational goal, sharing ideas, and knowledge. When there is a successful long term and social exchange relations between stakeholders and local residents, there is a creation of positive attitudes towards the associated businesses [Chan et al. \(2021\)](#). The Interactional Theory can improve the QOL of stakeholders by increasing the number of attractions and recreation opportunities. This offers stakeholders and residents opportunities to meet interesting individuals, create friendships, and exposed themselves to new perspectives. Social Exchange and Stakeholders Theory encourage network relationships among the stakeholders and the residents by analysing their role in building up an effective tourism development plans and cooperation's across

national borders among stakeholders and local residents. It can also be a source of advantage and restraint for the knowledge sharing and management in distributed organization [Baudry and Chassagon \(2012\)](#). Stakeholders can also experience various cultural practices, enriches experiences, widen horizons, and increases insights and appreciation for other approaches to living. Stakeholders should be allowed to formulate and implements goals that may lead to development. They should be able to plan and manage tourism related activities. Tourism capabilities or abilities can shape the quality of life of residents; a need arises to comprehend fundamental interactional rudiments that lead to the development of community-oriented procedures resulting in tourism-led expansion outcomes.

2.3. CONSEQUENCES OF TOURISM ON THE RESIDENT QOL, (CTRQOL)

Numerous research has pinpointed the potential effects of tourism. The impact and consequences of tourism have gone viral in the manner that communities are bent to enhance tourism development or enhancement. Communities expect tourism potentials to increase and improve their standard of living. This can be done through the increase of tourism products, which residents can also have the privilege to enjoy, such as festivals, cultural attractions and outdoor recreation and potentials. QOL can increase jobs availabilities and revenues. On the other hand, tourism can negatively influence QOL. There will be overcrowding, traffic and parks challenges, abrasion amongst visitors and the local residents, changes in the residents' ways of living that can be of disadvantage to the life satisfaction to the local inhabitants, [Dang et al. \(2020\)](#).

2.4. CENTRALIZATION AND DECENTRALIZATION IN THE TOURISM SECTOR IN CAMEROON

The policy of decentralization gives missions to the councils, authorizing them to constructs touristic sites in the country, making them available and exploitable. From the bottom to the top, Cameroonians are not well sensitized on the aspect of tourism planning and development, the economic effects, and influences of tourism in the community/locality in particular and in the country in general. For achieving effective and properly implemented decentralization, the capacity of the people and the councils have to be enhanced. Cameroon is made up of ten regions with more than 300 councils but only 50 of these councils are able to "map out" their own strategies due to the high level of centralization hence there is no interest of the people about tourism. Tourism potentials in Cameroon are more than the potentials of other countries in African [Brugman \(2016\)](#). Cameroon is known as Africa miniature, which implies that cultures in other African counties can be found in Cameroon. If you visit Cameroon, you have visited Africa. The country has been undergoing crises; political, economic, and social crisis, tourism cannot be developed under such conditions. Tourism development in Cameroon is still at its infant stage. With the ongoing political crises in Cameroon, tourism can never be at the forefront, this can only be possible when the country has solved its ongoing crises and when the communities and the stakeholders have been empowered and more awareness created on tourism planning and development. It has been argued that the growth of tourism involves the establishment of an actual decentralization tourism network in which representatives' stakeholders and the local communities are militarized into a scheme of act that promotes and improves the probabilities of a successful TD in a more inclusive manner and are able to consider a wider range

of community issues. Tourism should not only be deliberated by the officials of tourism, it should comprise of stakeholders and the involvement of residents, this will help to improve growth, creation of employment for the residents, enhance their life quality, upsurge income in the tourism sector and fascinate more tourists entries into the state. Tourism system in Cameroon can be mobilized to promote and improve better QOL of the residents as well as tourism development. Tourism in Cameroon should develop roles that are inspiring for local people, [Nyikana et al. \(2021\)](#), “allow people to develop them slaves, which will promote and enhance the quality of life of residents. The reasons, why TD has not really been effective or faces a lot of trials, is because many sub-Saharan nations function at a central system of administration, majority of the decisions-making come from the officials of tourism which means residents are not meant to make choices but rather just to agree upon. The nation functions under a strong system of a federal or central administration, thus making the decision process to be sluggish and slender and not yielding any positive impacts on the lives of the local communities. Many books/articles have confirmed that TD has not yet been able to enter effectively in African in general and Cameroon in particular due to the lack of negotiation and adequate management amongst numerous community actors [Musavengane and Klopppers \(2020\)](#). Social capital: An asset towards public resilience in the cooperative natural resource’s organization of community-based tourism systems/structures and difficulties related with marketing and packaging. If TD effectively enters into Cameroon and in Africa, it will be a business of “selling dreams” [Jonker and Robinson \(2018\)](#). The challenged faced in most sub-Saharan nations are the need to donate the different roles of the private local and foreign TD decisions in Africa. The main subject here is that those who have broader economic significances for Africa in general and Cameroon precise, make economic decisions. There’s a need for developed HR mainly native personnel both for delivering excellence services and for enhancing general abilities and skills for the local workforce.

Plans and actions can enhance tourism potentials, or it can reduce the extent of negative impacts. It is vital for the community to comprehend the wide range of scope of impacts and to come to an agreement on what positive impacts to emphasize on. It is so important to know and pinpoint negative impacts so plans and action can be taken to reduce and prevent them. There should be a clear statement of the community vision of tourism and an essential part of the community comprehensive plans. When there are active plans, it directs tourism towards the community goals, clarifying tourism role and bring together multiple interests all for the benefit of the community as well as the stakeholders.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. THE RESEARCH POPULATION AND THE STUDY AREA

This study is based on a qualitative research which implies that the questions are designed to answer questions through interviews from the tourism stakeholders, local resident public and private sector in tourism industry. The respondents comprises:

Government Representatives

- Ministry of Tourism and Leisure (MINTOUR)
- Ministry of Culture (MINCULT)
- Ministry of Transport (MINTRANS)
- Ministry of Public Works

- National Tourism Council (NTC)
- National Training Institutions

Private Industry Stakeholders

- National Association of Hotel/Restaurant Operators
- National Association of Tour Operators and Travel Agents
- Hotels, Motels, B&Bs, Food and beverage providers
- Recreational operators
- Tourism Services Organizers
- Natural and Cultural Attractions providers
- Private Training Institutions

Civil Society Organizations/Movements

- International NGOs
- Local NGOs
- Community Groups and Associations

This study was carried out in Cameroon in both French and the English-speaking regions. The questions were translated from English to French by a professional bilingual instructor for better understanding for the French participants, which implies that back-to-back translation was required. It involves stakeholders of the tourism industry that are highly experiencing tourism development in areas like Bamenda, Buea, Yaoundé, and Douala.

3.2. DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLING METHOD

This research was carried with symbolic stakeholders working in Cameroon's tourism industry. The researchers reached the saturated point or level where all the responses seem to be similar. The applicants/participant were chosen based on their efficient roles and complexity of knowledge about tourism, stakeholder relations through the judgmental sampling method in relative to the study goals [Mason \(2002\)](#). The research was also based on a grounded theory rather than a case study. This can be elaborated as the development of the theory occurs after one has finished gathering or collecting the data (thinking and acting). It also consists of establishing categories of information (coding) choosing one of the categories and positions it within a theoretical model. Coding is the process by which the data is bracketed and organized, writing sentences representing categories in the margins [Rallis and Rossman \(2012\)](#). It consists of text, pictures or even images taken during the data collection, categorizing and labeling them based on the real language of the participants.

Phone calls were made to set up appointments and the researchers clearly state the purpose of the research and ensures that their private information will be kept confidential. The study was carried out from 22 January 2018 to 22 February 2018 (period of one month), during working hours from 10 am-3pm, 15 to 20 minutes for each participant (working 5 hours per day). Themes were developed base on the responses of the participants. To guarantee anonymity and confidentiality, participants are indicated as stakeholder groups and numbers for example (respondent 1) than real names. The semi-structured / open-ended dialogues and meetings were one-on-one, tape-record, and later transcribed. This research gave

an insight scope on how tourism development, centralized and decentralization of tourism has been defined in Cameroon and its potentials to the local communities.

4. RESULTS

The demographic profiles of the respondents are summarized at the table given below.

Table 1

Table 1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents				
Respondent	Number of participants	Age range	Gender	
			Males	Females
Government	7	30 -45	3	4
Private industry stakeholders	6	30-65	6	0
Civil society organization/movement	7	30-65	2	5

During the data collection process, one of the respondents said, “

Decentralization policies give some missions to the councils which imply that councils have authorities over the constructions of touristic sites to be available and exploitable”.

People are not well informed about tourism, especially in the case of Cameroon. One of the respondents from the ministry of tourism said,

“The capacities of the councils need to be enhanced”.

Cameroon has ten regions with more than 300 councils, and the capacities of these councils have been enhanced. A respondent from the ministry said,

“There is no access to touristic sites because of poor or bad network transportation” and high level of insecurity”.

Another respondent said,

“Those who think tourism is centralized are those who only sit down in their offices and makes decisions. Tourism is not in the office. It is out of the office, and it should not be centralized, it should be decentralized, the government should not decide if I have to build a hotel. The government should only come in to make sure the hotel is built under the legal norms.”

When asked, do you think tourism development in Cameroon is centralized or decentralized? *“The tourism industry in Cameroon is highly centralized”.*

A respondent from a travel agency said,

“There are many travel agencies in Cameroon today, but before operating a travel agency, a substantial amount of money has to be deposited to the ministry of tourism call coition but today we have many handbag travel agencies. Some of these agencies will go to the service provider and get the software and starts operating illegally which the government is not aware.” “The villagers do not consider tourism as an income generator because they are not well sensitized,” said one of the respondents. “Tourism is like a globe, it deals with other sectors such as transportation, culture, environmental issues etc. tourism is more of a transverse,”

Said one of the respondents’.

“My Job is in line with what I study in the university”, said another respondent from a travel agency. “The government is more interested in the funds rather than the development of the people and that of tourism,”

Respondents from a private organization.

“Tourism can’t be developed when the country is undergoing both political and economic crises, it will be effective when the country has solved its crises”, said another respondent when ask the same question.

The common points mentioned by the respondents (how decentralization and centralization is been perceived in the tourism sector by both the public and the private sector) are grouped under the themes and classifications shown at [Table 2](#).

Table 2

Table 2 Themes and Classifications	
Themes	Categories
Availability of touristic sites	No access to most of the touristic sites. Poor network transportation. Some touristic sites that were selected for development, is still underdeveloped.
Unawareness of tourism	1) Cameroonians are not well informed about tourism. 2) Many tourism staffs are not well educated about tourism planning and development because they are coming from a different background such as communication and road constructions. 3) Not enhancing the capacity of the councils. 4) Lack of destination brand. 5) Implementers are graduated from different departments (not even from the school of tourism). 6) No international forum organized. 7) Tourism needs to be nurtured (protected). 8) With technology, tourism is going viral. (Availability of information through social media).
Tourism not well exploited	1) Not many workshops about tourism development. 2) Encourage national tourism.
Economic and social impacts of tourism in the community	1) Improved infrastructures. 2) Enhances development. 3) Nothing in tourism deteriorates. 4) It brings employment opportunities 5) Tourism is that industry that grows everywhere. 6) My family looks up to me for basic needs and survival.
Financial resources and Mismanagement of funds	1) The government is more interested in the funds rather than the constructions of tourist sites. 2) Much money has been transferred to improve tourism development, but very little job has been done. 3) Most Members of Parliament want to invest in their local areas or villages that there are no tourism potentials in these areas. 4) Hindering the development of tourism.

Various tourism potentials/benefits	1) Better life if the government improves tourism development. 2) Beaches, mountains, zoos, local kingdoms, national parks.
Employment facilities	1) More staffs need to be recruited in the tourism sectors.
Safety and security	Some sites cannot be exploited because of a high level of insecurity. Boko Haram (a Muslim terrorist group) and kidnappers have made it difficult to exploit this area.
Nepotism and favouritism in the tourism ministry	Most staffs are coming from different backgrounds, but since they have relatives and friends as top officials, recruitments for them becomes easy
Lack of communication	Information is not well channelled to the staffs. Lack of good customer services. Verbal and physical Harassment of tourist by police and security officers.
1) Life before working at the tourism sector 2) Present livelihood	1) Was difficult, challenging, was into commencing, was a farmer, and was a teacher. 2) It is satisfactory; it has improved my standard of living, change of vision, fixed income.

According to the results of the research, most of the staffs in the tourism ministry have limited knowledge about sustainable tourism development. Most of these staffs are coming from different backgrounds such as schools of communication and journalism, from a road construction company, students from universities while other from the school of youth and sports. Out of the 20 interviewees, only two of the respondents said their jobs are in line with what they study in their universities.

One of the respondents stated, *"I can't actually remember the date since I am coming from the school of communication and journalism"*.

The research found out that the staff, especially in the ministry of tourism, are recruited through the "back door". A question was asked the previous experiences of the respondents before starting to work at the ministry. One of the respondent said,

"I was working in a different sector. When the government announced the recruitment of staffs in the ministry of tourism, I was asked by someone who works in the tourism sector to compile my documents and brings to him, that's how I started working in the ministry of tourism". "Touristic sites in Cameroon are not been developed which is wrong" said one of the respondents. He continued by saying "when the annual budget for the year is launched members of parliament want their own village or region to be developed meanwhile there are no tourism potentials in those areas and is totally wrong. Tourism should focus on improving the lively hood of the community developing tourism potentials which can attract tourist into the nation and thus improved the country's income/profit and the livelihood of the residents not for the personal interest of individuals"

Respondents were asked about their perception of centralized and decentralization of tourism development in Cameroon. Respondent 3 said,

"Tourism development in Cameroon is highly centralized because guides are been given to the tourism council and the hoteliers, major decisions are made by the central

government and we are bound to implement. Not all stakeholders are involved in the decision making development.

Respondent 7 said,

"The government makes all the decisions. The government will ask the organizations or tourism institutions to instruct the tourists to use the ecotourism lodge mean will the tourists will prefer to use their tents".

Respondent 8 said,

"Those who think tourism is centralized are those who just sit in their offices, and formulate decisions to be implemented by the stakeholders, it involves formulation, implementation and evaluation, tourism is out of the office not inside the office. Tourism should be decentralized and not centralized. The government should not decide if I have to build a hotel or not. The government should only come in to make sure the hotel is built under the norms.

Respondent 1 said,

"Tourism development in Cameroon is decentralized. Funds are given to the organizations, which give some missions to the councils to access touristic sites to make them available to tourists.

Respondent 10 said,

"Villagers don't consider tourism development as an income generator because it is centralized, if tourism development is centralized, it will generate income for local development and thus benefit everyone both the local residents and the stakeholders"

Most of the respondents recorded that tourism development has actually changed their way of living, positively. *"Tourism cannot be developed when the country is undergoing crisis. Tourism development will be effective when we have solved the country's crises,"* said the respondent 1 (from the ministry of tourism) while respondent 2 said, *"tourism development just came up at the right time".*

Most of the respondents elaborated on the fact that tourism is still on its unawareness and infant stage. Most of the stakeholders are not really benefitting from tourism development because no international forums or workshops have been organized and the fact that tourism needs to be nurtured.

5. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Cameroon is known as "African miniature" which means cultures in other African countries can be found in Cameroon. When you visit Cameroon, you have visited Africa. There are a lot of economic and social benefits associated with tourism development, which has really changed the lives of some tourism personnel's and stakeholders such as fixed incomes, increased their standard of living, enhance development in some areas.

The tourism sector in Cameroon is highly centralized instead of decentralized. The public sector elaborated on the fact that tourism development in Cameroon is decentralized, while the private sectors strongly disagree on the fact that tourism development is highly centralized. In addition, only two of the respondents mentioned that the tourism sector is decentralized, and they were staffs in the ministry of tourism. If the tourism sector in Cameroon is decentralized, it will generate income for local development and thus empower the local community to be able to make decisions on their own, and increased their standard of living. Tourism in Cameroon is not well developed is still undergoing development. Stakeholders are not involved in decision making in the tourism sector. This set of individuals should be part of the development and planning process because their

ideas and participation really count, because all is done for their benefits. The country has high potential in terms of natural resources unlike the Waza National Park in the northern part of Cameroon, the beaches in Douala, Kribé, and Limbe. Unfortunately, governmental policies create strong barriers to sustainable tourism development. International and domestic tourists are unable to explore and enjoy these areas. The government of Cameroon should focus on this industry because tourism is one of the rapid developing industries in the globe today. Some travel agencies in Cameroon operate under illegal circumstances. The government should be able to do regular checks and make sure all travel agencies respect the rules, regulations, and offering tourist the best satisfaction.

The process of tourism planning and development in Cameroon is still at its infant's stage due to the ongoing political and economic crises in the country, alarming rate of exploitation and dishonesty, lack of workshops and international forums to sensitize the public. Plans and projects are only written but only a few of them are executed and the rest "dumped" on the dusty shelves in tourism offices, the government should ensure that plans are implemented and properly executed.

5.1. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Firstly, this study was carried out when the country was seriously undergoing political crises none as the Anglophone or the English speaking crises, thus making it difficult to get access to the staffs and information as well, especially staffs working in the ministry of tourism. They were so skeptical of providing relevant information, thinking it can be further used against them which may lead to losing their jobs, no one is allowed to give out any information that can be used against the government of Cameroon. Therefore, the researchers have to get a proper authorization from the ministry of tourism, signing an undertaking that the information collected will not be used for any other purpose except for what it was intended.

Secondly, transportation was another pitfall. The researchers have to use public transport to get to different remote areas that the roads are not properly constructed (bad and dusty) and thus making it challenging for the researchers and to the study to be carried out smoothly.

Thirdly, high power distance was also an obstacle to the study. It was challenging meeting some of the officials in the tourism sector (especially in the ministry of tourism) series of calls and appointments have to be made before seeing these individuals, thus slowing down the research process (back and forth all the time).

Some respondents were to be contacted via emails and telephone calls but the researchers could not get across to them due to poor and limited telephones network system. This situation slowed down the carrying out of this research.

5.2. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Most of the staffs in the tourism sector have little or no information of TD and planning especially those in the ministry of tourism (since most of them are coming from different backgrounds). Workshops, training, and seminars should be organized by the ministry of tourism and leisure (MINTOUR) for these staffs to be able to acquire basic knowledge about the development and planning of tourism and thus be able to increase the knowledge capacity of the subject. MINTOUR should be

able to move from centralization to decentralization in order to aid the process of tourism and development in Cameroon.

There is a lack of good customer service in the sector of tourism. The human resources in this sector should be adequately trained on how to welcome and interact with visitors and tourists and to better handle customers complain without being rude. In addition, building communication system in order to reach the international standard is receiving highly personalities in tourism (that is business tourism contrary to leisure tourism. Tourism is a sector that comprises of hospitality; this should be practical rather than just being in papers. Excellent customer service and hospitality will help to retain tourists and attract more of them into the country, but bad customer service will help to spread negative word of mouth and thus reduce the number of tourists that are coming into the country. It will be better if the tourism official organized refresher courses for the staffs frequently. The government should improve road infrastructures, the roads are degenerating. The comportment of the security officers, they are so impolite, rude and arrogant. Tourists are been harassed and checked right down to their shoes. Security officers ought to be protective and offer guidance to the tourists. Not all touristic sites in Cameroon are linked to airlines. Tourists have to travel by road for more than ten hours, it will be perfect if these sites are been linked to the airlines in order to make the process of traveling easy and enjoyable for tourists.

Those in the diaspora who have acquired adequate knowledge about the development and planning of tourism should be able to relocate back to Cameroon and invest this knowledge in this sector. The government of Cameroon, (MINTOUR) should provide employment opportunities, services and good working conditions for its citizens, and thus increased the standard of living and their QOL. (Most Cameroonians live beyond the poverty line).

There is a huge lack of hotels, transportation network, and other social amenities. If the government can improve the potentials that are found in the tourism sector, then it will be the idea of selling dreams. The government of Cameroon should focus on the tourism sector because it has got many potentials to increase the standard of living of living and QOL, increased the country's GDP. Tourism is one of the rapid increasing industries in the world today. With the ongoing political situation in Cameroon, it will be difficult to attract tourist into the country, the government should create a peaceful atmosphere with political stability to enable tourists to visit the country.

With all these done, the country can call for the international hotel networks to build more five stars hotels to match the international standards. The tourism sector is that sector that can solve rapid unemployment rate. Decentralization in this context means you give total freedom to the councils to manage the funds. The councils choose the sites that have to be developed and funds are allocated for the smooth carry out of these projects. The government of Cameroon is more interesting on the funds rather than improving touristic site. What the stakeholders and the community see as "centralized" is the guide that has been given to them. Decision making by the government and the top officials in the tourism sector does not involve the stakeholders and the communities. Plans are made and imposed upon them; meanwhile, the community and the stakeholders are the intermediaries between the tourists and the tourism sector. For instance, the government will ask the tourists through the organizations and the councils to use the ecotourism lodge meanwhile the tourists will prefer to use their tents (centralization).

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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