

COMPARING THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY ASSOCIATIONS IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS IN DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES IN CAMEROON'S MEZAM DIVISION**William Shu Neba¹, Pius Tangwe Tanga²**

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Abstract. The purpose of this study was to compare the function of community associations in building communities in the Mezam division of Cameroon in urban and rural settings. The study employed three distinct goals, which are as follows: (1) to investigate the actions done by rural and urban community associations in establishing communities (2) to determine how the public views the functions of rural and urban community groups in developing communities, and (3) to determine the difficulties that these associations encounter in these areas. Formal questionnaires and interview guides were used to gather primary data and support from secondary sources. A simple random selection process was used to pick 571 individuals in total. The objectives were examined using descriptive statistics. According to the study, community associations in urban and rural areas participated in several projects, such as building bridges (68.5% in the urban and 61.4% in the rural), town halls (51.4% in the urban and 45.3% in the rural), culverts (42.0% in the urban and 47.4% in the rural); supplying roads (57.7% in the urban and 41.8% in the rural), electricity (33.9% in the urban and 32.6% in the rural), piped water (47.9% in the urban and 43.2% in the rural); creating market squares (35.3% in the urban and 61.1% in the rural); setting up school facilities (50% in the urban and 59.6% in the rural); clearing farmland (43.5% in the rural); and growing and harvesting crops (49.1% in the rural). This implies that community associations in the Mezam division have been working enormously towards the development of communities. To achieve better results for the benefit of these communities in the Mezam division and to promote their sustainable development, the government, civil society organizations, and stakeholders should support their joint efforts. These findings underline the vital role community associations play in sustainable development in the Mezam Division. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on community-driven development and suggests pathways for stakeholder engagement and policy interventions.

Keywords: associations, Cameroon, community, development, Mezam Division, role.

INTRODUCTION. Since the dawn of time, individuals have formed groups for numerous reasons based on common traits [1]; consequently, various associations have emerged within our communities. Community associations (CAs) in urban and rural areas are referred to as community-based organizations (CBOs) [2, 3] and are viewed as a form of self-help group [4] that prioritizes human development [5]. Local development is facilitated by community associations, which help the government meet their communities' basic requirements [6]. In every village, the oldest man ruled with the council of elders [7] within these groups that lacked a consistent governing structure during pre-colonial times. They have historically been associated with married women, titled males, hunters, farmers, elderly partners, etc. Following the shift from traditional pre-colonial cultures to colonial societies [8], these pre-colonial CAs were influenced by colonialism and modernization in their operations [9]. Employing divide-and-rule tactics [10-12], Cameroon was governed by Ahmadu Ahidjo from 1960–1982 [13, 14] and by Paul Biya from 1982 to the present

[15], aside from a brief period of liberalism from 1982–1984 [17] introduced by President Biya. He turned into a tyrant [18] following a coup attempt to assassinate him on April 6, 1984 [15], leading to the suppression of all internal and external opposition against him [19]. Community associations were present during this time, but they began to emerge in the early 1990s [1]. The authoritarian regime in control banned the operations of these associations [20, 21] which negatively impacted local development initiatives.

Despite obstacles from politicians, administrative bottlenecks, dishonest community members, theft, social conflicts among community members, financial challenges and political instability, these community associations have persisted in offering services to the development of urban and rural communities in Mezam division. As a result, they have continued to operate in spite of the challenging circumstances that have impacted their dynamics. By starting, mobilising, and energising their own resources in an effort to raise their standard of living, community members are bearing the negative effects of the economic downturn and the state's increasing incapacity to provide economic and social development. Community-driven development has seen widespread public participation due to its emphasis on local human resources and indigenous technologies.

According to the regulations established by Law No. 90/053 dated December 19, 1990, concerning non-governmental organizations (NGOs) [22], the total of community associations throughout the country increased during this time [23, 24]. This statute established the legal foundation for associations [25], and it was amended in 1999 [26], altering the regulations regarding association freedom [27]. Nonetheless, because of operational shortcomings and the inadequacy of the legal and financial systems that oversee associations in the country [22], the performance of these urban and rural associations remains inadequate. There is ample evidence supporting the presence of various movements within Cameroon's community associations [28], [26], [29], including youth organizations, collective initiative groups, cooperative associations, and village development associations (VDAs) [30, 31]. These urban and rural associations are recognized for promoting growth in urban and rural areas within the Mezam division. They are organized, have respect for local traditions and values, and implement programs that address the felt needs of the communities they support.

The growth of urban and rural CAs in Cameroon's Mezam division can be attributed to the government's centralized governance system [32], the failure to enhance urban and rural communities and the recognition that grassroots associations [33] can have an important impact on the advancement and enhancement of these communities. This study enhances our theory by highlighting the significance of the Community-Driven Development (CDD) method [34-35] to encourage sustainable self-help growth [29] in the urban and rural communities of Cameroon's Mezam division. It has been challenging when the top-down centralized government model [36] for community development is being enforced. Activism for grassroots community development has escalated since the economic crisis of the 1990s [37, 38], affecting the government's duty to meet the needs of its citizens. Throughout this period, the growth of community groups in both urban and rural areas often depended on local resources and knowledge [39], fostering broad participation in projects aimed at community-driven development [40]. The CDD approach emphasizes the importance of strengthening urban and rural community associations in developing communities, making it appropriate for this research.

Many researchers have conducted studies in different areas such as; the role of agricultural cooperatives [41] and agriculture development programs in rural development during the liberalization era in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest [42], led by the government and non-governmental organizations, in Mezam, Cameroon, the influence of farmers' organizations [43] on agricultural advancement in Mezam division, Cameroon, the classification of rural development stakeholders [44] within Bui division, Northwest region of Cameroon, and the notion of self-reliance [44] in community development efforts in the Cameroon grass fields. No studies have been conducted comparing the role of community associations in urban and rural areas in developing communities in Cameroon's Mezam division. Consequently, this research aims to fill this void by contributing literature and suggesting measures that will help to foster the role of community

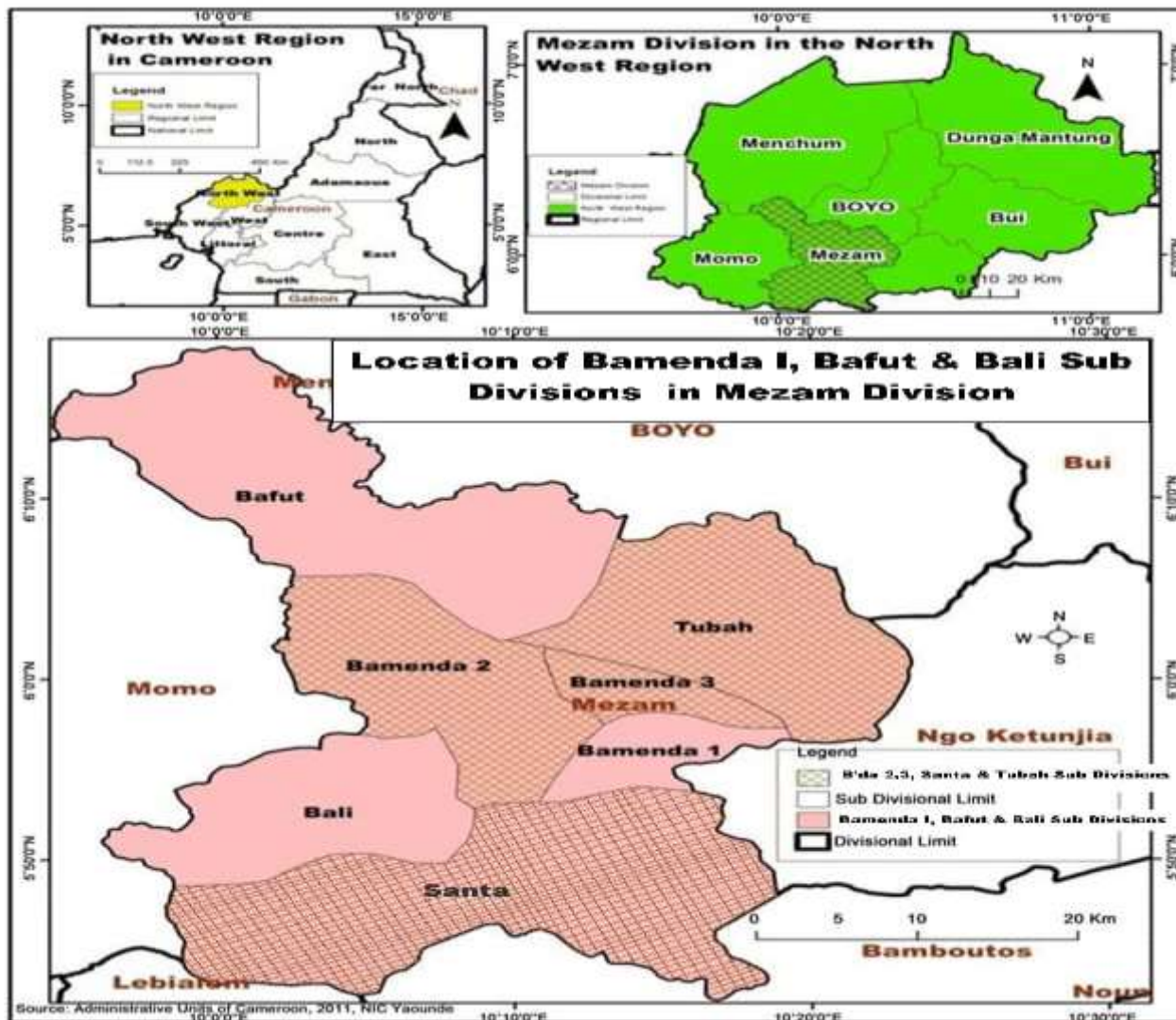
associations in urban and rural areas in developing communities in the study area and the world. This is essential because the government alone cannot bear the entire burden of community development in the whole region. Thus, this research examined the activities undertaken by urban and rural CAs in developing communities, discovered public perceptions of these activities, and identified the distinct challenges these associations face when engaged in these activities in developing communities.

METHODOLOGY.

Study Design

Mezam division is in the Northwest region of Cameroon [45], encompassing an area of 1,841.45 km² [41], with a population of over 850,000 [46]. It lies between longitudes 10°09" and 10°11" and latitudes 5°56" N and 5°58" N of the equator [46], east of the Greenwich Meridian. The Mezam division is flanked to the north and east by the Menchum, Boyo, and Momo divisions [41] and to the south and west by the Western location [47] (Figure 1). The division includes both urban and rural regions [47] and is divided into seven Subdivisions: Bamenda I, Bamenda II, Bamenda III, Bafut, Tubah, Santa, and Bali [46, 47]. Three Subdivisions were examined: Bali, Bafut, and Bamenda I. The climate in this division has changed, exhibiting shorter rainy seasons and prolonged dry spells [48]. The vegetation characteristic of the savanna is mixed with grass and trees [48].

Figure 1: The Mezam Division's Location in Cameroon's Northwest



Source: [47]

The research explored the role of urban and rural community associations in developing communities in Cameroon's Mezam division using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Mezam was chosen because, unlike the other six divisions that make up the Northwest region, it possesses a higher quantity of community associations [46] in both its urban and rural settings.

Study Population

The total population was made up of all the registered CAs in the Mezam division. Using information from the Mezam Divisional Agriculture and Rural Development Delegation (2009/2010), there are around nine distinct kinds of registered community associations in the study region. These include age groups, cooperatives, common initiative groups (CIGs), trade associations, youth associations, social clubs, professional associations, religious organizations, and village development associations (VDAs).

Sampling Techniques

Four (4) registered CAs chosen randomly from urban and rural areas consist of cooperatives, common initiative groups, village development associations, and youth organizations. The titles of all the distinct types of CAs were documented, crumpled, placed in a sack, and subsequently mixed to achieve this. Each was selected, unfolded, and recorded without substitution. The procedure was repeated until the required number of CAs was obtained and evaluated in the urban and rural areas of the Mezam division. A total of 571 participants were involved, comprising both males and females. To accomplish this, twenty-five members were randomly selected from each CA in both city and countryside settings. Twelve (12) primary informants were selected intentionally, and twelve (12) regular members aged eighteen years or older were randomly chosen and interviewed.

Instruments

Primary data was gathered using structured questionnaires and an extensive interview guide, in addition to secondary data obtained from diverse sources, such as journals, online research articles, textbooks from both public and private libraries, published and unpublished research projects, and periodicals. In July and August of 2010, in Cameroon's Mezam division, a survey was carried out to investigate the role of community associations in both urban and rural areas engaged in developing communities.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability signifies that an instrument's scores are stable and uniform [49]. Conversely, Validity indicates that the scores obtained from a tool are significant and enable the researcher to make sound inferences about the sample population under examination [49]. To verify the validity of the tools, the researchers conducted multiple pre-tests in a location distinct from the actual study area to maintain consistency in responses. The instrument's reliability was established through the examination of the pre-tested data, along with the interpretation and comparison of the results to verify that the instruments were sufficient for effectively conducting the study. Once all these tasks were completed, the researchers moved on to implement the tools in the study region for gathering primary data.

Data Analysis

The information was inputted into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet Version 13. Using SPSS version 20, the data was analyzed, and frequency counts and percentages were calculated and shown in tables, with the results being triangulated and reported. The study hypothesis was examined using the Chi-square distribution test. As soon as feasible following the in-depth interview, the material was verbatim transcribed. The codes allocated to the identified groups were operationalized and clearly defined. The interviewees' coded responses were compared to highlight both differences and similarities, and the results were then evaluated and presented.

Ethical Consideration

The researchers acquired written administrative permission to carry out their study from the Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) of the Mezam division. Permissions were also requested from all the traditional leaders of each community chosen for the research. Consent was secured, and every participant's identity was kept confidential, ensuring their anonymity.

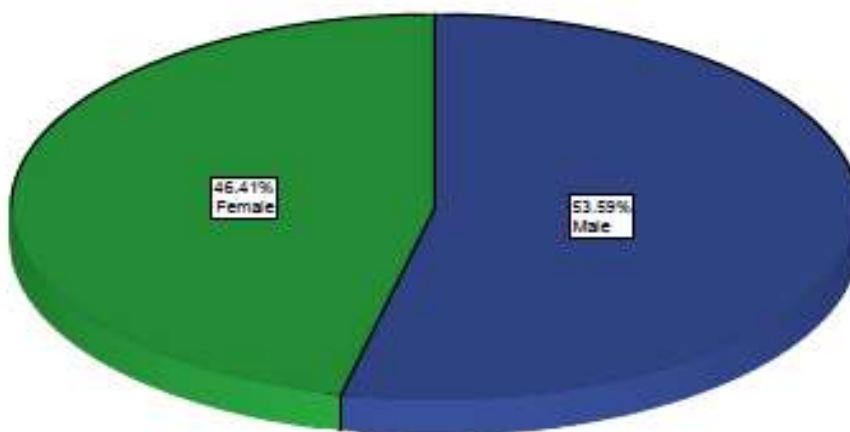
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

Background Characteristics of Participants

Sex Distribution of Participants

The analysis in Figure 2 indicates that 53.59% of the participants were men, while 46.41% were women. The findings resemble those of [46], who found that in the Mezam division, a greater share of the rural development workforce consists of men compared to women. This suggests that women held multiple duties for the family's well-being, which might have hindered their active involvement in community development within the Mezam division.

Figure 2. Sex Distribution of Participants

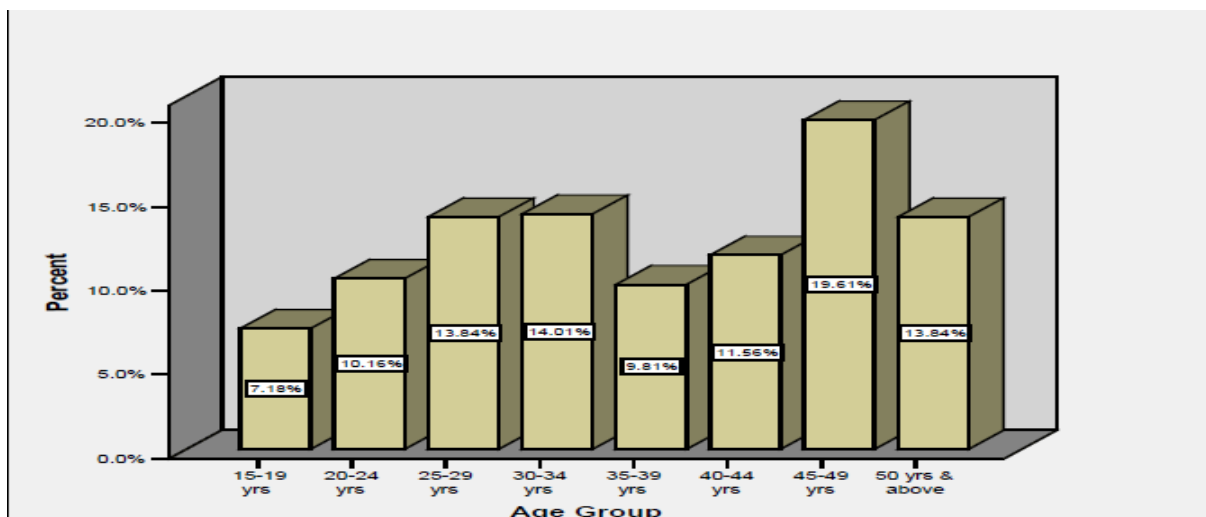


Source: Field Data (2010)

Age Distribution of Participants

Figure 3 reveals that a considerable number of participants fall within the age range of 45 to 49, accounting for 19.61%, while those aged 30-34 are also represented. This suggests that a significant level of youth mobility is replacing older and less involved individuals in community development efforts. According to the findings, 14.01%, ages 25-29 and 50 and above 13.84%, ages 20-24 10.16%, ages 35-39 and 15-19 9.81% and 7.18%, respectively.

Figure 3. Age distribution of participants

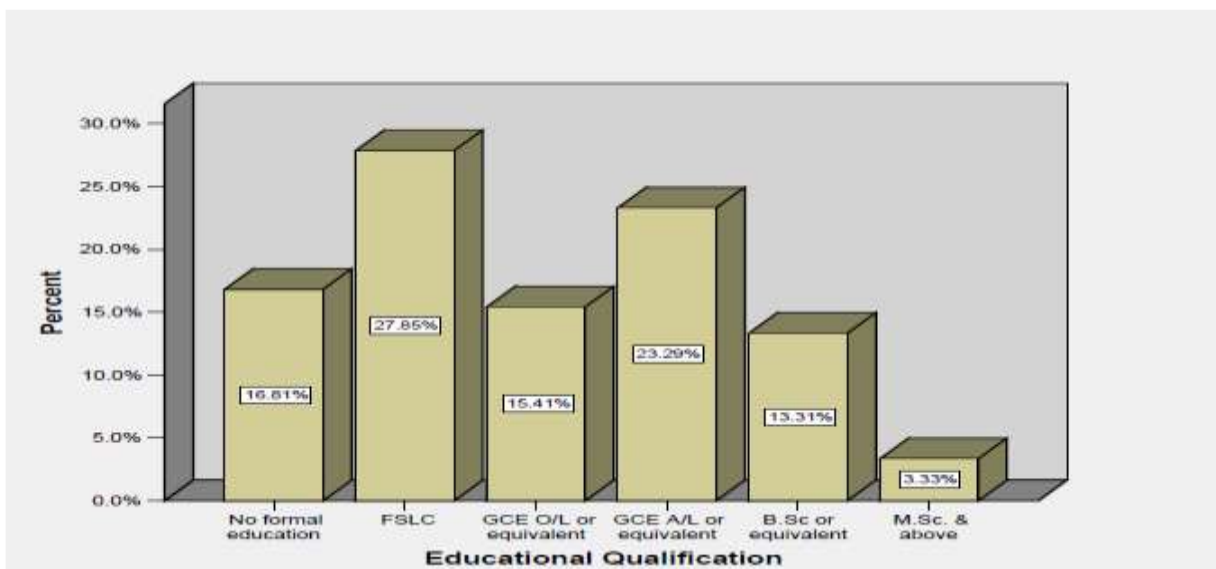


Source: Field data (2010)

Educational Qualification of Participants

Figure 4 indicates that First School Leaving Certificate holders comprised a sizable portion of participants at 27.85%, while GCE A/L or equivalent holders followed closely at 23.29%. Among the participants, 13.31% had a B.Sc. or its equivalent, 3.33% held an M.Sc. or a higher degree, and 16.81% had no formal education. This illustrates an extremely low level of education in the Mezam Division. The findings correspond with those of [50], which indicated that a majority of community association members in Lagos State, Nigeria, did not have formal education and mostly relied on their initiative to complete tasks independently.

Figure 4. Educational qualification of participants

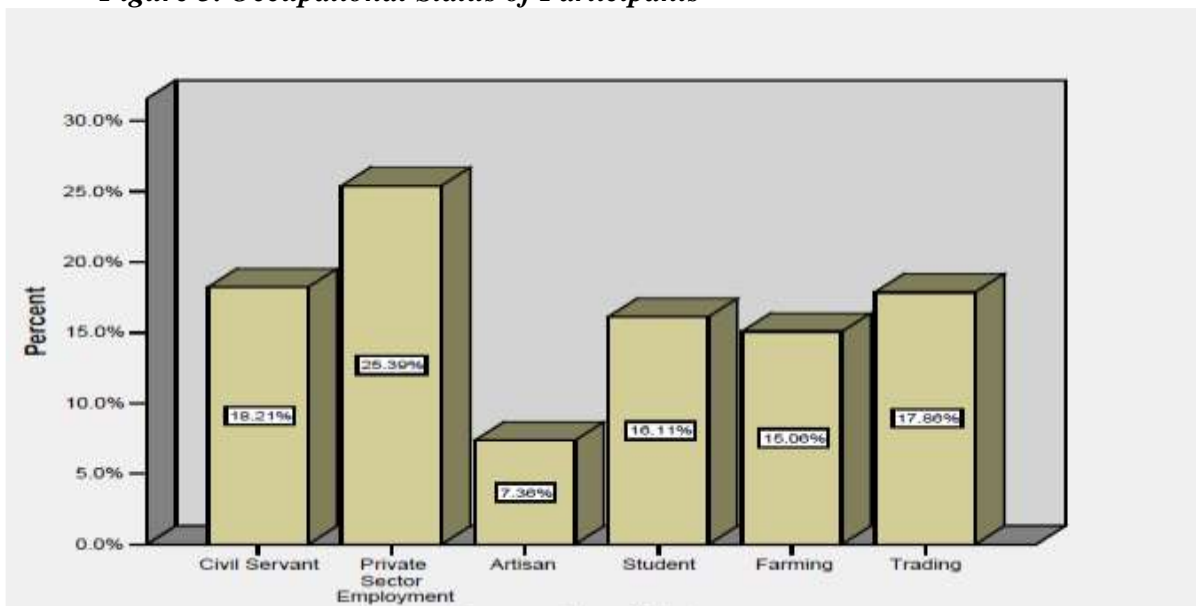


Source: Field data (2010)

Occupational Status of Participants

Figure 5 shows that many participants were employed as farmers 15.06%, traders 17.86%, civil servants 18.21%, and students 16.11%, private sector employees 25.39%, and craftsmen 7.36%. This suggests that to enhance the effectiveness of these urban and rural community associations (CAs) involved in developing communities in Mezam, the government, NGOs, and stakeholders need to offer them financial support.

Figure 5. Occupational Status of Participants



Source: Field Data (2010)

Community Status

The findings in Figure 6 show that a larger percentage of participants, 50.09%, came from urban areas, whereas 49.41% originated from rural areas. This suggests that people in urban areas value community development more than those in rural areas.

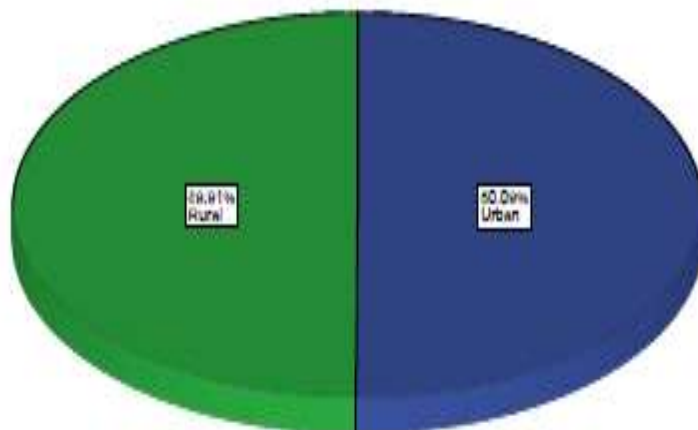


Figure 6. Community Status

Source: Field Data (2010)

Activities of Urban and Rural Community Associations in Developing Communities

Community associations (CAs) in both urban and rural areas participate in various community development projects, as illustrated in Table 1. A notable portion of participants, 68.5% in urban areas and 61.4% in rural areas concur that CAs construct bridges. The results indicate that 51.4% of individuals in urban settings and 45.3% in rural areas concur with the establishment of town halls. Only 47.4% of respondents in rural areas and 42.0% in urban areas concur that CAs construct culverts. The findings reveal that merely a small fraction of participants from urban and rural areas, at 33.9% and 32.6% respectively, concur that CAs supplied electricity. These results indicate that community associations are playing a crucial role in developing urban and rural areas within Cameroon's Mezam division. Among most of the respondents, 57.7% concur that CAs in urban communities construct roads, whereas 41.8% powerfully agree regarding those in rural communities. Firmly concur with the availability of piped-borne water in urban communities at 47.9% and rural areas at 43.2%.

In urban areas, 33.7% of individuals concur in support of the construction of hospitals, and 39.9% in rural communities concur. In countryside villages, an overwhelming majority of 61.1% concur that CAs participates in the development of village market squares, whereas in urban areas, only 35.3% concur. In both urban and countryside areas, as many as 50% of respondents concur that community associations are engaged in the provision of school facilities, registering 50.0% and 59.6%, respectively. Among the participants, 25.2% completely disagree in urban communities, while 43.5% concur that CAs are engaged in clearing farmland in rural communities. Although 34.3% of urban community participants dissent, a huge portion, 49.1%, concur that CAs in rural areas play a role in crop production and harvesting. According to these results, community associations are actively involved in providing services that address the perceived requirements of their local populations in both urban and rural environments.

Research on the activities performed by community associations (CAs) in urban and rural settings in developing communities in Cameroon's Mezam division shows that CAs engage in various responsibilities, including building culverts, town halls, bridges, roads, supplying piped-borne water, establishing village market squares, ensuring school facilities, clearing agricultural land, and planting and harvesting crops. These findings are consistent with those of [42], which

indicated that many community associations in the Meta community of Cameroon's Northwest region have transitioned from cultural roots to a developmental focus, frequently via self-help projects like building schools, bridges, and supplying piped-borne water. In Ondo, Nigeria, community-based organizations (CBOs) concentrate on road building at 40.9%, power supply at 20.9%, flood management initiatives at 10.9%, educational institutions at 6.4%, public toilets at 5.5%, water wells and boreholes at 11.8%, and additional projects at 3.6% [51].

Table I. Activities of Urban (U) and Rural (R) Community Associations in Developing Communities

Items	Uncertain		Completely Disagree		Dissent		Concur		Powerfully Consent		Total	
	Community Status		Community Status		Community Status		Community Status		Community Status		Community Status	
	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R
Building Culverts	33 11.5%	21 7.4%	4 1.4%	14 4.9%	19 6.6%	14 4.9%	196 68.5%	175 61.4%	34 11.9%	61 21.4%	286 100%	285 100%
Construction of town halls	13 4.5%	72 25.3%	4 1.4%	18 6.3%	10 3.5%	46 16.1%	147 51.4%	129 45.3%	112 39.2%	20 7.0%	286 100%	285 100%
Building Bridges	59 20.6%	40 14.0%	34 11.9%	27 9.5%	42 14.7%	45 15.8%	120 42.0%	135 47.4%	31 10.8%	38 13.3%	286 100%	285 100%
Electricity supply	61 21.3%	34 14.9%	43 15.0%	43 15.1%	42 14.7%	40 14.0%	97 33.9%	93 32.6%	43 15.0%	75 26.3%	286 100%	285 100%
Construction of Roads	13 4.5%	14 4.9%	8 2.8%	31 10.9%	13 4.5%	18 6.3%	165 57.7%	103 36.1%	87 30.4%	119 41.8%	286 100%	285 100%
Pipe-borne water.	13 4.5%	14 3.9%	8 3.1%	20 7.0%	5 1.7%	29 10.2%	137 47.9%	102 35.8%	122 42.7%	123 43.2%	286 100%	285 100%
Provision of hospitals facilities	67 23.4%	73 25.6%	24 8.4%	32 11.2%	45 15.7%	144 39.9%	96 33.7%	36 12.6%	20 7.0%	20 7.0%	286 100%	285 100%
Construction of Village market squares	63 22.0%	19 6.7%	45 15.7%	11 3.9%	46 16.1%	14 4.9%	101 35.3%	174 61.1%	31 10.8%	67 23.5%	286 100%	285 100%
Provision of School facilities	13 4.5%	34 14.9%	6 2.1%	7 2.5%	7 2.4%	24 8.4%	143 50.0%	170 59.6%	117 40.9%	50 17.5%	286 100%	285 100%
Clearing of farmlands	80 28.0%	28 9.38%	72 25.2%	11 3.9%	65 22.7%	26 9.1%	63 22.0%	124 43.5%	6 2.1%	96 33.7%	286 100%	285 100%
Cultivation/ harvesting of crops	68 23.8%	33 14.6%	53 18.5%	12 4.2%	98 34.3%	26 9.1%	61 21.3%	140 49.1%	6 2.1%	74 26.0%	286 100%	285 100%

Source: Field Data (2010)

In the Mezam division, community associations take part in any activity that promotes community development. According to this viewpoint, community empowerment has the potential to improve the well-being of both individuals and associations at the local level. Numerous issues facing the communities in Mezam division have been discussed, with a particular emphasis on the empowerment approach. These issues include building bridges, town halls, culverts, market squares, school buildings, clearing farmlands, harvesting crops, building roads and providing pipe water and electricity to their respective communities. Therefore, empowering target individuals, groups, and associations at the community level to take effective action using the talents and potentials developed is an effective way to resolve difficulties. Empowerment in the context of community development refers to the strategies that people, groups, and communities use to take

charge of their lives and the problems that affect them on an economic, social, psychological, and political level.

The quantitative information about the activities of CAs in the developing areas of Cameroon's Mezam division, including urban and rural environments, was enriched by insights obtained from in-depth interviews. In an interview, one participant emphasized that CAs strive to enhance villages in the Mezam division. In his expression:

VDA's have executed projects in the community ranging from the construction of roads, bridges, town halls, village market squares, health centres, pipe-borne water, and the extension of electricity supply within the community. Cooperatives and common initiative groups (CIGs) are interest groups focused on the group's and its members' welfare, and youth associations (YAs) have also helped to keep the community lively, particularly during holidays (Traditional Ruler, Bafut Rural, KIIs session, 8th July 2010). Similarly, "*These associations have also helped in renovating the palace premises which attract tourists into the community and are also a source of revenue generation for the palace,*" (The Traditional Ruler of Bali Stated, KII session, 20th August 2010).

Public Perception of the Roles of Urban and Rural Community Associations in Developing Communities

As indicated in Table 2, the community's view of the performance of urban and rural CAs in developing communities of Cameroon's Mezam division was positive. Most participants gave high ratings to the culvert constructions by these CAs, with 67.5% in urban areas and 62.1% in rural communities. Community associations received a very good rating for town hall construction from 51.7% of urban areas and 45.3% of rural communities. A sizable number of participants, 40.4% in urban areas and 47.0% in rural areas rated CAs as very good in bridge construction. Nonetheless, only 33.9% and 32.6% of participants in urban and rural areas, respectively, believed that CAs had a very positive impact on electricity supply. The involvement of CAs in road construction was viewed as excellent by 41.4% of rural communities, whereas 57.0% of urban communities assessed it as very good.

Findings indicate that 48.3% of participants from urban areas and 43.2% from rural areas rated CAs as very good and excellent for delivering pipe water. The results showed that 33.0% of individuals from rural communities and 39.9% from urban areas rated hospital facilities as very good. As per findings, the construction of village market squares was rated very good at 61.8% in rural areas and 35.0% in urban areas. Participation of community associations in the provision of school facilities scored an impressive very good 59.6% in rural areas, surpassing 50.3% very good found in urban areas. In rural communities, 43.2% rated the clearing of farmland very good, while 33.3% still rated it as excellent. The findings reveal that while 35.0% of urban communities viewed crop cultivation and harvesting as good, 48.8% of rural respondents classified it as very good. According to the findings, the public tends to depend on the contributions of CAs in developing communities within Cameroon's Mezam division, as CAs in urban and rural areas have advocated for their towns' progress when the government has not succeeded.

Findings showed that the public viewed the role of urban and rural community associations (CAs) in developing communities within the Mezam division as favourable. These findings correspond with those of [52], which highlighted that resident showed prominent levels of satisfaction with CBO initiatives, including the establishment of town halls, drainage systems, transformers, electric poles, and borehole/well water in Oyo State, Nigeria. Nonetheless, minimal satisfaction was noted in aspects such as building or upgrading essential healthcare facilities, supplying classroom structures for local schools, and equipping the schools with furniture and materials [52]. This suggests that these efforts are challenging to implement and require significant financial resources, rendering it unfeasible for community-based organizations with limited funding and no financial support to initiate and finalize them effectively. Despite not showing significant correlations with age, gender, or educational level, numerous participants in Lagos State, Nigeria, rated CBO's activities poorly [50].

Table 2. Public Perception of the Role of Urban (U) and Rural (R) Community Associations in Developing Communities

Items	Poor		Bad		Good		Very Good		Excellent		Total	
	Community Status		Community Status		Community Status		Community Status		Community Status		Community Status	
	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R
Building culverts	33 11.5%	22 7.7%	5 1.7%	14 4.9%	22 7.7%	14 4.9%	193 67.5%	177 62.1%	33 11.5%	58 20.4%	286 100%	285 100%
Construction of town hall	12 4.2%	70 24.6%	4 1.4%	19 6.7%	10 3.5%	46 16.1%	148 51.7%	129 45.3%	112 39.2%	21 7.4%	286 100%	285 100%
Building bridges	61 21.4%	42 14.7%	35 12.3%	27 9.5%	42 14.7%	44 15.4%	115 40.4%	134 47.0%	32 11.2%	38 13.3%	286 100%	285 100%
Electricity supply	59 20.6%	33 11.6%	42 14.7%	42 14.7%	44 15.4%	41 14.4%	97 33.9%	93 32.6%	44 15.4%	76 26.7%	286 100%	285 100%
Road construction	16 5.6%	14 4.9%	7 2.4%	32 11.2%	15 5.2%	17 6.0%	163 57.0%	104 36.5%	85 29.7%	118 41.4%	286 100%	285 100%
Provision of Pipe-borne water	12 4.2%	11 3.9%	10 3.5%	20 7.0%	4 1.4%	29 10.2%	138 48.3%	102 35.8%	122 42.7%	123 43.2%	286 100%	285 100%
Provision of Hospital facilities	67 23.4%	74 26.0%	24 8.4%	31 10.9%	46 16.1%	64 22.5%	114 39.9%	94 33.0%	35 12.2%	22 7.7%	286 100%	285 100%
Construction of Village market squares	64 22.4%	19 6.7%	44 15.4%	12 4.2%	45 15.7%	14 4.9%	100 35.0%	176 61.8%	33 11.5%	64 22.5%	286 100%	285 100%
Provision of School facilities	14 4.9%	35 12.3%	6 2.1%	6 2.1%	8 2.8%	24 8.4%	144 50.3%	170 59.6%	114 39.9%	50 17.5%	286 100%	285 100%
Clearing of farmlands	80 28.0%	29 10.2%	71 24.8%	12 4.2%	66 23.1%	26 9.1%	64 22.4%	123 43.2%	5 1.7%	95 33.3%	286 100%	285 100%
Cultivation and harvesting of crops	67 23.4%	33 11.6%	53 18.5%	12 4.2%	100 35.0%	26 9.1%	61 21.3%	139 48.8%	5 1.7%	75 26.3%	286 100%	285 100%

Source: Field Data (2010)

Community organizations in Nigeria's Plateau and Imo States have played a role in empowering communities; however, the communal life in Imo State was more vigorous than that of Plateau State, enhancing Imo State's outcomes [53]. The roles of community-based organizations in rural development projects in Osun State, Nigeria, were the subject of research [54]. The results indicate that role performance is lacking in over 80% [54] of organizations being average in comparison. As expected, CBOs in Osun State were not meeting their obligations because of insufficient government backing, widespread poverty in the community, and difficulties in securing funding [54]. This suggests that to generate funds for community development in the Mezam division, these urban and rural CAs need to connect. In Southwest Nigeria, local groups participated in programs aimed at developing rural communities [55]. More than half of the respondents, 52.1% [55], viewed community development activities positively and indicated that they had derived significant benefits from them.

The findings from the qualitative data validated the public's perception that the community development efforts of these rural and urban CAs have notably improved living standards in Cameroon's Mezam division. According to one of the women who took part:

These associations have helped in the construction of roads, village market square, community hall and award of scholarships to intelligent students within the community (Ordinary Member, Bamenda I Rural, during KIIs Session, 20th July 2010). Succinctly, another woman stated:

These groups have also facilitated the building of town halls, installation of pipe-borne water, construction of classrooms, and expansion of electricity provision in the community (Ordinary Member, Bali Rural, during KIIs Session, 28th July 2010). A male participant supported these facts by stating that:

These associations have also played a vital role in lobbying for government-sponsored projects and integrating the community with other communities and the youth associations on their part have achieved much in sensitizing the community to be aware of the consequences of HIV/AIDs and other STDs (Ordinary Member, Bali Urban, During KIIs Session, 28th July 2010). An additional male participant said:

The cooperatives and common initiative groups have also helped in providing farmers with agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, insecticides, and seedlings at reduced prices (Local Notable, Bafut Rural, During KIIs Session, 3rd August 2010). According to a male participant

Cooperatives have been assisting farmers by giving them loans at low interest rates and assisting them in the sale of produce (Municipal Councilor, Bali Urban, During KIIs Session, 20th August 2010). During KII with a male participant, it was discovered that the following factors oversee all these successes:

The ability to mobilize the community to actively contribute both in cash and in-kind is one of the major factors (Ordinary Member, Bafut Rural, During KIIs Session, 3rd August 2010). Another male participant expressed the view that many factors contribute to the CAs' accomplishments in community development, particularly *“The aid received from international NGOs and the contribution from the elite of the community”* (Bali Urban, President of CA, at the KIIs Session on August 20, 2010).

Challenges Faced by Urban and Rural Community Associations in Developing Communities

Community associations (CAs) in both urban and rural areas of the Mezam division face numerous challenges that hinder their capacity to develop communities, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Obstacles to Community Development for Urban (U) and Rural (R) Community Associations

Items	Undecided		Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Total	
	Community Status		Community Status		Community Status		Community Status		Community Status		Community Status	
	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R
Postponed project completion	10 3.5%	33 11.6%	22 7.7%	35 12.3%	155 54.2%	56 19.6%	9 31.5%	135 47.4%	9 3.1%	26 9.1%	286 100%	285 100%
Poor project management	43 15.0%	36 12.6%	74 25.9%	15 5.3%	108 37.8%	63 22.1%	53 18.5%	137 48.1%	8 2.8%	34 11.9%	286 100%	285 100%
Ineffective leadership	55 19.25%	26 9.1%	33 11.5%	16 5.6%	121 42.3%	44 15.4%	62 21.7%	140 49.1%	15 5.2%	59 20.7%	286 100%	285 100%
Problem of illiteracy	39 13.6%	14 4.9%	71 24.8%	20 7.0%	63 22.0%	48 16.8%	89 31.1%	120 42.1%	24 8.4%	83 29.1%	286 100%	285 100%
Insufficient funds	23 8.05%	6 2.1%	22 7.7%	4 1.4%	47 16.4%	14 4.9%	125 43.7%	99 34.7%	69 24.15%	162 56.8%	286 100%	285 100%

Source: Field Data (2010)

A sizable portion of participants, 47.4% from rural areas agree and 54.2% from urban areas disagree that CAs do not encounter the issue of postponed project completion. The findings show that 48.1% of individuals in rural areas believe there is poor project management, while 37.8% in urban areas disagree. A sizable portion of participants, 49.1%, from rural communities believe that CAs are confronted with ineffective leadership, whereas 42.3% from urban areas disagree. The problem of illiteracy impacts community associations, with 31.1% in urban communities agreeing and 42.1% in rural areas disagreeing. The findings indicate that while 56.8% of rural participants strongly agree that CAs encounter insufficient funds, 43.7% of urban participants agree. This explains why many projects initiated by rural CAs are left unfinished due to inadequate funding and a shortage of skills in sustainable project management.

The findings reveal that community associations (CAs) in urban and rural communities face numerous challenges, such as ineffective leadership, postponed project completion, poor project management, literacy issues, and limited financial resources. The results differ from previous studies [52], which indicated that insufficient funding, poor fund management, uncooperative project management committee members, and uncooperative community members regarding project contributions were some of the challenges CBOs encountered while executing projects in Oyo State, Nigeria. Research conducted in Ondo State, Nigeria, indicates that the efforts of community-based organizations to promote local economic growth are significantly hindered by insufficient collaboration [52]. The Mutengene self-help water project in Cameroon [56, 57] illustrates that challenges like the state's prescriptive influence, the authoritarian demeanor of officials, the inflation of achievements, participant selection, and disputes within and among groups have been recognized as hindrances to community development in the Mezam division for both urban and rural Community Agents. Research by [58] indicates that elite control and political interference in Pakistan obstruct grassroots community engagement. Additionally, it serves as a barrier to community involvement in locally driven development initiatives [58]. For lasting community development in the Mezam division, enhancing community capacity alongside that of urban and rural CAs is essential. In a study, [55] observed barriers to participating in CD activities by a greater number of participants, 60.2%; the fundamental issues included lack of government support 227.8% and cultural restrictions on women's involvement 261.0% [55]. In societies where Muslims are the majority and women are seen as home caretakers, this is a common situation.

The qualitative data findings showed that the function of CAs in community development is impacted by issues arising in both urban and rural CAs, alongside community dynamics, governmental policies, and NGOs. As stated by an important contributor:

When the association is about to execute any project without the prior notice of the community leaders, they don't tend to motivate the people in the community to participate, always complain of poverty and tend to be too slow in the payment of levies, at times too, the community may not be rich in natural resources meaning that the associations will have to look for resources to achieve their objective. Other challenges are those from nonnatives who do not see themselves as part of the community and are always agitating to contribute toward a project (Traditional Ruler, Bafut Rural, During KIIs Session, 8th July 2010). This was further demonstrated by the qualitative data that:

Government laws governing associations in Cameroon are so rigid and the penalties attached to them are so hard that these associations cannot go beyond limits (Municipal Councilor for Bafut, During KIIs Session, 8th July 2010). In exchange for counterpart funding, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) would always demand a specific amount from the community or association. One participant underlined that:

NGOs will always demand a certain amount of the total cost of a project before giving their contribution without taking into consideration the population of the community and the availability of both human and natural resources within the community. A typical example is Plan Cameroon where they will insist that the

community should put in place a certain amount before they can come in to implement any project. This was the case with our community Borehole. Once the target is not met, the NGOs will not support and whatever thing they have will be transferred to another community which was able to meet up with their target (President of CA, Bali Urban, During KIIs Session, 20th August 2010). During the in-depth interview, a male participant disclosed that:

The village development associations in the urban communities are faced with problems like mismanagement of funds and embezzlement on the part of the leaders (Ordinary Member, Bamenda I Urban, During KIIs Session, 13th August 2010). Another participant stated that:

The youths are faced with problems arising from the nonchalant attitudes of other youths, encouraging them to be stubborn and not to participate in community development and problems arising from unhealthy love relationships common among the youths (Municipal Councilor, Bamenda I rural, During KIIs Session, 18th August 2010). In short, one participant conveyed sadness over the problem of cooperative and Common Initiative Group (CIG) members often making late loan payments. In his own words:

With the cooperatives and common initiative groups, people are quick to collect loans from them but to pay back the loans becomes a problem making it impossible for the smooth functioning of these associations (President of CA, Bafut Rural, During KIIs Session, 8th July 2010). Similarly, a female participant stated:

These associations do not have a well-equipped secretariat, except the Cooperatives and Common Initiative groups who have offices without equipment and their records are not also updated (Ordinary Member, Bamenda I Urban, During KIIs Session, 13th August 2010).

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the data were collected in 2010 and, while valuable for historical insight, may not reflect current political, institutional, or socio-economic developments affecting community associations in the Mezam Division. Important changes—such as decentralization reforms, shifts in donor involvement, and digital engagement—could have since reshaped the landscape.

Second, the study was geographically limited to three subdivisions within Mezam Division, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions of Cameroon or to broader sub-Saharan contexts. The use of self-reported data further introduces potential biases, including recall and social desirability bias.

Third, the researchers applied a mixed-methods approach, but the qualitative component was limited to key informant interviews. Broader qualitative techniques such as focus groups or participant observation could provide deeper insights into evolving community dynamics.

Finally, due to institutional data retention policies, the original raw data were discarded five years after collection. As a result, secondary analyses—such as correlation or regression modelling—cannot be conducted at this stage. This limits the ability to explore associations between variables beyond the descriptive level.

Future research should aim to update the dataset with recent empirical evidence and expand the study to other regions for comparative insight. Investigating the role of youth-led initiatives, the impact of digital tools in rural development, and inter-associational collaboration could offer further valuable contributions.

CONCLUSION.

The community associations (CAs) in the Mezam division's urban and rural areas engage in numerous initiatives aimed at enhancing the living conditions within the local communities. These urban and rural CAs are inspired and guided by the community members' desire to meet their civic responsibilities, encourage sustainable development, and make efficient use of their limited

resources to tackle their needs. The community had a favourable perspective on the contributions of both urban and rural CAs to the advancement of the Mezam division. The community depends on CAs as drivers of social change and sustainable progress, demonstrating that CAs in urban and rural settings have enhanced multiple facets of social development within the community. To promote grassroots development, communities lacking associations should form them. In the Mezam division, these CAs face difficulties in community development, regardless of being urban or rural. Despite these challenges, it is crucial to implement policy measures that strengthen the role of urban and rural CAs and encourage grassroots development through community-led initiatives. Government, development experts and non-governmental organizations should empower these urban and rural CAs in developing communities in the Mezam division and ensure their sustainability through capacity building members and financial support.

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Conflicts of Interest

We declare the absence of any conflict of interest.

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