



Towards Better Management of Public Education in Cameroon: The Case for Decentralisation

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Abstract

This paper conceptualises centralisation and decentralisation and provides evidence that the Cameroon public education system is facing imminent decentralisation. It uses available literature and the author's teaching experience to criticise the centralised education system in Cameroon, especially in resource allocation and management. The author argues that to increase the quantity and quality of education in Cameroon, there is a need to decentralise responsibility for and control of education. He presents the model proposed by government for decentralisation and proposes roles and functions for the various levels of authority in the model.

Résumé

Cet article conceptualise les notions de centralisation et de décentralisation et démontre que le système éducatif camerounais va au devant d'une décentralisation imminente. Il se base sur la littérature disponible à ce sujet, ainsi que sur l'expérience pédagogique, pour critiquer la centralisation du système éducatif camerounais, particulièrement en matière de distribution et de gestion des ressources. L'auteur avance que, pour améliorer la quantité et la qualité de l'enseignement au Cameroun, il est indispensable de décentraliser l'imputation et le contrôle y afférent. Il présente le modèle proposé par le gouvernement en vue de la décentralisation prévue, et suggère des rôles et fonctions pour les divers niveaux d'autorité contenus dans le modèle.

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Introduction

The role of education in all aspects of development (economic, social, cultural, technological and scientific) is paramount. For a people to develop, they must acquire sufficient and proper education. The Dakar Framework for Action says education is a fundamental human right, the key to sustainable development, the key to peace and stability within and among nations and an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century (World Education Forum 2000). A recent publication of IIEP (2002) highlights the importance of education by stating that:

Education is not just a human right. It is also vital for reducing poverty, promoting health, improving governance and empowering people to make choices about their destinies. People are at the centre of development and education is crucial for enhancing their capabilities, furthering equity and promoting social progress (IIEP 2002:2).

Considering the importance of education in the development of a people, there is a need to expand access and improve its quality. The education initiatives launched in Jomtien in 1990 were never achieved. In Dakar 2000, it was revealed that Education For All was still a far target in many African countries. The Dakar Framework for Action calls on all countries, especially in the Third World, to take accelerated steps to ensure that all eligible populations are enrolled in school by 2015 (Rahman 2000; World Education Forum 2000).

Prior to Dakar 2000, 47 African countries, including Cameroon, met in Johannesburg in 1999 to assess progress towards achieving education for all. The data and information presented at this meeting shows that 40 percent of 220 million eligible children in sub-Saharan Africa are not in school (EFA 2000). This shows that the quantity of education is not enough.

Education quality is a very difficult commodity to measure. However, there is unanimity in the international literature that the quality of products from African schools is deplorable (Tamukong 2001). The teaching-learning process is defective since it is plagued by many problems, including outdated curricula, unqualified teachers, shortage of teachers, overcrowded classrooms, relatively high unit costs, chronic shortage of equipment and books and above all, low teacher morale resulting from inadequate salaries. A natural corollary of this situation is low quality products. From the preceding discussion, it can be concluded that the quality and quantity of education on the continent are not sufficient. The

factors that compromise adequate provision of quality education include availability of resources, curriculum, teachers, textbooks, and management among many others.

The focus of this paper is the management of the public school system. In Africa, as well as elsewhere, there are two basic systems of educational management: centralised and decentralised. The Francophone and Lusophone countries generally have centralised systems where the central government, through a ministry of education, holds all power for education. On the other hand, Anglophone countries usually have decentralised systems where control over and responsibility for education are shared between the central, provincial and local governments. However, in each group of countries, the degree of centralisation or decentralisation varies, and sometimes also within countries with federal systems.

Experience has shown that both types of management have advantages and shortcomings. However, decentralisation has been found to be comparatively better if well implemented and this explains why many countries around the world are presently decentralising education (Tamukong 1995; Bray & Lillis 1988; Govinda 2003; Grauwe 2003), even though this process is sometimes referred to by other names include municipalisation, regionalisation and localisation (Orivel 1990; Bray & Lillis 1988; Lauglo & Mclean 1985; Yannakopoulos 1980). The Dakar Framework for Action calls for decentralisation and the formation of various partnerships with different categories of people and organisations. It is worthy to note at this point that no education system can claim to be 100 percent centralised or decentralised. The reality is that both types of management are practiced in each country with one far outweighing the other resulting in the differences between and within countries pointed out earlier. Thus, the type of management can be situated within a continuum ranging from extreme centralisation to radical devolution of power (extreme decentralisation).

Some definitions

Centralisation in management is the retention of decision-making authority by top management, while decentralisation when top management shares decision-making authority with subordinates. The two words constitute extreme situations on what is called the centralisation-decentralisation continuum. Decentralisation increases as the degree, importance and range of lower-level decision-making increases, and supervision by top management decreases (Kreitner 1995:309).

There is a need to strike a balance in every organisation, that is, to determine which types of decision-making to decentralise and which to centralise. The two extremes are dangerous to organisational survival, development and competitiveness. Extreme centralisation means too much control, which tends to thwart initiative and imagination, while extreme decentralisation means lack of control, which can engender anarchy and chaos.

Political decentralisation

Whether the system of education is centralised or decentralised depends very much on the political structure of the country. Where officials of the central government carry out decision-making alone, the political structure is described as centralised (Williams 1993). Where lower tiers of government are legally empowered to take important decisions, then we have territorial decentralisation (Fiske 1996:9). There is also functional decentralisation that involves various authorities operating in parallel (Bray 1999). For example, if two or more ministries deliver educational services or if the government and the private sector deliver such services, then there is functional decentralisation.

Centralisation/Decentralisation in education

A system of education can be described as centralised, decentralised or mixed. Where all decision-making is taken in the ministry of education, the system is centralised; where a larger number of important decisions on education are taken at the local level, the system is decentralised; where decision-making is equal or almost equally shared between the ministry and the local authorities, the system is mixed. Decentralisation of education is not a static situation, but a process – a continuous dynamic activity requiring constant monitoring, evaluation and readjustments.

According to Tamukong (1995), educational decentralisation occurs in three increasing stages: deconcentration, delegation and devolution. These terms can be defined as follows (Bray 1999; Fiske 1996; Williams 1993). Deconcentration is the weakest form of educational decentralisation and involves a shifting of some management functions to regional or branch offices in such a way that the central ministry remains firmly in power. Personnel in such offices are directly accountable to the ministry. Delegation implies a higher level of decision-making at local levels. In this case, the central government lends power to lower levels of government or semi-autonomous organisations such as churches. Such power can be withdrawn at any time without resort to legislation. Devolution is the most far-reaching form of educational decentralisation. There, power over financial, administrative and pedagogical matters is permanently transferred

to sub-national levels whose officials do not need to seek approval from the central level. The sub-national officials have the option of informing the centre of their decisions. The role of the centre is mainly the setting of broad national goals and the collection and dissemination of information.

Educational centralisation in Cameroon

The revised constitution of Cameroon has highlighted the creation of regional governments that will have control of and responsibility for social services including education (Cameroon 1996). The regional governments will be composed of elected representatives of the local populations and the traditional rulers. Furthermore, on the eve of 20th May 2001, President Paul Biya clearly indicated that regional governments are going to be set up. Thus, it is foreseen that Cameroon will soon be experiencing political decentralisation. The scholarly literature, for example Bray (1999), Fiske (1996), and Florestal and Cooper (1997), shows that in decentralised systems, regional and local governments have considerable authority over and responsibility for education and this is the route that Cameroon appears to be taking.

In line with the above remarks, the National Assembly of Cameroon passed Law no.98/004, to lay down guidelines for education in the country (Cameroon 1998). This law indicates that the education system is to be decentralised. Section 11 (1) states that 'The state shall formulate and implement educational policy with the assistance of regional and local authorities...' At present, there are no regional and local authorities in Cameroon. This law therefore implies the creation of such authorities which shall participate in formulating and implementing policy.

Section 12 says sources of education finance include budgetary allocations from the state, contributions from education partners, and budgetary appropriations from regional and local authorities. Section 32 states that each school will have an educational community composed of the authorities, the teachers, the students/pupils, persons from the socio-professional circles and regional and local authorities. Section 33 makes it clear that the system will be decentralised, 'The members of the educational community shall be involved, through their representatives, in consultative and management bodies set up at the level of educational institutions, as well as at each level of the decentralised authorities, or of the national education set up'.

The new constitution and the 1998 education law are still to be fully implemented. A partial implementation of the 1998 law has resulted in the creation of school management boards that will be examined in more detail later.

At present, the Cameroon education system is functionally decentralised in the sense that there are authorities that operate in parallel. Several ministries, especially the three ministries for education and higher education, operate educational institutions. In addition, the provision of education is both public and private. Furthermore, the three ministries and two semi-autonomous organisations organise examinations in the country. The GCE Board organises secondary school-leaving examinations for Anglophones while the Office du Baccalauréat does the same for Francophones.

In contrast, there is no territorial decentralisation which, according to Bray (1999), entails a redistribution of power or authority for decision-making among different tiers of government (such as nation, states/provinces and districts) and schools. It is this kind of decentralisation that is contained in the 1996 revised constitution and the law no. 98/004. In this light, one can rightly say that the present education system is centralised and that the 1996 revised constitution and 1998 education law aim at changing the situation. At present, most decision-making, monitoring and management functions are concentrated in the Ministry of National Education in Yaounde. The Ministry regulates all aspects of the system including students, teachers, funding, administration, curriculum and facilities. The recruitment, posting, payment, promotion and retirement of school personnel are management functions of the central government. The provincial and divisional delegations of education, found all over the country, are there to ensure that the Ministry has effective control of schools in the periphery. The delegates, who are officials of the ministry, do not make decisions except perhaps in a few non-vital areas if any and such decisions must be based on prescribed legal texts and procedure. They are however, encouraged to make suggestions and proposals to the minister.

Because of the existence of provincial and divisional delegations, we could say the education system is deconcentrated, but some writers argue that deconcentration is often a way of ensuring effective centralisation, which appears to be the case in Cameroon.

The new Ministry of Technical Education is organised and run along the same lines as the Ministry of National Education. The Ministry of Higher Education on the other hand, is not even deconcentrated.

A major step that the government has taken in the direction of decentralisation and which appears to be a partial implementation of the 1998 law is the creation of school management boards in every public nursery, primary or secondary school by decree no. 2001/ 041 of 19th of February 2001 (Cameroon 2001). Because of their importance in education management in Cameroon, these boards are further examined below.

School management boards in Cameroon

Public nursery or primary schools

Composition of the school management board

Each school has a school board composed of at most eighteen members, six of whom are ex-officio and twelve are elected. The size of the board varies depending on the school and its locality. The ex-officio members include:

- (i) The head teacher,
- (ii) The president, secretary and treasurer of the PTA,
- (iii) The local council representative,
- (iv) The representative of the minister of finance as auditor.
- (v) Elected members are chosen by the group they represent and include one to three representatives of the teaching staff, two parents who are not teachers in the school, one pupil from class five or six, the representative of the most popular trade union in the school, a representative of the business community, a representative of NGOs functioning in the locality, a representative of local development associations, the representative of the traditional authority, and another auditor voted by the board from among its numbers.

An executive composed of a president, a vice president, a secretary and a finance secretary runs the board. The president and vice-president are elected for a mandate of one year which can be renewed three times. They must not be personnel of the school. The head teacher serves as the minutes secretary while one of the teachers' representatives serves as finance secretary.

Functions of the school management board

The board meets normally at the beginning of each term on the invitation of its president. Extra-ordinary sessions can be held at any time at the initiative of the president, two-thirds of the numbers or the divisional representative of the ministry of national education. The board, which is the structure that supervises, advises, controls and evaluates the running of the school, has the following specific duties.

It determines the school places, adopts the school budget and controls its execution, approves administrative and management accounts. The board confirms the organisational chart and the internal regulations of the school. It must locate and mobilise school resources, while ensuring the rational utilisation of infrastructure, personal, finances and didactic materials. The board has the responsibility of seeing to the enrolment of school aged children in the community, and participates in the recruitment

of pupils. It may participate in recruiting part-time and temporary personnel. It must evaluate school performance and give its opinion on all facets on school life. If necessary it is required to inform the governance observatory and the minister of national education of any malpractice.

Secondary schools

Composition of the management board

The board is composed of twelve ex-officio members and sixteen elected ones to give a total of twenty-eight. This number can vary depending on the size of the school and the prevailing conditions of its location. The number should not exceed twenty-eight. The ex-officio members are the head teacher (principal), the vice principal, the senior discipline master, the chief of works in technical institutions, the bursar, a representative of the local council, the president of the students' co-operative, the president, secretary, and treasurer of the PTA. In addition, a representative of the minister of finance serves as one auditor.

The elected members comprise a representative of administrative personnel, two student representatives (one boy and one girl), three representatives of teachers, four parent representative who are not teachers in the school, a representative of the business community, a representative of NGOs operating the locality, a representative of development associations, a representative of the traditional authority, and another auditor voted by the board from among its numbers.

The management board is run by an executive composed of a president, a vice president, a secretary, and a finance officer. The president and finance officers' mandate is renewable twice. They should not be teachers or students of the school. The principal serves as secretary while the school bursar serves as the finance officer.

Functions of the school management board

The board meets normally at the beginning of each term on the invitation of its president. Extra-ordinary sessions can be held at any time at the initiative of the president, two-thirds of the numbers or the divisional representative of the ministry of national education.

The management board is charged with the supervision, advice, control, and evaluation of school management. In this capacity, it performs much the same duties as those undertaken by the boards of primary schools as specified above. During its first plenary session, the Board establishes a standing committee to assist the principal with regard to student admissions and the recruitment of part-time and temporary staff. This committee is

chaired by the principal and other members include the vice president of the Board, a vice principal, two parent representatives voted from among the Board members, one student representative voted from among the Board members, one teacher representative voted from among the Board representatives, and the representative of administrative personnel on the Board.

Observations regarding management boards

As indicated earlier, the creation of management boards is a step towards decentralisation. The inclusion of local people such as traditional chiefs, businessmen, parents and others in managing schools is the beginning of a sharing of decision-making between the centre and the locality. However, the boards suffer from some major weaknesses. They do not generate any revenue, they do not receive and spend any money from higher levels and above all, they cannot sanction anyone. The board assists the head teachers to recruit temporary staff but does not have the means to pay any such teachers. Instead, it is the PTA that generates revenue to pay temporary staff and this gives the PTA a very powerful position from which it could dominate the Board. Furthermore, other school financial problems are resolved by the PTA, which in some cases has put up classrooms, built the school fence, installed water and set up school libraries and such-like.

Thus, one can say that the school board is not powerful enough because it lacks money and cannot sanction anyone. Furthermore, the extensive presence of civil servants who are representatives of the central government on the secondary school boards can dwarf any local initiative. There is therefore a need to look for means by which the board can generate and manage financial resources and to give it some controlling authority over personnel. Furthermore, there appears to be a need to review local representation in management boards so that local communities do not become awed by the presence of civil servants at the secondary school level.

Management problems in Cameroon

The preceding section has shown that the education system in Cameroon is to be decentralised according to the 1996 revised constitution and the education law of 1998. In carrying out decentralisation, it is vital to eliminate the ills that have plagued the system due to its centralised nature as well as new ones that may arise due to decentralisation. Decentralisation has at times created far more serious problems and the literature cautions that countries should not just copy blindly but should determine what to centralise and what to decentralise depending on local contexts (Bray &

Lillis 1998; Yannakopoulos 1980; Bray 1985; Bray 1999; Lauglo & Mclean 1985). In order words, decentralisation should not be considered a magical cure or panacea for all problems. It is necessary for decision makers to know what went wrong with centralisation and to evolve strategies of pre-empting such ills as well as emergent ones in the new structures.

This paper supports the case for decentralised management of public education in Cameroon. The author has worked in the Cameroon public education system for over 20 years and is very conversant with its problems. In addition, he has read the literature on the decentralisation and centralisation experiences of many other countries (see for example Bray 1985; Bray & Lillis 1988; Hinchcliffe 1989; Jimenez & Tan 1987; Lauglo & Mclean 1985; Orivel 1990; Patrinos & Ariasingam 1997; Watt 1989 and Yannakopoulos 1980). In the following sections, management problems identified in the present set up will be highlighted and ways of solving them through decentralisation will be presented. The identified problems are not inclusive and may not be unique to Cameroon and thus the solutions suggested could apply elsewhere in Africa as well.

Poor allocation of human resources

In the Cameroon public school system, teachers and other education personnel are not rationally deployed. There is an urban-rural disparity with urban centres having a disproportionately higher share of human resources. In some urban primary schools, there are 2–3 teachers per class and in some urban secondary schools there are teachers who work for just four hours per week spread over one or two days. In some rural primary schools teachers are forced to do multigrade teaching because of the lack of staff, while in rural secondary school some teachers have up to 30 hours per week and cover many subjects and grades at the same time.

The Ministry of Public Service in Yaounde with the assistance of the department of personnel of the Ministry of National Education recruits all teachers of the public school system in the country. These are then deployed by the Ministry of National Education which also transfers teachers from one school or town to the other. However, the provincial and divisional delegates are authorised in some rare circumstances to effect the transfer of personnel within their geographical jurisdictions.

This centralisation of recruitment, posting and transfer of teachers is highly inefficient for a multitude of reasons. There is a lack of equity between geographical locations in the distribution of teachers. The central authorities cannot or do not see problems at local level. They tend to focus on satisfying the needs of Yaounde and other cities to the detriment

of rural areas. Teachers do not often have the possibility of choosing where to work. School heads cannot effectively plan because very often, they are not sure of the number of teachers they will have for a school year. Some transfers are even disruptive because they occur within the school year and quite often, the transferred teacher is not replaced. Corruption has been noticed in the transfer of teachers i.e. some teachers corrupt Ministry officials so that they are transferred or posted to particular places or schools. Teachers are not duty-conscious and assiduous. Local authorities, including school heads, cannot sanction them directly. Thus teachers tend to behave the way they like and teach when and how they like because of lack of local control. When a head or delegate acts tough to a teacher, the latter will go to Yaounde and arrange for a transfer.

There is a great desire among teachers to remain in the major urban centres like Yaounde and Douala. When interviewed informally they give a plethora of reasons for wanting to stay in these areas. I list some of them here. Teachers claim that there are no social amenities in rural environments. Some want to continue their education and can only do so in the cities. Some are married and their spouses do business in the urban centres. Some want to stay where they can easily locate and attract spouses. Some stay in Yaounde to follow up on their files so that they can get paid.

In a decentralised system where the recruitment and management of human resources is localised, such phenomena will generally not occur. The central government ensures an equitable distribution of finances and each locality recruits and manages the personnel it needs. Those who sign contracts with a local authority will have to take up residence within its area of jurisdiction. Salaries will be paid locally and promptly so that personnel do not have to travel to Yaounde for months and even years to get paid. If someone does not like the amenities available in a locality, he or she will not apply to work there. Where an environment is so enclaved, the provincial and central governments can make special allocations to the authorities so that they attract teachers, as has been the case in Botswana and elsewhere.

Poor allocation of financial resources

Proposed current budgets are determined in all the schools but the ministry decides final allocations. Very often, the gap between what is demanded and what is allocated is very wide. The ministry alone determines all capital investments. The allocation of finances does not appear to follow any agreed upon formula and as a consequence, schools with the same level of enrolments sometimes end up receiving vastly different current budgets.

If semi-autonomous local education authorities are created, the above problem will be solved easily. Central and provincial finances will be allocated to these authorities following the proportion of eligible population or some other agreed upon formula instead of the whims and caprices of ministry officials. Here, the assumption is that in decentralising education to provincial and local authorities according to the 1998 law, accompanying formulas for financial contributions from each tier of government will be formulated as well. If such arrangements are fixed, each local authority knows beforehand what to expect from higher levels and this will reduce or eliminate the irrational distribution of financial resources. If the central and provincial governments are really committed to equity, they will take steps to equilibrate delivery of service between different geographical units by making special grants to the disadvantaged ones as has been the case in some decentralised systems where some local governments could not generate their quota of education budgets or were lagging behind others in terms of service delivery.

Disparity in quantity

The quantitative provision of education is unequal with Yaounde and other major cities having disproportionately higher shares. The majority of unenrolled children in Cameroon are found in the rural areas because of the lack of schools or shortage of school places. The general tendency has been for top ministry officials to create schools mainly in urban centres and in their respective villages. Furthermore, top civil servants of other ministries as well as politicians lobby and obtain schools for their places of origin. Villages that do not have powerful sons or daughters end up without schools, or they are saddled with ones with a few poorly constructed classrooms, if they have any. If there is decentralisation that ensures an equitable distribution of resources, local authorities in both rural and urban areas will be in a position to create sufficient school places of good quality for their children. But when Yaounde alone has to decide, some areas will always be favoured over others.

Disparity in quality

This situation is closely linked to the previous remarks. The centralised nature of the system has created a situation where well-built schools possessing equipment and high quality teachers and libraries are found only in towns and in the villages of powerful political elites. Recently, the government embarked on equipping public secondary schools with computers and so far, the focus has been on schools in Yaounde and a few

other provincial headquarters. This tends to exacerbate the gap between the rich and the poor.

In a decentralised system local authorities in cities and villages will use resources generated locally and those from central and provincial governments to solve such problems and consequently enhance education quality. Education officials will be accountable to local communities who hire them and as such will tend to use resources efficiently and effectively. Thus the local authorities must be powerful enough to be able to sanction the personnel they recruit.

Some experiences in the case studies by Bray and Lillis (1988) show that decentralisation transferred power from the hands of corrupt central government officials into those of corrupt local barons. Such people tend to make it very difficult for decentralisation to work by getting unqualified relations recruited, taking contracts to build schools and embezzling the money and protecting their protégés from sanctions. Creating commissions for recruitment, discipline and contracts can control this problem if parents and educated elite are highly involved. Also, a bit of central supervision at the regional/provincial level may be necessary to pre-empt corruption.

Irresponsible school heads

The minister alone, sometimes on the proposal of delegates, appoints school heads. The heads are not accountable to any local authority and the practice has been for them to run the school single-handedly, resulting in a lot of inefficiency. Collegial decision-making and democratic management practices are very rare in the public school system in Cameroon. Cases of misuse of financial resources abound. School heads have been known to steal school money and materials for their own personal use. There is even the case of a school head who removed louvres from a school building to put in his house. In a few cases heads have converted school buses for personal use or even for public transportation for their own benefit.

Some school heads are arrogant and run their schools like military camps. This author remembers a head who used to throw stones at students and refused to dialogue with complaining parents. Others do not even possess the basic elements of management and end up creating an atmosphere of tension in the whole school. In some cases people with very doubtful social values have been appointed and their whole life styles have left local communities completely awed. In the face of all these difficulties, the local communities are powerless. It takes a very long time for Yaounde to react, and even then if the head has a powerful 'godfather'.

nothing is done to him. Sometimes he is merely transferred in the same capacity to cause the ruin of yet another community.

In a decentralised system, vacant positions are advertised and the local authority recruits candidates after interview. A principal or school head recruited in this way will be accountable to local authorities and can be disciplined rapidly when need arises. Such a situation guarantees efficient and effective use of resources as well as good administrative practice.

The recent creation of school management boards is a step in the right direction. However, the boards are not powerful enough, especially since they cannot discipline school heads and other personnel. The board can only report malpractices to the ministry and to the good governance observatory.

Poor teacher management

Teacher management is the weakest aspect of centralised management in Cameroon. Apart from a recent innovation where a few contract primary school teachers are recruited locally at divisional level, teacher management is centralised in three ministries in Yaounde. The Ministry of Public Service and Administrative Reform recruits, promotes, pays, disciplines and retires teachers. The Ministry of National Education posts, transfers and appoints them while the Ministry of Finance and Economy pays their salaries and allowances.

There is very little coordination between the ministries. Sometimes, it takes more than 24 months for a new teacher to get his first pay-cheque. The consequence of this situation is that newly recruited teachers spend one to two years in Yaounde shuttling between the three ministries to be able to get their salary. This situation is inefficient and ineffective because the teachers end up being paid for all the time they spent following their files in Yaounde. It is also demoralising and frustrating for the teachers to come to realise immediately they are recruited that the system is so inefficient.

In a decentralised set-up where teachers as well as other education personnel are recruited, paid, promoted, disciplined, and retired locally by a single authority, the situation described above cannot arise. At the end of his first month, a teacher gets his first pay-cheque. He will not waste time for which he is paid to 'chase' files in Yaounde.

Another problem is the transfer of teachers across the country, for example from Kousseri to Mundemba. First, it is expensive since the government pays transportation for the transferred teacher, his family and luggage. It is also expensive to the individual because he is likely to lose or damage some luggage on the way or even be forced to sell at give away prices. Second, some transferred teachers take a year or more to reach their

new posts and they get paid for all this long time spent in transit. Some transferred teachers simply disappear into nature for life or go overseas resulting in the phenomenon of 'ghost teachers' who continue to be paid.

If local authorities recruited and managed teachers, no such waste will occur. A teacher can only be transferred within the authority's area of jurisdiction and the movement of such a teacher can be rapidly effected using the authority's buses. Furthermore, transfers will be greatly reduced because individuals will be recruited into specific vacant posts. In this way, teachers will get paid only for effective work. Thus transportation costs will greatly reduce and the phenomenon of 'ghost workers' will reduce or even disappear.

Lack of assiduity or laxity among teachers, especially in rural areas, constitutes a major crisis in the system. Many teachers in rural schools just abandon their jobs completely while retaining their salaries. A few perform as visiting teachers, staying in urban centres and appearing in the school once in awhile to teach for an hour or two for the full month's pay.

The above problems are easily solved in decentralised systems. If each local authority advertises posts, interviews, recruits, and pays teachers, then the situation above cannot arise. The job description can demand that those who end up being recruited, no matter their origin, take up permanent residence within the authority's area of jurisdiction for the duration of their contracts so that the phenomenon of 'ghost teachers' can be eliminated or at least controlled. Furthermore, the local authorities, being closer to the schools, are better placed to monitor and evaluate teacher productivity, assiduity, and conscientiousness so that sanctions are applied with rapidity to dissuade others. Such strategies will certainly ensure more effective and efficient use of public resources.

The Government model

Law no. 98/004 has identified three levels of authority: the state or central government, the regional authority and the local authority. The same law has assigned responsibility as follows:

The State

According to section 11, the state shall formulate and implement policy with the assistance of rational and local authorities, families and private and public institutions. Specifically, the state shall set the objectives and general guidelines for national teaching and training syllabuses in conjunction with all sectors of national life in order to make education more professional. It must ensure the constant adaptation of the educational

system to national economic and socio-cultural realities, and also to the international environment, especially through the promotion of bilingualism and the teaching of national languages. The state lays down the conditions for the creation, opening and running of government and private educational establishments and controls them. It defines standards for construction and equipment of public and private educational establishments and controls them. It is required to draw and update the school location map and finally, it must finance education.

Regional and local authorities

The responsibilities of these authorities are covered in three sections of the law. Section 11 states that they shall assist the state to formulate and implement education policy. Section 12 stipulates that they shall finance education. But Section 13 contradicts section 11 by saying that a separate law shall determine the responsibilities of the regional and local authorities in implementing education policy and in financing education. At this point, the idea of assisting in formulating education policy is removed since the awaited law will only cover policy implementation and education finance and the present one has not shown how and in what domains the local and regional authorities are to assist in policy formulation.

Comments on the model

When one reads Law no. 98/004, it becomes very evident that the education system in Cameroon is to be decentralised. The structures have been identified and they are equally covered in the 1996 revised constitution that involves territorial decentralisation. What is confusing in the law is that one section says the local and regional authorities will participate in policy formulation and another says these authorities will only implement policy and finance education.

Furthermore, setting of standards for school buildings that the law says is the purview of the central government is better done at regional level due to spatial variation in price and availability of building materials. Regional variations in climate will also affect the type of school building. In addition, school location planning is better done at local and regional levels where immediate knowledge of needs is more readily available than at the centre.

Considering the above comments and inspired by the literature on case studies of decentralisation, as well as long experience in the education sector of Cameroon, this author has made proposals for the sharing of authority and responsibility between the state, the regional authorities and the districts.

It is worth noting that in local terminology, state and centre are synonymous unlike elsewhere where state is instead synonymous with region or province.

Proposals

Considering the disadvantages of centralisation as highlighted above, the main thrust of this article is to propose ways of managing public education in Cameroon effectively, efficiently and equitably. This is very much in line with the present constitution and the 1998 law on education. The proposals will hopefully result in increases in both the quantity and quality of education so that Cameroon can attain education for all by 2015 as contained in the Dakar Framework of Action and in the current education sector plans. The proposals entail decentralisation to an estimated 80 percent (considering the number and importance of roles and decisions at the district and regional levels) and centralisation to about 20 percent, giving a mixed system in a sense but which can practically be described as decentralised in line with the model contained in the 1998 law. It is the strong conviction of the author, which has evolved from a long teaching experience and from reviewing the literature on education in more than 40 countries, that this decentralised model, if properly implemented and subjected to constant monitoring and readjustments, then education in the country will be in perpetual good health.

The model assumes the presently envisaged three levels of authority will be involved in the provision and management of education: the local or district, the province or region and the state, centre or nation. Each of these levels of authority must play some role in education if it is hoped to provide quality education to all the eligible population.

Another important assumption is that Cameroon must of necessity undergo political decentralisation by giving some decision-making power to regions or provinces and districts because of the rich cultural and linguistic diversity in the country, and especially as a way of implementing the present constitution. The literature, notably Tamukong (1995), Bray & Lillis (1988), Lauglo & Mclean (1985) and Foster (1975), has shown that splitting a country into semi- autonomous sub-national units is a way of maintaining national unity and political stability in culturally diverse countries. Thus to prevent ethnic wars as happened recently in Rwanda, Burundi, Nigeria, Sudan, and Ethiopia, and to pre-empt secessionist wars, it is often advisable to effect political decentralisation by creating semi-autonomous regions/provinces/states each with its own democratically elected government.

Each region should ensure good governance and rapid development by creating districts/local council areas/counties according to geographical, historical, cultural, and linguistic or other affinities. Elected local governments that fully represent the peoples' interests will run such districts or areas. Districts may be further split, but for the purpose of this paper only the three levels of authority above are assumed, considering that the constitution provides for these three levels only.

The provincial and district governments will function through creating suitable structures (such as ministries, secretariats, commissions, or boards) and one of them will have education as its portfolio. The proposals that are presented below have been generated from living through the centralised experience in Cameroon and from reading on decentralisation experiences in a large number of countries including Nigeria, Botswana, Kenya, Papua New Guinea, China, Guyana, Burma, Zambia, India, Pakistan, Brazil, Netherlands, USA and Australia (Bray & Lillis 1988; Hinchcliffe 1989; Jimenez & Tan 1987; Yannakopoulos 1980; Orivel 1990; Udoh & Akpa 1990; James 1986; USIS 1986; Watt 1989). The two sources have jointly led to a formulation of the roles assigned to the different levels of authority below. The government is still to come out with a law to distribute responsibility for and control of education between the various levels of government and this proposal is intended to guide such a law.

The district authority

Sociologists claim that real development must lie in peoples' own culture, beliefs and values (ODA 1995). This statement is sometimes enough reason to devolve decision-making authority to districts so that local communities become more involved in the management of local affairs. Ethnic tensions and wars have broken out in Cameroon and elsewhere in the continent before because some groups felt that development projects initiated by central governments tended to impoverish their livelihoods, exclude them from resources (such as knowledge, information, technology, education, land, water, energy, labour etc.) and from social, political and cultural institutions, activities and facilities. Decision-making power is very essential for peaceful development. Thus, it is hoped that in the new set up, districts would be very powerful in taking decisions about improvement of lives, access to resources, and participation in the political process. A district will thus bear much responsibility for and control of education and ensure that it is equitably delivered so as not to increase socio-economic differentiations. The district authorities in charge of education could be assigned the following functions.

First, they must oversee and coordinate delivery of educational services in the whole district while generating funds through the local government finance department and through user charges in secondary schools. District authorities will operate nursery, primary, and secondary grammar schools. They will authorise the creation of private schools considering the local school map. They must keep education statistics, determine school locations, determine enrolment targets, and fix class norms following local demographic factors and provincial targets. It would be their responsibility to determine on the closure and merger of schools, to manage and disburse funds allocated by the provincial authorities, and generate guidelines for institutional authorities to ensure a smooth running of the schools. The same authorities must adapt some aspects of the curriculum e.g. agriculture, history and cultural studies to local contexts, mass produce/purchase teaching aids and some textbooks, construct, equip, and maintain all public schools, supervise all schools to ensure quality and student welfare, recruit and manage all categories of education personnel i.e. teachers, school heads, administrative personnel, health personnel etc. The district should be able to hire, pay promote, sanction and retire all personnel nursery, primary and secondary schools, provide free primary education but charge fees in secondary school while ensuring that the poor still have access. Each district will decide whether to deliver free nursery education or not since its provision has a lot of equity problems attached. It must organise primary school leaving examinations and award certificates, assist the examination boards and regional authorities to run secondary school leaving certificates, oversee the preparation of individual school budgets and ensure timely disbursement of funds for all approved expenditure in the public schools. Other duties include organising periodic in-service training for teachers, administrators and school counsellors with assistance from the regional authorities; creating and running school and public libraries; stimulating and sustaining school-community relationships and monitoring and evaluating delivery of education and effecting timely interventions.

The regional authority

It is assumed that each province/region will have a democratically elected government, which will function through particular structures one of which will be in charge of education. The regional education authorities among other functions will set provincial norms and targets in line with national objectives. They will recruit and manage some categories of education personnel and assist the districts in personnel recruitment and management.

The Regional Authority will coordinate education in the province by setting guidelines for the districts, manage and equitably disburse funds from the central government, and to do so must generate revenue to finance education and make grants to the districts depending on demographic and social factors.

In addition the regional authority should be favourably positioned to determine school curricula to reflect national objectives and regional contexts, to approve district plans for educational development and provide needed assistance in their implementation, and determine the working conditions of education personnel. Other tasks include setting criteria for creating private institutions, determining standards of school buildings and facilities, operating universities, colleges of education and technical secondary schools, qualifying teachers, administrators and school psychologists in association with universities or other certification bodies, and assisting examination boards in organising various examinations and awards.

Regional authorities should also carry out research to inform policy and practice. They can cut costs through the bulk production or purchase of textbooks and other teaching aids. Finally, they must monitor and evaluate the provision of education in the province and carry out timely interventions.

The Central/State authorities

Cameroon currently has three ministries of education: National Education, Technical and Professional Education and Higher Education. It would make more sense, economically to fuse them. However, the focus here is on the role of the central government in the delivery of education in the country.

The ministry or ministries, assisted by other executive and legislative structures, will carry out activities that include setting national norms and standards, generating guidelines for curricula and school structures, coordinating delivery of educational services in the country, aggregating education statistics from lower levels, ensuring equitable access to all levels and types of education by carrying out spatial and social equilibration, and setting guidelines for the functioning of regional authorities.

As with regional authorities they will also need to carry out research to inform policy and direct interventions, generate resources to finance its activities and make grants to regions based on demographic and social equity factors and operate national universities, research centres and libraries.

Conclusion

Caution must be exercised in decentralising education. A global survey shows that majority of countries are decentralising while a few are recentralising. A tiny minority has not moved in either direction. Thus, as Bray (1985) has noted, to many countries decentralisation is in fashion, it is the thing to do, it is modern. Because of this infatuation, countries go about decentralising in the mistaken belief that it is a panacea for all the ills of education and without taking the necessary precautions to preempt possible problems. Decentralisation has, for example, shifted responsibility to some local collectivities without endowing them with the financial and managerial capacity to perform in their new roles, and central governments have tended to lay all blame on the failings of education systems on ill-equipped local governments; decentralisation has therefore, in some cases, led to larger social and geographical disparities in education. It has, in some countries, led to very corrupt practices at local level because control structures were dismantled and, has consequently resulted in very low quality education in some areas. This catalogue of decentralisation potential limitations is very long.

But since it is generally agreed that decentralisation is a better option than centralisation—possibly because of its democratic implications—governments have to factor in structures and procedures that will eliminate or at least control the above and other identified difficulties when decentralising. The first step is to determine what to decentralise considering local contexts and levels of education concerned; and to work from the basis that the central government will continue financing education instead of abdicating its responsibilities, as has happened elsewhere. Urwick (1992) has suggested that centralisation/decentralisation should be guided by the principles of efficiency and equity and that in reality a mixed system is ideal, as where certain aspects of the delivery of education are centralised while some are decentralised. He suggests that planning, for example, should be centralised for reason of efficiency and that resource allocation too could be centralised for the purpose of equity. However, centralised resource allocation has not been equitable so far and there is a need to decentralise it considering the local situation in Cameroon.

International policy borrowing is in vogue just as decentralisation is. An attempt has been made in this paper to point out what is wrong with the centralised delivery of public education in Cameroon. Also, some

major failings of decentralisation have been identified above. The questions that policy makers should ask themselves include:

- What are the major problems of education in Cameroon and how can such problems be solved?
- Which countries have experienced similar problems to those of Cameroon?
- Did these countries solve the problems and can their solutions be adapted to Cameroon? If so, how?
- Since Cameroon has opted for decentralisation, what aspects of education delivery should be decentralised and which should remain centralised?
- In decentralising, what should be the relative distribution of power and responsibility between the state, province and district?
- What problems are likely to emerge in decentralisation and how can these be pre-empted?
- What problems arose in decentralisation in similar countries and how were such problems solved?
- Can such solutions be adopted and built into the decentralisation process so that the identified problems do not occur?

This paper has presented proposed roles and functions of the various levels of authority summarised from the experiences of various countries as contained in the literature. They could be adapted or modified as the case might be. They could serve as a starting point on any debate by policy makers as to what to assign to each level of government. There is a wealth of experience from which countries like Cameroon can draw in order to make the decentralisation exercise a fruitful and successful one.

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