

The road covered

Since July 2009, eight laws have been passed and close to forty decrees signed by the Head of State to enable the process take root.

In line with section 1(2) of the January 18, 1996 constitution as amended by Law No 2008/001 of April 14, 2008 modifying the 2nd June, 1972 constitution, Cameroon shall be a decentralized unitary state. Putting aside endless varsity debates on the different definitions of decentralization, it simply refers to the transfer of administrative and financial autonomy to competent local authorities.

That is, unlike the yester years when development was defined and executed from the ministries, today local communities will be in charge. In fact, as the years go by, communities will through their councils and mayors undertake their development projects (road construction, building of schools, health centers and markets, electrification, provision of water, environmental protection, etc). Thus far, the balance sheet of this process can aptly be sub divided into three: state reforms, territorial reorganization and an extraordinary legal framework formulated to govern the process.

Concerning state reforms, a circular signed by the Prime Minister on 11 January, 2008 calls on all ministries to take decentralization into consideration while elaborating their different projects and policies. This has brought about a better and brighter view of efforts and actions undertaken by the state and decentralized territorial collectivities. As well, a gentle but gradual kind of responsible management is emerging between elected officials (mayors) and their appointed counterparts (Senior Divisional Officers). This emerging responsibility brings to light the fact that when fully implemented, decentralization will be a co-management of the country by the state and the local people.

With regards to the ongoing territorial reorganization in our country, they are aimed at bringing administration close to those administered. From a practical platform, this reorganization is visible through the transformation of erstwhile provinces into regions, the recent creation of new sub-divisions, the creation of 59 new councils across the country as well as the creation of 12 new urban councils.

The legal framework that gives strength to decentralization in our country has since January 1, 2010 facilitated the transfer of administrative and financial competences from nine ministries to decentralized territorial collectivities. These ministries include those concerned with the provision of water in rural areas, digging, tarring and maintenance of roads, women and the family, agriculture and rural development, social affairs, fisheries and animal husbandry, health as well as education. In concrete terms, this means the above ministries will now have to fund councils to accomplish projects that they hitherto executed. It is this new transfer of power that squarely explains the phrase "bringing administration closer to those administered".

Putting together the above, it becomes spotlessly clear that the process of decentralization has come to stay and hence requires the support of all Cameroonians worth the salt. As a matter of what precedes, it is a gradual and progressive process needing regular

reforms and constant training of its different stakeholders through out the national territory. It is for this reason that the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization has facilitated the creation of a network of journalists charged with the coverage and follow up of the said process. In the meantime, for this process to be better felt by local communities, it must be complemented by a well elaborated deconcentration. For example, a local council wishing to build a health center, bridge or school has to inform the competent government authority (delegate in charge) on where, why, when and how the said structure will be built. In the midst of all this, effective speed breaks have been designed to clip the wings of officials, whether elected or appointed (that is mayors and SDOs) in a bid to ensure the collective good and interest of those constituting decentralized territorial collectivities. To avoid mismanagement of financial resources by authorities concerned in the process, vital reforms have been made at the Ministry of Finance as well as FEICOM related to the disbursement of funds control. The presence of these administrative and financial checks and balance give no room for fear of any form of oppression or tyranny between the governed and the governors within the framework of decentralization. Manyanye Ikome