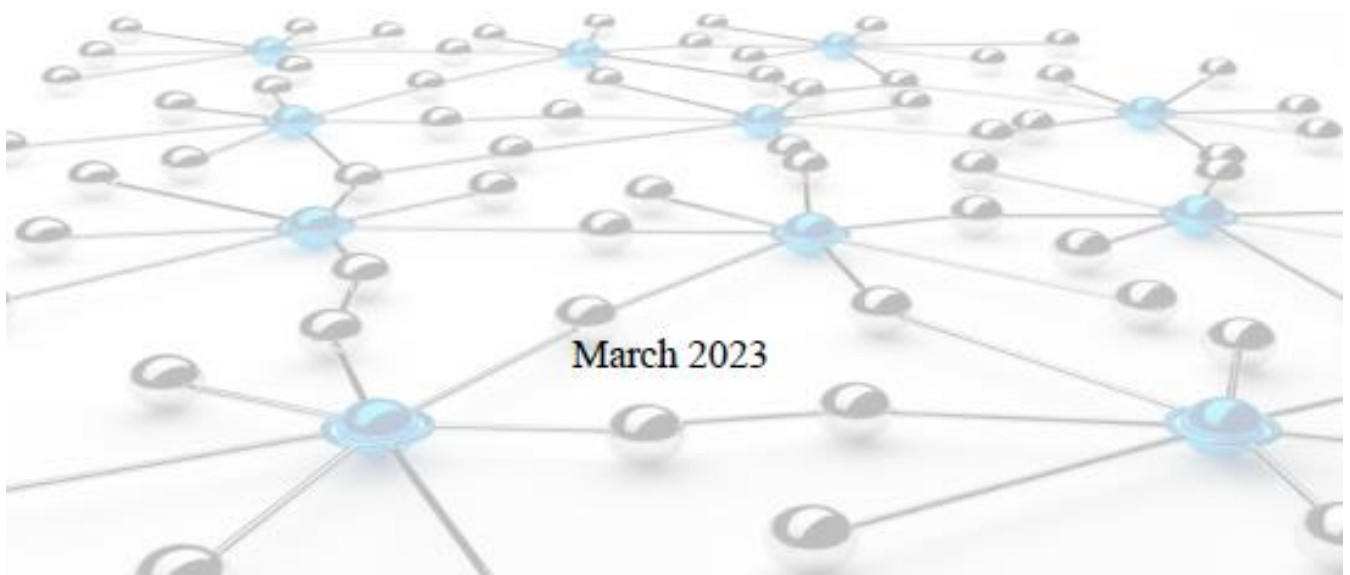


RESEARCH REPORT

Effectiveness of North West and South West Regional Assemblies (ENSRA)



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Important Disclaimer

Effectiveness of North West and South West Regional Assemblies is a project funded by UK FCDO. The direct beneficiaries of the project are the regional assemblies of the North West and South West regions of Cameroon. The project is being implemented by the Central African Hub of the African Leadership Centre (ALC) Office in Nairobi, Kenya. The views and comments in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the above-mentioned institutions.

Executive Summary

Views on the results of decentralisation in the North West (NW) and South West (SW) Regions of Cameroon under the special status reform have been mixed, ranging from no success to remarkable success depending on the stakeholder. The purpose of this mixed methods research was to better understand the effectiveness of the regional assemblies in the NW and SW Regions from the perspective of stakeholders and the people in the two regions who are the primary beneficiaries of this reform. To promote responsive institutions at the regional and national levels and encourage the participation of men and women, stakeholders require knowledge of the effectiveness of decentralization, gaps in its implementation, and how it can be improved. The findings of this study reveal that stakeholders believe some changes have taken place since the law on decentralisation was enacted but that these are yet to have a significant impact on the lives of the primary beneficiaries. They show that more robust measures will need to be taken to ensure significant political, fiscal and administrative autonomy for the special status to produce the expected results of protecting the English-speaking or Anglophone subsystems (education and common law) that are historically associated with the NW and SW. Participants in the study expressed a strong desire for significant autonomy to be granted to the special status regions. The following recommendations have been made based on their views:

- Firmly pursue peaceful means to sustainably resolve the ongoing conflict to create an enabling environment for regional assemblies to carry out their missions;
- Enact laws that will ensure exclusive competence in key areas including but not limited to finance, education, justice and the development of economic infrastructure;
- Introduce higher legislated gender quotas to improve women's representation in regional assemblies;
- International actors should offer financial support and other incentives to encourage local authorities to effectively carry out projects that can impact the welfare of citizens in areas like education, social housing, healthcare, water and sanitation, and transportation.

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Abbreviations

AWDF	African Women’s Development Fund
BSc	Bachelor of Science Degree
Cameroon GCE A/L	General Certificate of Education Advanced Level Examination
Cameroon GCE O/L	General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level Examination
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CPDM	Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement
DESPRO	Swiss-Ukrainian Decentralization Support Project
ENAM	National School of Administration and Magistracy
GC-RLA	General Code of Regional and Local Authorities
iKNOW Politics	International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
MINDDEVEL	Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development
MSc	Master of Science Degree
NW	North West Region
OHADA	Organisation for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
SDF	Social Democratic Front
SSRA	Special Status Regional Assemblies
SW	South West Region
UK FCDO	Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office of the United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
WID	Women in Development
WILPF	Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom

1. Introduction

1.1. Contextual Overview

The granting of a special status to the North West (NW) and South West (SW) Regions has been driven by demands from these regions to empower localities to make decisions for themselves to better meet their own priorities and more effectively address their needs. The origin of the special status can be traced to the 1996 Constitution of Cameroon¹ when the term was first used formally². Efforts to implement it however are very recent. It is following the Major National Dialogue organised from September 30th to 4th October 2019 by the government as part of its efforts to resolve the conflict with separatists in the two English-speaking regions that significant measures were taken to implement it³. The conflict in the two regions escalated in October 2017 after the government failed to effectively address demands for the protection of the English-speaking education subsystem and the common law subsystem by teachers and lawyers of the NW and SW Regions and ensuing demands for local autonomy by a consortium of civil society organisations⁴. This report presents the findings of an empirical study that examines the effectiveness of the special status regional assemblies in the NW and SW from the perspective of stakeholders and service users in the two regions. It examines the results, gaps and constraints in the implementation of decentralisation in the special status regions since Law No. 2019/024 of 24 December 2019 relating to the Bill to Institute the General Code of Regional and Local Authorities (GC-RLA) was enacted in the aftermath of the Major National Dialogue. This study proposes data-driven recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the regional assemblies in the two regions.

Cameroon is a Sub-Saharan African state situated in the Gulf of Guinea. It comprises two territories materialised by the partition of the then-German protectorate of Kamerun, following the defeat of Germany during the First World War. The territories experienced two separate systems of administration under the League of Nations Mandate (1916 to 1946) and the United Nations (UN) Trusteeship (13 December 1946 to April 1961 for British Southern Cameroons

¹ Law No. 96-6 of 18 January 1996 to amend the Constitution of 2 June, 1972

² Takougang, J., & Krieger, H., 2018, Cameroon's Anglophone crisis: Dialogue, deadlock, and deadlock breaking. *African Affairs*, 117(469), p.175

³ Crawford, G. et al., June 2022, Voices from 'Ground Zero': Interrogating History, Culture and Identity in the Resolution of Cameroon's 'Anglophone' Conflict, Coventry University, p. 28, accessed on 19 February 2023 at https://pure.coventry.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/54589016/Voices_from_Ground_Zero_web.pdf.

⁴ Ibid

and 13 December to 1 January 1960⁵ successively before the independence of the French portion and its reunification following a UN organised plebiscite with the English part on 1 October 1961. The area that was administered by France makes up over 80% (formerly called East Cameroon) of post-reunification Cameroon and the British portion makes up for 20% (formerly, West Cameroon). This situation resulted in the development of separate linguistic, legal, educational, administrative, and economic and security cultures among the two peoples. Until the abolition of the Federal system that formed the basis for reunification in 1972, there were two separate systems of education and justice, which did not merge seamlessly. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the effectiveness of decentralisation and the challenges to its successful implementation under the current special status framework, which was officially designed to safeguard the harmonious coexistence of the two peoples of Cameroon.

Grävingholt and Haldenwang⁶ state that “the promotion of decentralisation and local governance has long since been an established part of bilateral and multilateral development cooperation”. In the North West (NW) and South West (SW) Regions and Cameroon in general, it has been viewed and promoted by stakeholders as a way of improving service delivery and inclusion in governance. In spite of the election of regional councilors on 6 December 2020, and the election of executive members of the Regional Assemblies on 22 December 2020 the effectiveness of the assemblies has remained a subject of heated debate. Understanding what has been achieved and the challenges that have been encountered is, therefore, necessary to inform policy on the implementation of the special status. This is however not possible without a clear and common understanding of the meaning of the special status and decentralisation in the two regions as these concepts appear to have varied interpretations across national stakeholders.

Decentralisation is defined by the General Conference of Local Councils in Cameroon of February 2019 as “the transfer of powers from the state to elected local representatives which have legal personality and wield powers of free administration”.⁷ A major feature of the decentralisation process in Cameroon is that efforts have been made to give officials appointed

⁵ see A/RES/63 (I) of 13 Dec. 1946 and Anastasia Nlende Nzume, 2004, *British and French Administration of Peoples on the Southern Borderlands of Cameroon: the Case of the Anglo-French Intercamerouns Boundary, 1916-1961*, PhD Thesis, University of London School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), accessed on the 3 February 2023 at: <https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/29199/1/10731294.pdf>

⁶ Grävingholt, Jörn & von Haldenwang, Christian, 2016. "The promotion of decentralisation and local governance in fragile contexts," IDOS Discussion Papers 20/2016, German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS), p. IV.

⁷ Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development (MINDDEVEL), 2019, *Proceedings of the General Conference of Local Councils in Cameroon*, Yaounde, 6-7 February 2019, MINDDEVEL

to represent the state (central government) a prominent role in the regions,⁸ which can be argued to limit and compromise the democratic nature of decentralisation. Tcheuwa contends that good decentralisation is implemented along with good deconcentration, considered as a “technique that enables the central government to be present throughout the country in order to better administer it and oversee its basis interests such as the maintenance of public law and order and harmonious development of the whole country”.⁹ This mix of political decentralisation and deconcentration (administrative decentralisation) can be considered controversial from a democratic decentralisation perspective¹⁰.

According to Piotrowski and Lang¹¹, ‘special status’ refers to a legal framework that grants autonomy to specific regions or territories within the country. This autonomy is manifested in various ways, including the ability to manage their resources, establish local governance structures, and pass laws that are specific to the region. The special status can therefore be considered a form of decentralisation design to address the unique historical, economic and cultural specificities in a given country. The special status in Cameroon is manifested in the creation of regional assemblies in the NW and SW which are defined by Ako and Funke¹², as legislative bodies that represent the interests of a particular regions or territories. According to Article 3 (1) of Law No. 2019/024, “the North West and South West Regions shall have a special status based on their language specificity and historical heritage”.

Given that the terms regional assembly and special status have been often used interchangeably by practitioners in Cameroon, the term special status regional assemblies (SSRA) is therefore also used here to refer to both. Although the SSRA were only created recently, Takougang and Krieger¹³ are of the view that they were introduced in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon in the 1990s, specifically with the enactment of the 1996 Constitution¹⁴. The Constitution states in its Section 62 (2) that (2) “without prejudice to the provisions of this Part, the law may take

⁸ Tcheuwa J.C. (2022). “Decentralisation and the Primacy of the State”, in Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development (MINDDEVEL), 2022, Decentralisation, MINDDEVEL, p.8

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Crawford, G., & Hartmann, C. Eds. (2008). Decentralisation in Africa: A Pathway out of Poverty and Conflict? Amsterdam University Press. P. 9. Available at ; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46msxc>

See also, Barnett, C., Minis, P., & VanSant, J. (1997). Democratic Decentralisation: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnada635.pdf

¹¹ Piotrowski, J., & Lang, M. (2019). “The international legal framework for territorial autonomy: An overview.” European Yearbook of Minority Issues, 16(1), p. 192

¹² Ako, J. E., & Funke, N. N., 2020, “Regionalism and regional assemblies in Cameroon: Opportunities, challenges, and prospects”. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 34(1), p. 23.

¹³ Takougang, J., & Krieger, H. (2018). “Cameroon’s Anglophone crisis: Dialogue, deadlock, and deadlock breaking”. *African Affairs*, 117(469), p.175

¹⁴ Law No. 96-6 of 18 January 1996 to amend the Constitution of 2 June, 1972

into consideration the specificities of certain Regions with regard to their organization and functioning”. Takougang and Krieger¹⁵ argue that the framework was intended to provide greater autonomy and control over resources to these regions and ease local decision-making and representation, with the government's aim to address the long-standing grievances of marginalization and discrimination experienced by the Anglophone regions. In spite of the official commitment by the government, the enactment of several laws to specifically guide the implementation of the SSRA, Achu and Ndi¹⁶ among others contend that, ongoing conflicts and controversies persist over these measures, with many Anglophones arguing that they have not done enough to address their concerns.

The escalation of the Anglophone crisis into an armed conflict in 2017¹⁷ is a key contextual aspect in the desire to codify and implement the special status in the SW and NW. The efforts to resolve the conflict can potentially accelerate the decentralisation process or stall it as the literature on decentralisation in crisis situations shows. As Grävingsholt and Haldenwang¹⁸ argue for example, efforts by multilateral and bilateral partners to promote decentralisation in crisis situations such as in Cameroon can be “faced with the general suspicion of encouraging separatism, exacerbating conflicts, and thereby promoting the disintegration of the state”. In spite of this, “fragile contexts create demand for institutional solutions concerning the distribution of tasks, responsibilities, resources and political power between the various levels of the state”¹⁹. The North West and South West Regions of Cameroon have a combined population of around 5 million people²⁰. Farming is the primary economic activity in the North West and South West Regions, with coffee, cocoa, palm oil, and timber being the major products²¹. The ongoing conflict, triggered by demands for more autonomy in late 2016 by the English-speaking minority that constitutes the greater part of the population in the SW and NW regions, has led to the closure of many businesses and farms, severely impacting the economy²². The

¹⁵ Takougang, J., & Krieger, H. (2018). “Cameroon’s Anglophone crisis: Dialogue, Deadlock, and Deadlock breaking”. *African Affairs*, 117(469), p.175

¹⁶ Achu, L. A., & Ndi, G. S., 2020, “Decentralisation in Cameroon: Issues and Challenges”. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 10(2), p.5

¹⁷ Crawford, G., et al. (2022). “Voices from ‘Ground Zero’: Interrogating History, Culture and Identity in the Resolution of Cameroon’s ‘Anglophone’ Conflict”. June. Access on 18 February 2023.

https://pure.coventry.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/54589016/Voices_from_Ground_Zero_web.pdf.

¹⁸ Grävingsholt and Haldenwang, 2016, op. cit pp. IV & 1

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ National Institute of Statistics (NIS) Cameroon (2020). “3rd General Population and Housing Census, Cameroon”, NIS, p.3, Retrieved on 24 February 2023 from; <https://www.statistics-cameroon.org/news.php?id=139>

²¹ Simo, M. F. (2020). “Impact of the Anglophone crisis on the cultural heritage of Cameroon: A case study of the North West Region”. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, 5(1), p. 72

²² Kiven, J. N. (2020). “Social and cultural values of the North West and South West regions of Cameroon: Implications for national unity and integration”. *African Journal of Education, Science and Technology*, 7(1), p.6

conflict has also disrupted the education system in the region, with many schools and universities being forced to close²³. Contrary to scepticism on the benefits of decentralisation in such a context, Fombe and Fuh²⁴ contend that engaging in meaningful dialogue with all stakeholders and promoting an inclusive and participatory approach to governance is crucial for resolving the conflict and addressing regional inequality and marginalization. In addition to the expectations of local economic development and participation, decentralisation in the NW and SW can thus also be seen as a possible contribution to overcoming conflict. The demographic, historical, economic and political importance of the two regions makes the effective implementation of special status important for the country's decentralisation efforts and stability.

The aim of this study funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) was to increase understanding of the effectiveness of decentralisation, from the perspective of different stakeholders in the special status regions to chart a path for policy reform and effective implementation. To achieve this aim, the study sought to answer the following questions: can the decentralisation process in the special status regions be considered effective?; and how can current efforts to promote it be scaled up? Specifically, it sought to;

- examine the understanding of changes in the division of powers between regional assemblies, local authorities and deconcentrated services.
- examine whether the special status has protected the English-speaking common-law subsystem.
- analyse the effects of the special status on the English-speaking education subsystem.
- examine whether Regional Assemblies are adequately funded.
- understand how the setting up of regional assemblies affected gender equality.
- examine whether the participation of citizens in governance has been guaranteed by the implementation of the special status.
- understand the benefits citizens in the SW and NW have experienced as a result of the decentralisation reforms within the context of the special status;

²³ Ngum, E. N. (2018). "The impact of the Anglophone crisis on education in Cameroon". *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 11(1), p.53

²⁴ Fombe, L. E., & Fuh, E. N. (2018). "The Anglophone crisis in Cameroon: A historical analysis". *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research*, 7(1), p.71

- analyze the perspectives of policy actors and other stakeholders in the NW and SW on the adjustments that can be considered in order to improve service delivery by regional assemblies;
- propose policy recommendations for the SW and NW to enhance the benefit of decentralization.

These objectives were pursued by collecting data using closed and open-ended questionnaires to generate a mix of quantitative and qualitative data for analysis. The study was carried out by a team of researchers from the Central African Hub of the African Leadership Centre in Nairobi and fellows of the Centre who are researchers and leaders of civil society organisations with extensive experience of working in the two regions and Cameroon. The report is divided into five main sections. Figure 1 below provides a summary of the sections in the report.

Figure 1: Structure of the Report

Section 1	Introduction: This section highlights the background of the research, the aims and objectives. It also includes an overview of the methodology adopted for the study.
Section 2	Special Status and the Protection of the Common Law and English-Speaking Education Subsystems: This section examines the effectiveness of the special status in protecting the common law subsystem and the English-speaking education subsystem.
Section 3	Special Status and the Promotion of Gender Equality and Economic Development: In this section, the contribution of regional assemblies to achieving gender equality and economic development is discussed.
Section 4	Challenges to the implementation of the special status: This section identifies and presents some of the main difficulties encountered in promoting decentralisation in the special status regions.
Section 5	Conclusion and Recommendations: This section provides a general summary report and concluding remarks on the findings. It also included recommendations on how the decentralisation process can be more effectively implemented.

The sections outlined in Figure 1 above provide a comprehensive discussion of the effectiveness of the special status with particular attention paid to the effectiveness in protecting the English-speaking educational and common law systems that arguably inspired the design of the decentralisation process in the NW and SW. Particular effort is made to comprehensively examine the main challenges to the effective implementation of the special status that need to be addressed to ensure its effectiveness. The organisation of the sections is designed to provide an in-depth discussion of the benefits experienced by citizens in the two regions and the changes in the division of powers between regional assemblies and deconcentrated services.

1.2. Methodology and Data Analysis

This study adopted a mixed-method research approach. Drawing from previous studies in the literature on decentralisation and special status regions, qualitative and quantitative questionnaires were developed to explore the effectiveness of SSRA in (a) protecting the common law subsystem (b) protecting the English subsystem of education (c) promoting gender equality (d) promoting local economic development and (f) promoting the participation of citizens in the NW and SW in governance. Additionally, qualitative data was also obtained from a policy workshop organised under the theme “Promoting Decentralisation in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon”, with stakeholders from government, diplomatic missions, international governmental organisations, civil society, traditional authorities and academia. Data obtained from the discussions during the workshop was recorded, transcribed and included in the analysis. The discussions centred on the preliminary findings of this study presented by the research team and presentations by experts from the Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development, the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and the Family, and the South West Regional Executive Council. The protocol for this research was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the African Leadership Centre in Nairobi.

A total of 337 qualitative and quantitative questionnaires were administered in the special status regions to purposively-selected respondents who came from regional assemblies, councils, deconcentrated services, civil society, academia, and service users and other public institutions. Data collected using both qualitative and quantitative questionnaires was triangulated to ensure reliability of the findings. The mixed method approach was useful in facilitating participation by stakeholders with varying levels of education or written expression. The questionnaires were also pre-tested with purposively-selected stakeholders in the two regions to ensure that the content reflected the most pertinent issues regarding the special status that warranted

investigation and that the language was simple and comprehensible. Where necessary, due to literary challenges or the preference those taking part in the study, the questions were read to the participants and their responses were entered by one of the researchers.

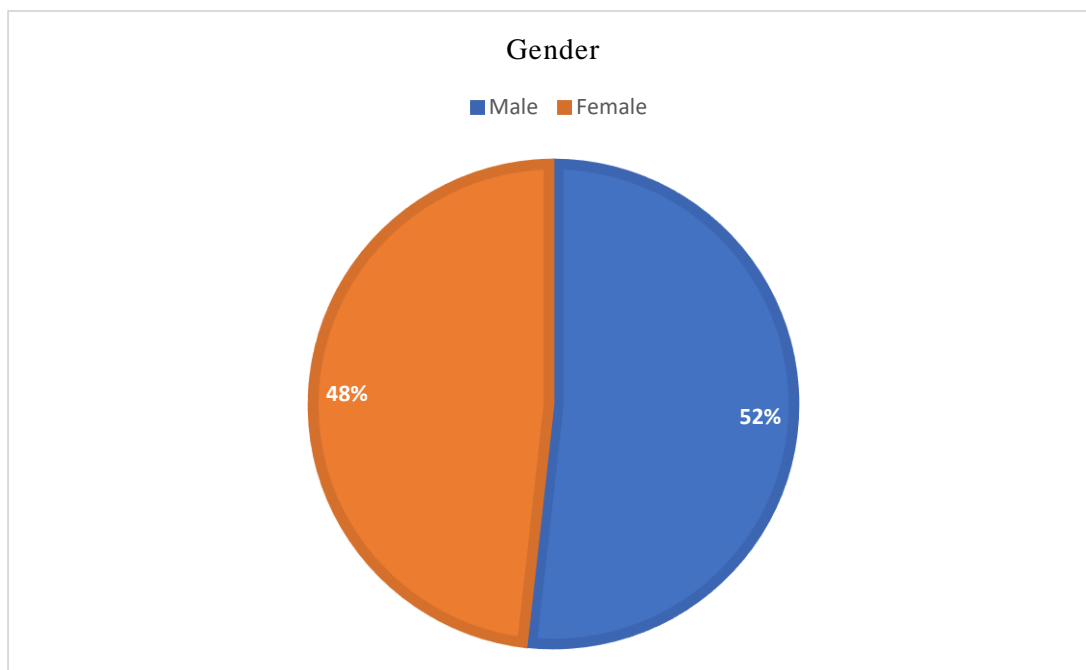
Out of the 337 questionnaires, one hundred and nine (109) questionnaires were administered for the qualitative component, at which point saturation was judged to have been achieved. These were complemented by data obtained from the policy workshop attended by 56 participants. The qualitative questionnaire was administered until data saturation was reached. Saturation in qualitative research helps ensure that all perspectives in a population have been included in the study. Data saturation is defined as the point when no additional views are identified during data collection. This means that further data collection will not affect the findings of the study. To ensure that this point was effectively reached, saturation was first sought separately for data from responses by participants of different gender, age group and occupation. After attaining saturation across groups, 2 additional questionnaires were administered for each group, after no new ideas were recorded. This technique used to ensure saturation has been reached, is referred to as oversampling. The analysis of qualitative data was done in four main steps.

The first step in analysing the qualitative data was to gain familiarity with the data. The text was read and re-read and notes were made on overall impressions by the researchers. The second step was to categorise the data. The process of categorisation was both deductive and inductive. A list of categories was derived from the questions that the study sought to address. These questions were formulated after a review of the literature was completed. Some of the preset categories were modified after reading through the text and finding new categories that were recurrent and that could best be merged with or called for a redefinition of given categories. The third step consisted in making meaning of the categories. Summaries of each category were made and connections between them were identified. The fourth step was clustering. Given the volume of data collected, categories that could be used to explain the same issue were merged. These categories were used as themes which were used to write this report.

On the other hand, a total of 228 responses were received for the quantitative survey. In total, 337 questionnaires were thus administered, corresponding to a response rate of 100%. The respondents to both surveys were selected using the purposive and snowball sampling methods. Purposive sampling is a type of convenience sampling method in which participants are

included based on defined criteria. Snowball sampling is done by requesting initial contacts that have participated in the study to recommend others who meet the criteria of recruitment. The use of both snowballing and purposive sampling reduced is useful in reducing the risk of non-response bias. Open-ended questions and space for written comments on questionnaires were used to generate qualitative data. Closed-ended questions were used to generate quantitative data. Responses in the quantitative questionnaire were converted into quantifiable indices to compute the frequency of agreement with the effectiveness of aspects of the decentralisation process. The responses were coded on a five-point likert scale into 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = somewhat agree and, 5 = strongly agree. To ensure that the sample for the quantitative survey was equally representative, the characteristics of the population such as age, sex and gender were taken into consideration when recruiting participants. The use of such criteria was necessary because a non-random sample was used. It, therefore, ensured that the sample significantly reflected the characteristics of the population as shown in figures 2, 3 and 4 below.

Figure 2: Gender of Respondent

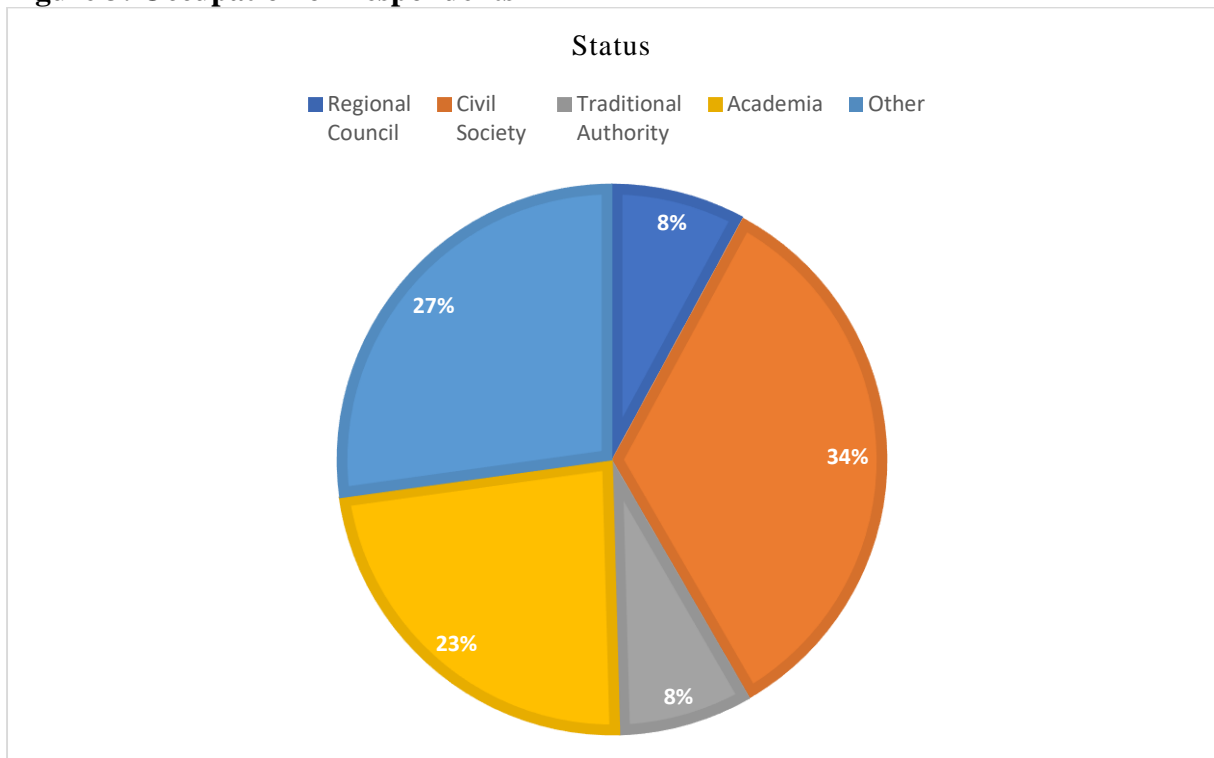


Source: Based on 337 from qualitative and quantitative questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

The pie chart above shows that the number of women that participated in the study is not significantly lower than the number of participants who identified as male. The number of male respondents was higher than that of female participants by 4 percentage points. The representation of views from both men and women was particularly important given that the

effective participation of both genders is considered necessary for effective decentralisation. An effort was also made to ensure the proportion of occupations in the sample reflected that in the study population as shown in Figure 2 below.

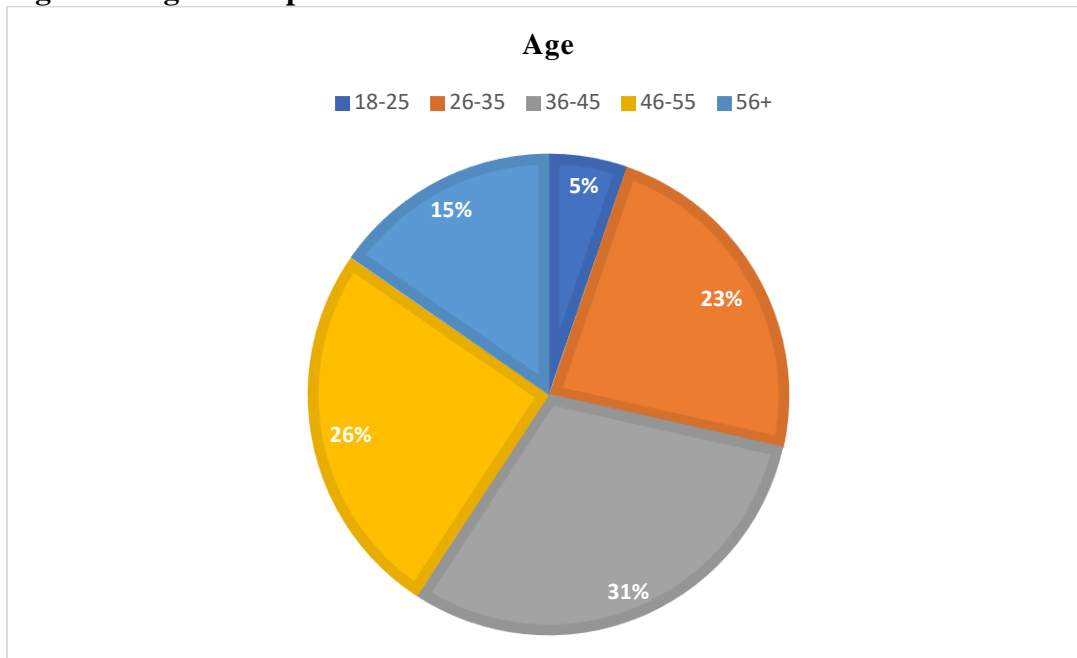
Figure 3: Occupation of Respondents



Source: Based on 337 qualitative and quantitative questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

As shown on the pie chart above, the highest percentage, 34% of participants came from civil society, followed 27% for other occupations, 23% from the academia, 8% for traditional authorities, and 8% for local authorities. Decentralization involves transferring power and resources from central to local authorities, and it is important to consider the perspectives of various stakeholders, including civil society, academia, local/council authorities, and traditional authorities. A diverse range of participants was consequently recruited for this study. The percentage from each group was intended to reflect its proportion in the study population. An effort was equally made to ensure persons from different age groups participate in the study. This was to ensure the study did not only represent the views of a single age group.

Figure 4: Age of Respondents



Source: Based on 337 from qualitative and quantitative questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

This pie chart in Figure 4, shows that the age group with the highest number of individuals is 36-45, representing 31% of the total, while the 26-35 age group comes in second with 23%. On the other hand, the smallest age group is 18-25, making up only 5%. Presence of different age groups also ensured that opinions across these groups was included in the study.

Quantitative data was analysed through the generation of percentage frequency tables and the visualization of survey responses in pie charts and bar charts. The analysis of the responses from the quantitative survey was further enriched by triangulating it with the themes that have emerged from the qualitative component of the research.

The qualitative and quantitative surveys and the policy workshop did not involve any procedures that put study participants at risk of harm. Written informed consent was secured prior to participation in the study. Since all respondents were residents resident in the SW and NW regions and most had a good educational background, the informed consent forms and questionnaires were in English, which is widely spoken in these regions. The confidentiality of participants was ensured by replacing identifiers with codes during data analysis. The data from the survey is stored in a restricted folder on a secure work laptop. The files would be maintained

securely for a maximum of two (2) years from the time of data collection, after which these will be deleted.

2. Special Status and the Protection of the Common Law and English- Speaking Education Subsystems

The promulgation of Law No.2019/024 of 24 December 2019 following the Major National Dialogue²⁵, with a special focus on resolving the Anglophone conflict rekindled hope on the protection of the common law and English-speaking education subsystems in the crisis-hit regions. The government has also taken several other measures aimed at protecting these subsystems. Together, the English-speaking educational system and the common law practice have constituted an important part of what is commonly referred to as Anglophone identity and culture in Cameroon. The protection afforded to the practice of common law and English-speaking education by SSRA however appears to have remained limited or inconsequential. This section, therefore, examines the views on whether these subsystems have been effectively protected by the implementation of the special status since the enactment of Law No.2019/024 in 2019.

2.1. The Protection of the Common Law Subsystem

The common law subsystem and its main features in particular appear to be little understood even by policy actors in Cameroon. Common law is sometimes taken to mean the conduct of court sessions in English and more recently the appointment of judges trained in the recently created Common Law Department at the National School of Magistracy and Administration (ENAM). It is thus necessary to examine the meaning of common law especially as understood by the English-speaking population that has been persistent in requesting its protection to facilitate an understanding of the effectiveness of measures taken by the government together with the creation of the SSRA.

2.1.1. Meaning of Common Law

In spite of the existence of the common law subsystem in Cameroon since reunification, it remains little understood. The Legal Information Institute at Cornell Law School defines common law as “law that is derived from judicial decisions instead of from statutes”²⁶. The common law decisions from the courts are sometimes codified by legislatures at the state or national level to give them the permanence afforded by a statute, modify it, or completely

²⁵ Crawford et al, 2022, op. cit

²⁶ Legal Information Institute (2020). “Common Law”, Cornell Law School, accessed on 25 January 2023 at: https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/common_law

replace the outcome with legislation. The manner of recruitment of judges has been historically considered an important feature of the common law system by the English-speaking population of the NW and SW. This means the common law system in this context is expected to allow for the selection of judges from among senior lawyers and in which published judicial opinions or case law is of primary importance. Acceding to the legal profession requires prior completion of formal legal training rather than sitting for a competitive examination as obtains in the civil law system in Cameroon. It is in this light that one responded who described the protection afforded by the special status as “very weak” for example said,

Magistrates/Judges are still appointed from among graduates from ENAM and not from among outstanding legal minds (lawyers) from the BAR. Courts’ decisions/judgments are being challenged by the executive. (R10A)

Another important feature of the common law worthy of note is the role played by lawyers. They take centre-stage in representing the interests of their clients in civil proceedings as opposed to the situation in the civil law system where the judges play a key role in proceedings by bringing charges, establishing facts through witness examination and applying remedies provided for in legal codes. It is in light of this description of the common law system that the views on the appropriateness of the measures and laws adopted by the government can be better appraised.

2.1.2. Measures taken to Protect the Common Law Subsystem

The enactment of Law No.2019/024 followed from decades of confusion²⁷, language challenges and inconsistent application of the common law and civil law across Anglophone regions²⁸. As Ngwafor²⁹ noted in his paper “Cameroon: The Law across the Bridge: Twenty Years (1972-1992) of Confusion”, the bi-jural legal system of Common Law and Civil Law jurisdictions inherited from the British and French presence before independence and reunification has plunged Cameroon into serious dilemmas. The persistence of these dilemmas including the limited mastery and confusing application of both legal systems and failure to address them following protests in 2016 by lawyers of the common law extraction has been considered as one factor that led to the escalation of the Anglophone conflict since October 2017³⁰.

²⁷ Ngwafor, E.N. (1995). “Cameroon: The Law across the Bridge: Twenty Years (1972-1992) of Confusion”, *Revue générale de droit*, 26(1), 69-77

²⁸ Crawford et al, 2022, op. cit

²⁹ Ngwafor, 1995, op. cit

³⁰ Crawford et al, 2022, op. cit; ICG 2017

It is against this backdrop that the government of Cameroon embarked on measures including the creation of the Common Law Bench at the Supreme Court through Law No. 2017/014 of 12 July 2017 to amend and supplement some provisions of Law No. 2006/16 of 29 December 2006 to lay down the organisation and functioning of the Supreme Court; the creation of the Common Law Department at the National School of Magistracy and Administration (ENAM) on the 9 April 2018;³¹ and the special recruitment of English-speaking magistrates to run for a period of five (5) years. In addition to these measures, the government organized the Major National Dialogue from September 30th to 4th October 2019 which resulted in the recommendation to uphold the Common Law system in the restive Anglophone regions. The legal framework designed to uphold this system was put in place with the promulgation of Law No.2019/024 of 24 December 2019 to institute the general code of regional and local authorities whose effective implementation has attracted the attention of both practitioners, scholars and Cameroon's bilateral and multilateral partners. One way of resolving problems related to the law in special status regions is to grant regional assemblies the ability to make laws and regulations specific to their region, or grant them power to veto initiatives to uphold, enact or repeal laws in areas or issues of particular interest to them, known as "competence exclusive".³² Section 328 (2) Law No.2019/024 of 24 December 2019 makes the consultation of regional assemblies in the NW and SW optional. This means that the assemblies may not be consulted even on matters that remove protection for or erode the practice of common law in the NW and SW.

The light weight given to the role of SSRA by Law No.2019/024 in protecting common law practice potentially reflects the near absence efforts by regional assemblies to promote its consistent application from the perspective of most participants in the study. One participant for example said:

In this perspective, I think the special status has not touched on the Anglophone Judicial system. The Common Law system was instead protected by the Ad hoc committee created in 2017 to seek solutions to the Anglophones problems i.e. the appointment of Anglophone magistrates in the legal departments in the North West and South West regions. And the appointment of common law judges in the courts of first instance and high courts in the NW and SW. (R7A)

³¹ Emmanuel K. (2019), "Supreme Court, ENAM: Common Law Fully in Practice", Cameroon Tribune, 17 September, accessed on 26 March 2023 at; <https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/27889/fr.html/supreme-court-enam-common-law-fully>

³² Serrano, A. (2007). "The development of regional parliaments in Spain: new institutional opportunities for minority nations?", *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 9(3), p.3
Martinez-Gallardo, C., & Perez, M. M., 2018, "Regional Economic Integration in Mexico: A Spatial-Temporal Analysis of Competence Exclusive", In *Handbook of Research on Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* pp. 83-108). IGI Global.

In the same vein, one of the participants retorted that:

Why even talk of the Common Law Subsystem when the bi-jural System is operational as the harmonised penal code? At a sub-regional level OHADA is a Francophone cosmopolitan practical experience. For me it is clear that the bilingual nature of Cameroon is not recognised at a sub-regional level. (R4A)

Another participant explained that “In the law courts, what is practiced is very distant away from the common law”. (R8J) This idea that the protection that could be expected with the creation of special status regions is not strong enough was equally echoed by another participant who said:

The special status has not made any great significance in the common law subsystem, since we still find the French subsystem of law in our law system today. Nearly all documents need to be translated from French to English. (R2H)

Other participants believed that there was no protection at all as a result of the special status. One research participant for example note that:

It does not protect the common law system in any way because there are civil and military tribunals which do not master the type of cases they should handle, the president of the republic. Civil matters are unfairly tried in the military courts, where the order of the day is not law but intimidation. Visit the Bamenda military tribunal when it seats to apprehend this. (R8J)

Similarly, another participant considered the protection of the common law subsystem by the setting up of the special status to be insignificant. According to this participant:

One of the complaints of common law lawyers was the presence, including at high level of French-speaking judges and prosecutors in courts in Anglophone in French or broken English. Trained under the Francophone Civil Law system also means they have little or no mastery of the Anglophone common law system, more akin to civil liberties. (R5H)

In the same light, another respondent stated that: “Nothing, because magistrates with civil law backgrounds are still operating in the common law zone”. (R2N) These views suggest that more needs to be done to enable the SSRA play a significant role in promoting the practice of common law in courts of the NW and SW.

Some participants were however of the view that the creation of the SSRA has helped maintain the common law subsystem. According to one participant for example, “Only common law judges are now appointed to courts”. (R3S) This view was corroborated by another participant who said that “It has helped to maintain the practice of common law in the Anglophone regions”. (R1S)

One of the study participants believed that the measures taken are positive but that more needed to be done to develop the SSRA. According to this participant:

The content of the type of protection given to the English-speaking Common-Law subsystem by the special status needs to be developed given that the Regional Assemblies are baby institutions. However, some measures have already been taken in line with the implementation of a common law section in the National School of Administration and Magistracy (ENAM), demonstrates the good faith of the central government. (R11A)

Another participant corroborated this view by outlining various policy measures undertaken by the government to protect the common law system in the Anglophone regions thus:

It has led to the creation of the Common law department in the National School of Administration and Magistracy. Magistrates can now be trained in the common law system and will dispense justice accordingly. Unlike before when all magistrates were only trained in the civil law system. Even though the number of such magistrates is still small there is hope that over the years more will graduate and be posted. (R26A)

The findings from the qualitative component were consistent with those from the quantitative survey. The majority of the respondents to the quantitative survey believed that the implementation of special status has not been effective in protecting the common law subsystem as shown in Table 1 and Figure 5 below.

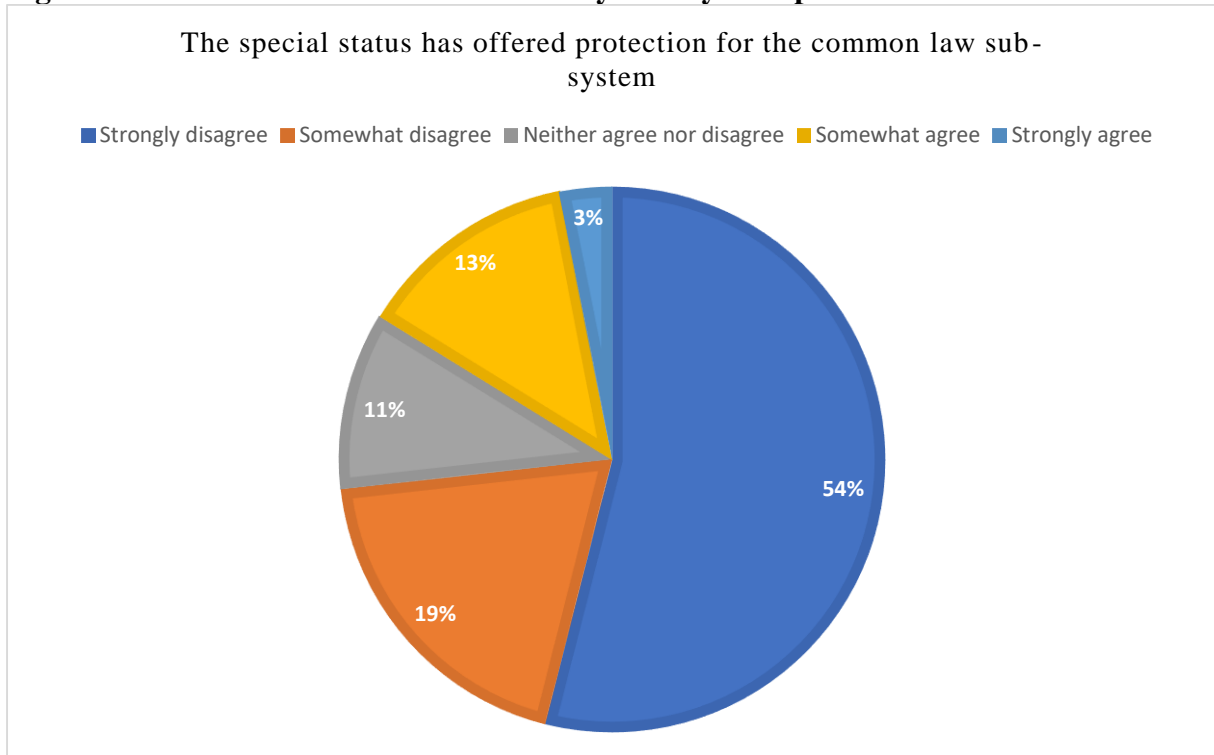
Table 1: The special status has offered protection for the common law subsystem

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	
39	8	2	6	0	55
21	9	12	11	1	54
17	7	5	7	2	38
33	13	2	3	2	53
13	7	3	3	2	28
123	44	24	30	7	228

Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

The frequency distribution above shows that the majority of respondents (167) believed that special status has not offered protection to the common law subsystem. 37 respondents were however of the view that it has. The pie chart below shows the percentage of responses for each Likert item derived from this frequency table.

Figure 5: Protection of the Common Law System by the Special Status



Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

Most respondents (73%) either strongly or somewhat disagree that the special status in the North West and South West Regions has offered protection for the common law sub-system which is a key part of the Anglophone heritage and identity. The fact that barely 13 % of respondents somewhat agree that the special status offers protection for the common law system further suggests that there may be challenges to the effective implementation of the recently instituted law and policy measures. This is significant as the common law sub-system is a key aspect of governance in these regions.

Although the majority of respondents believed the SSRA have not been effective in protecting common law practice. Table 2 below shows that a good number of participants (76) believed the powers and prerogatives of regional assemblies have been clearly and unambiguously outlined in legal instruments. These results are presented in Figure 6 below.

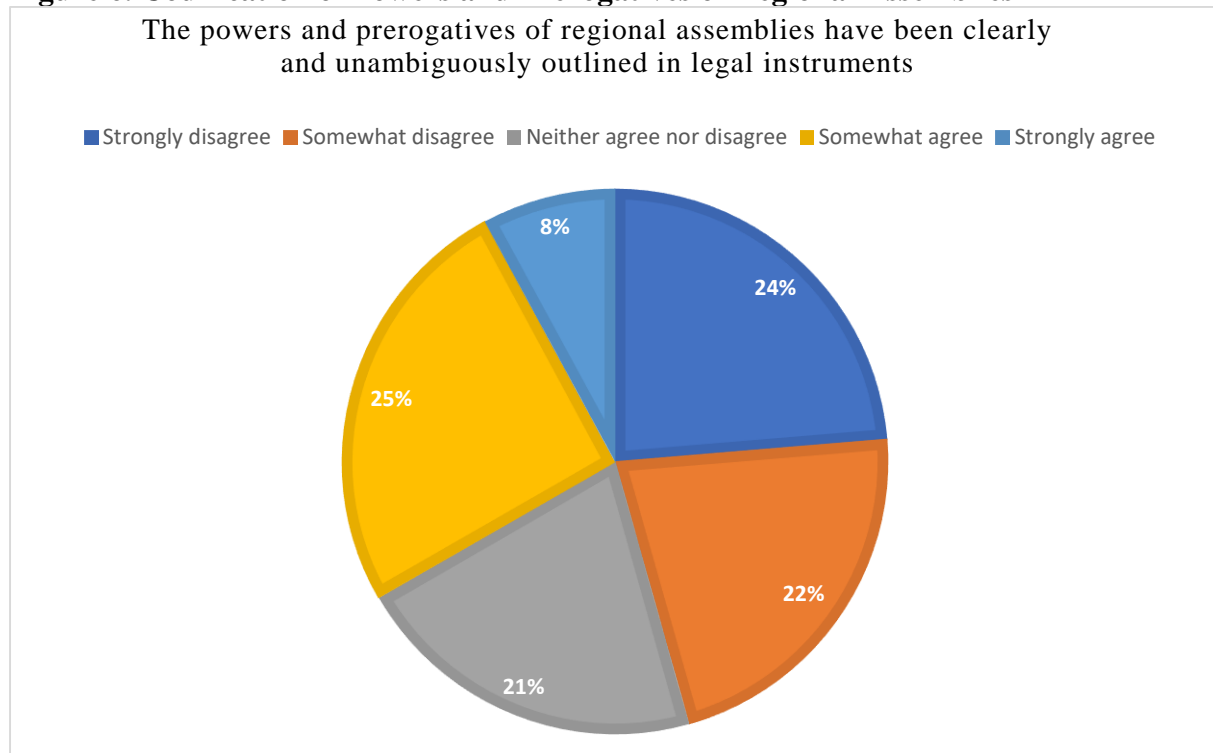
Table 2: Codification of powers and prerogatives of Regional Assemblies

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	
16	5	14	20	0	55
11	17	13	9	4	54
4	12	7	9	6	38
19	8	13	11	2	53
4	8	1	9	6	28
54	50	48	58	18	228

Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

Figure 6 shows that a significant percentage (33%) either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that the powers and prerogatives of regional assemblies have been clearly and unambiguously outlined in legal instruments. This suggests that the powers of the SSRA in relation to the protection of the common law subsystem among others are clarified to some extent in legal instruments as mentioned above.

Figure 6. Codification of Powers and Prerogatives of Regional Assemblies



Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

The percentage of respondents who however strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed was higher (46%). This suggest that the efforts made to outline the powers and prerogatives of

SSRA in the law with regard to the protection of the common law subsystem among others is commendable but that these can be improved.

These findings show that challenges to the common law system that prevailed before the setting of SSRA still exist, in spite of measures such as the creation of a Common Law bench at the Supreme Court, a common law department at ENAM, the special recruitment and training of English-speaking magistrates. The confusion of upholding certain bi-jural practices including appointment of magistrates from ENAM rather than the Bar Association to Anglophone courts; use of French during some court sessions in the Anglophone regions, and application of the Organisation for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa (OHADA) law (with the civil law spirit) across Cameroon including the special status regions remain according to most participants. These findings are consistent with those from previous studies such as that by Ngwafor³³. The need for better legal protection in the law has also been underscored by scholars such as Elad who argues that:

Section 328 only sets forth consultation of the two Special Status Regions as a discretionary option. Their being consulted is dependent on the State's judgment, which has the prerogative to determine the pertinence of their being involved or not. ... It is difficult, if not impossible to reconcile the reduction of this domain of competence to a discretionary option to consult (per Section 328), with the legislator's recognition that the "specificities of the Anglo-Saxon legal system" are an integral part of these two regions' Special Status, in Section 3 of the same law³⁴.

The need for improvement in the law also corroborates³⁵ the view of authors such as Ntungwen³⁵ who argues that the legal framework for decentralization in Cameroon is commendable, but that some gaps and inconsistencies need to be addressed to ensure effective implementation of the subsystem. The constitution of 1996 makes room for improvements in the legal framework in its Section 47(2) which states that "Presidents of regional executives may refer matters to the Constitutional Council whenever the interests of their Regions are at stake". In the specific case of the NW and SW, this is also possible with the application of Article 4(2) of Decree No. 2020/773 of 24 December 2020 relating to the "conditions for discharge of the duties of Public Independent Conciliator in the North-West and South-West regions", which states that the Conciliator "may also propose statutory and regulatory amendments to the President of the Republic, with a view to improving the quality of regional and council services". In light of the

³³ Ngwafor, 1995, op. cit.

³⁴ Fombad, C.M.E (2023). "UPDATE: Researching Cameroonian Law", Hauser Global Law School Program, New York University School of Law, accessed on 17 February 2023 at: <https://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/Cameroon1.html>

³⁵ Ntungwen, F. T. (2020). "Decentralization and Development in Cameroon: An Evaluation". *Journal of Political Science and Leadership Research*, 6(1), p.31

above, while the measures taken by the government of Cameroon to protect the common law system within the framework of the special status across the two restive regions, are commendable, these findings show that the effects are however not significantly felt. They also reveal that effective implementation will require amendments to the law relating to the appointment of judges and the competence of military tribunals. The findings equally show that the provision of greater autonomy in the law for the SSRA on decisions concerning the practice of common law in the SW and NW is required.

2.2. Protection of the English-speaking Education Subsystem

Law No. 2019/024 in its Art. 3 (3) makes the protection of the English-speaking education subsystem one of the main features of the special status. This subsystem refers to the educational practices inherited from the British presence under the successive League of Nations Mandate and United Nations Trusteeship in Cameroon which ended in 1961.

2.2.1. Features of the English-Speaking Education Subsystem

The Cameroon English-speaking sub-system of education comprises primary education, secondary and higher education. Primary education includes six (6) years (previously seven years) of primary education running from class one (1) to class six (6). At the end of class 6, the pupils sit for the First School Leaving Certificate examination. For students expected to enroll for secondary school education, they are expected to sit for the Government Common Entrance Examination, with the results divided into List A (top students' category) and List B (average students' category) and a First School Living Certificate of examination. This subsystem is often described as one based on the STEM Model, also increasingly known as the STEAM Model. This model emphasizes the need to education to enable learners experience real-life situations. It combines Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics in teaching³⁶ to nurture and guide student inquiry, dialogue, and critical thinking. This approach is believed to equip learners with the knowledge and practical skills to solve problems and engage in effective collaborations.

During secondary education, students are trained for five (5) years. By the end of Form three (3), they are expected to select between Arts or Science courses of study. Studies between Form

³⁶ Workshop, Policymakers, Yaoundé, 16 March 2023

four (4) and Form five (5) are specialised and geared towards the final examination, the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (Cameroon GCE O/L).

The high school level is comprised of specialised education where the students are taught depending on the field of study they sat for during the Ordinary Level (Arts or Science). Upon completing two years of study, the students are expected to sit for the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level examination (Cameroon GCE A/L).

Technical secondary and high schools equally exist whereby students can obtain a specialised secondary education as an alternative to the general education. Students in technical education obtain a GCE O/L Technical certificate after 5 years and a GCE A/L Technical certificate after a further 2 years of study. After obtaining the GCE O/L and A/L certificates, students are expected to be qualified for professional work or further studies. It should be noted that training in technical colleges in previously enable candidates to obtain the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) and the City and Guilds³⁷. Efforts at harmonisation by the government led to the replacement of these qualifications that were esteemed in the English-speaking regions with the Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle—CAP (Professional education certification) obtained in Form Four after four years of training, the Probatoire Technique obtained in Lower Sixth Form and the Baccalaureat Technique obtained in Upper Sixth Form. The GCE O/L Technical and a GCE A/L Technical certificates were re-introduced following the creation of the General Certificate of Education Board (GCE Board) occasioned by massive protests by parents of students in English-speaking schools in Yaounde in 1993 as a reaction to further attempts to harmonise the general education programmes.

At the higher educational level, the students choose a particular field of study in line with their career plans and a Bachelor's degree (BSc) is obtained after a comprehensive three (3) years of study. The Master of Science Degree (MSc) is obtained after two (2) years of studies and a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) after three (3) to five (5) years.

The English-speaking system of education has undergone some changes over the years from the reunification period with the steps taken towards the harmonisation of the English sub-system of education with the French sub-system, rather perceived by indigenous people of the NW and SW as the erosion of the English sub-system of education. The failure of the government to effectively address the demands made by teachers of this extraction regarding

³⁷ Kouega, J. (2018). "The Anglophone Problem in Cameroon: Focus on Education", *Open Access Library Journal*, 5, 1-9.

the protection and promotion of the English-speaking education sub-system has been considered as one of the main causes of the escalation of the ongoing conflict in the NW and SW.³⁸ The special status can thus be said to have partly been designed to address this problem as stated in Section 3 (3) of Law No. 2019/024. In spite of the enactment of this law and other measures taken by the government in this regard, the majority of participants in this study believed that the erosion of the English-speaking subsystem of education has continued.

2.2.2. Reasons for the Erosion of the English-Speaking Education Subsystem

One of the reasons advanced to explain the continued erosion of the English subsystem of education was that teachers of the French subsystem or those who are not fluent in English are still sent to schools to teach where English is expected to be the language of learning. Many participants believed that the special status has not done anything with regard to protecting the English-speaking education sub-system, given that schools in these regions still have teachers who can barely speak the language of instruction in the NW and SW. One participant for example said;

To me it hasn't because some French teachers teaching in the English subsystem can't seem to express themselves in English thereby making or rendering lessons difficult for the students. (R25J)

On a similar note, another participant said the special status has not protected the English educational subsystem: “because we still have French teachers teaching in the English subsystem and they are unable to express themselves in English”. (R17J) This was corroborated by most participants. Another for example said

Francophone Cameroonians still flood the English subsystem of education and under teach the students with very bad English. (R9J)

Another respondent compared the situation with the education subsystem to that of the common law subsystem in the following way:

Like with the legal system, very little has changed with the educational system. Anglophones teachers complain against Francophone teachers in Anglophone classrooms, in secondary schools and universities lecturing in broken incomprehensible English. (R5H)

Some participants focused on whether the measures taken have been effective in protecting the English speaking subsystem of education. In this regard, one respondent stated that the

³⁸ Crawford et al, 2022, op. cit.

“English speaking education system has not been protected in any way”. (R27J) Similarly, another respondent stated that “It’s very insignificant because in some faculties in the university, most lecturers are still of the French subsystem of education”. (R12H) It is important to note from the perspective of participants, the problem does not lie with the origin of the teacher but their ability to communicate effectively with students and deliver lessons in line with the experiential requirements of the STEAM Model. Concretely, geology students in the English-Speaking subsystem for example trained to identify mineral occurrences in the field by collecting and testing samples and biology students do not only learn about the digestive system but perform dissections at High School level to observe this among others. Such experiences are rare, if not absent in High Schools of the French-Speaking subsystem.

The results obtained from the quantitative survey also suggest that the special status has not effectively offered protection to the English subsystem of education. Table 3 below shows that 159 respondents believed that the special status has not effectively protected the English speaking subsystem while 43 participant were of the view that it has.

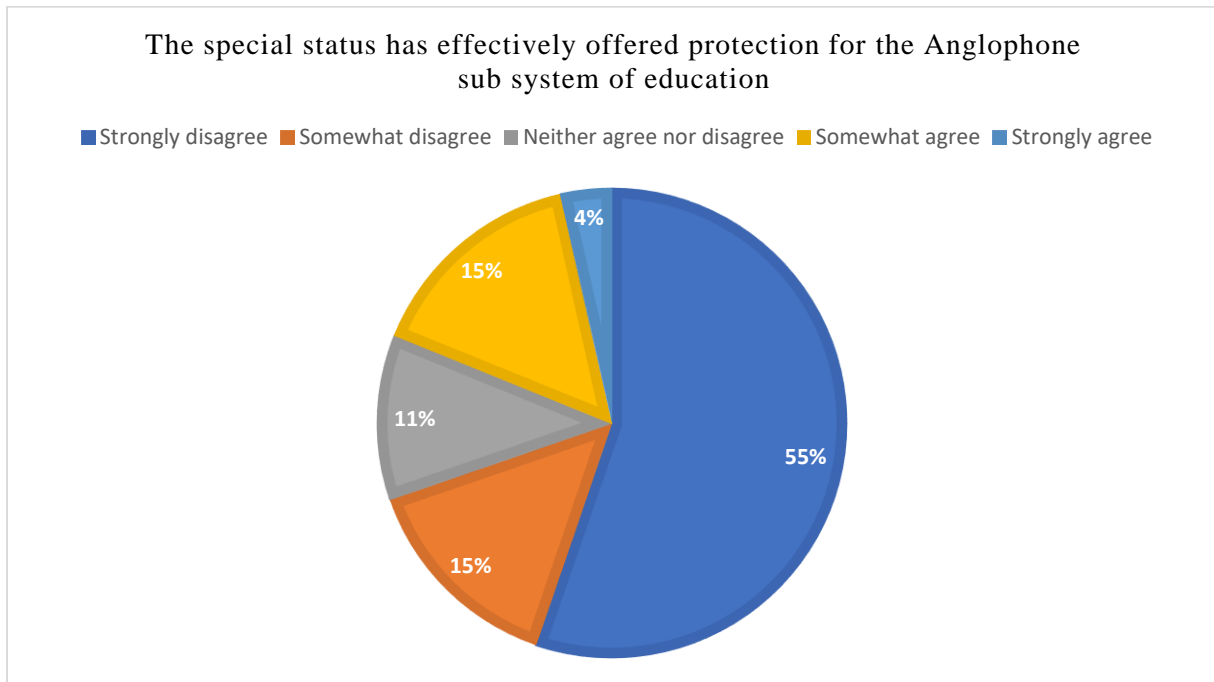
Table 3: Protection of the English-speaking subsystem of education by the Special Status

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	
36	6	5	8	0	55
20	9	9	12	4	54
19	7	3	6	3	38
39	9	3	1	1	53
12	2	6	8	0	28
126	33	26	35	8	228

Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

The pie chart computed from the frequency table above shows that majority of respondents, 70% either strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed that the special status has offered protection for the English-speaking subsystem of education.

Figure 7: Protection of the English-Speaking Subsystem of Education by the Special Status



Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

This suggests that there may be gaps in the implementation of the special status in protecting the English-speaking education sub-system. This is particularly significant as education is a key aspect of governance and effective decentralization in Cameroon, notably in the two English-speaking regions. The majority of participants were of the view that decision making regarding education has not been effectively decentralised.

Respondents considered over-centralisation as one of the main reasons why SSRA have not been effective in promoting the English subsystem of education. The centralisation of decision-making powers in the capital city (Yaoundé), away from English-speaking regions, including on matters that only affect English sub-system according to participants makes it difficult for the protection envisaged in Law No. 2019/024.

Communiqués concerning the GCE Board come from the minister of secondary education and rarely from the registrar of the GCE Board. (R4J);

Some of us are still to see it. The policies are crafted at the Centre and does not reflect the appropriate aspirations of the Anglophones. (R15J);

Every major academic decision still comes from Yaoundé in French written memos, and our universities are not autonomous. (R9A);

The educational subsystem has not changed since the advent of the special status. The educational system is still dominated by the French principles, thus no significant change. (R11N)

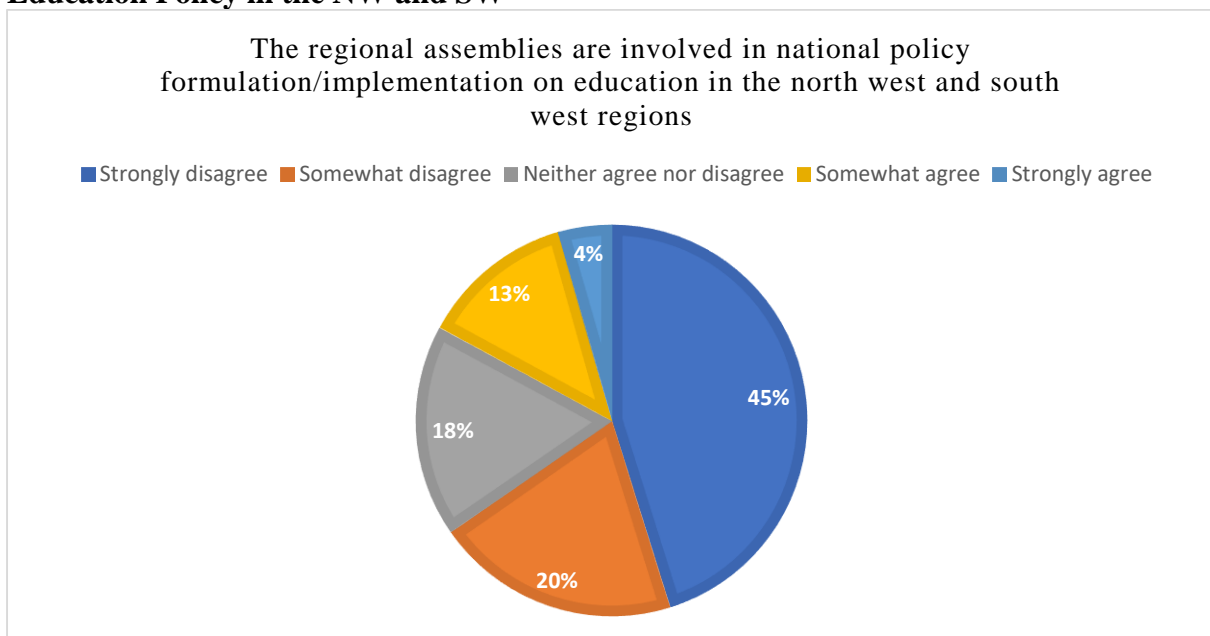
The results indicate that due to the near absence of autonomy in making and implementing policies on education, the regional assemblies of the NW and SW are also not significantly involved in policy formulation and implementation on education that touches on English subsystem at the national level. The frequency distribution and the pie chart below show that most participants either strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed that SSRA are involved in policy formulation and implementation on education in the NW and SW.

Table 4: Participation of Regional Assemblies in the making and implementation of education policy in the NW and SW

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	
28	10	9	6	2	55
20	7	10	15	2	54
13	9	10	4	2	38
32	11	7	1	2	53
10	9	4	3	2	28
103	46	40	29	10	228

Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

Figure 8: Participation of Regional Assemblies in the Making and Implementation of Education Policy in the NW and SW



Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

Figure 8 above shows that a total of 65% of the respondents strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed that the regional assemblies are involved in national policy formulation and

implementation on education in the NW and SW. A small percentage of participants, 17% in total either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed. This suggests that there is a widespread perception that the regional assemblies are not adequately involved in national policy formulation/implementation on education in the Two English-speaking regions of Cameroon. To ensure that the SSRA effectively protects the English-speaking educational subsystem some respondents said regional assemblies should be given exclusive power within the law and resources to make and implement decisions on matters pertaining to this subsystem. This is consistent with the argument by scholars such as Serrano³⁹ and Martinez-Gallardo and Perez⁴⁰ who consider that granting regional assemblies the ability to make laws and regulations specific to their region, sometimes superseding national law in certain areas, known as "competence exclusive" is a way of increasing their effectiveness. With such autonomy, participants believed the special status would succeed in effectively protecting the English-speaking education subsystem as intended in Law No. 2019/024.

Although the majority of participants considered the protection afforded by the special status to the English-speaking educational system to be weak, to say the least, some participants thought that the acknowledgment that it needs to be maintained through Law No. 2019/024 is a step in the right direction. One participant for example put it in the following words:

The acknowledgment of the uniqueness of the Anglo-Saxon sub-system of education offers protection from possible dilution from contact with the French system of education. (R51J)

The special status granted to the two English-speaking Regions of Cameroon is an institutional mechanism that recognizes the specificities of the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon. Education forms an important component of these specificities implied or identified in the 1996 Constitution and Law No. 2019/024 together with language and the common law. These findings suggest that effective protection will require that teachers that cannot speak English fluently, should not be deployed to teach subjects and courses in English. The findings also show that SSRA will require more autonomy to effectively make and implement policies that can promote and protect the English-speaking education sub-system. As mentioned with regard to the Common Law subsystem above, the SSRA presidents and the Conciliators can propose changes to the law or the enactment of new legal instruments to intended to protect the English-Speaking Education subsystem when threats to its protection are identified.

³⁹ Serrano, 2007, p. 3

⁴⁰ Martinez-Gallardo & Perez, 2018,

3. Special Status and the Promotion of Gender Equality and Economic Development

The relationship between gender equality and economic development has been the subject of strong scholarly attention. The literature shows that this relationship is mutually reinforcing. While some authors such as Eastin and Prakash⁴¹ demonstrate how economic development affects gender equality, others such as Maceira⁴² show that increasing gender equality boosts the economy. This mutually reinforcing relationship means that effectively promoting both through decentralisation can accelerate the significant attainment of the objectives of government and SSRA for both gender equality and economic development at the regional level. We therefore examine the views of respondents in this section on whether the SSRA have been effective in promoting gender equality and economic development.

3.1. The Promotion of Gender Equality

According to Gopinath, “gender equality goes hand-in-hand with macroeconomic and financial stability, can stimulate economic growth, boost private and public sector performance, and reduce income inequality”⁴³. The equal participation of men and women in decision-making and leadership at the local level has been increasingly recognised as an important ingredient for effective participatory governance and accountability⁴⁴. This importance of gender equality in Cameroon is marked by efforts to putting in place of a National Gender Policy guide (PNG) by the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and the Family. One of the objectives of this policy is to ensure that gender is integrated into all national and decentralized policies, programs and reflected in budgets. In spite of the national and international recognition of the role of gender in decentralisation processes by both scholars and practitioners, ensuring the qualitative and quantitative representation of women in SSRA of the North West and South West as in other decentralised systems around the world, still requires significant policy efforts. While some studies show that decentralisation can create the space for gender equality to be realised, others

⁴¹ Joshua, E. & Aseem, p. (2013). “Economic Development and Gender Equality: Is There a Gender Kuznets Curve?”, *World Politics*, 65(1), 156-186

⁴² Helena, M.M. (2017). “Economic Benefits of Gender Equality in the EU”, *Review of European Economic Policy*, 52(3), pp. 178–183

⁴³ Gopinath, G. (2022). “Gender Equality Boosts Economic Growth and Stability”. Korea Gender Equality Forum September 27 - 28, 2022 accessed on 5 March 2023 at: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2022/09/27/sp092722-ggopinath-kgf-gender-korea#:~:text=Gender%20equality%20goes%20hand%2Din,performance%2C%20and%20reduce%20income%20inequality>.

⁴⁴ Randzio-Plathand, C. (2010). “Gender and Decentralisation: An Introduction”, Workshop of African and European Civil Society Organisations held in Bonn, November 2009. VERNO Project on Africa-EU Partnership, p.4

point to the need for attendant measures to ensure it is effectively promoted within decentralised systems.

A cross-country analysis by Sundström and Wängnerud provides evidence of a relationship between the quality of government and the proportion of seats occupied by women in municipal assemblies⁴⁵. A comparative analysis focusing on relationship between decentralisation and the political representation of women by Ortals, Rincker and Montoya⁴⁶ shows that decentralisation does not automatically lead to an increase in the participation of women in governance. The main factors that promote gender equality according to these authors are gender candidate quotas and proportional electoral laws⁴⁷. The study by Ortals, Rincker and Montoya, however shows that decentralisation can explain the increased gender activism in the countries studied and that this has a significant implication for the potential of women⁴⁸. In line with the findings of Ortals, Rincker and Montoya another study by Kenny and Verge focusing on decentralisation in Spain and Britain shows that the use of party gender quotas automatically increases female participation in politics⁴⁹. Evidence from the Swiss-Ukrainian Decentralization Support Project (DESPRO) reveals that decentralization reform in Ukraine has “considerably influenced the level of women’s involvement in the local decisionmaking processes”⁵⁰.

One argument advanced for the importance of gender equality in local governance is that women make up half of the world’s population. This is reflected in countries such as Cameroon where women constitute nearly half⁵¹ of the total population. In Cameroon, they also contribute significantly to the economic and social wellbeing of their families and the country. In discussing the impact of the conflict in the SW and NW regions, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) captures important contribution in the two regions by arguing that the conflict has had “a disproportionate impact on women who make up the majority of farmers and who are often responsible for arranging food for their families”. The

⁴⁵ Aksel, S. & Lena, W. L., (2014), “Corruption as an Obstacle to Women’s Political Representation: Evidence from Local Councils in 18 European Countries”. *Party Politics* 22, no. 3, pp 354–369.

⁴⁶ Ortals, C. D., Rincker, M., and Montoya, C., (2012) “Politics Close to Home: The Impact of Meso-Level Institutions on Women in Politics”. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 42, no. 1. pp. 78–107.

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Meryl, K. and Tània, V (2012). “Decentralization, Political Parties, and Women’s Representation: Evidence from Spain and Britain” *The Journal of Federalism*, 43(1) pp. 109-128

⁵⁰ Swiss-Ukrainian Decentralization Support Project (DESPRO), (2020). “Empowering Women Through Decentralization Reform”. Accessed on 03 March 2023 at; <https://decentralization.gov.ua/uploads/library/file/628/12.pdf>

⁵¹ World Bank, 2022, Population, female (% of total population) – Cameroon, accessed on 17 February 2023 at; <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=CM>

largely informal nature⁵² of their economic and social activities has however resulted in these being ignored in formal spaces and decision-making.

As a step towards promoting the recognition of women's contribution and their participation in governance, Section 333 (2) of Law No. 2019/024 states that “the house of Divisional Representatives shall reflect the sociological components of the region as well as gender”. The same requirement is made concerning the Council Board in Section 166 (3) and Regional Councils in Section 276 (1) In spite of this clear recognition of the importance of gender equality as implied in these provisions, women are still underrepresented in SSRA according to most participants in this study. It is thus necessary to clearly identify key benefits of promoting gender equality in decentralisation processes before examining the views on the performance of SSRAs in this regard.

3.1.1. Benefits of Decentralisation for Gender Equality and the its Promotion by SSRA

One of the benefits of decentralization according to both scholars and practioners is that it opens up more access points for new political actors⁵³. Decentralisation can thus open the space for women who make up an equally important segment of the population as men to participate equally in governance. The participation of women in politics has been demonstrated to produce significant benefits especially among minority populations such as those of the NW and SW. Pepera for example states that “there is also strong evidence that as more women are elected to office, there is a corollary increase in policy making that emphasizes quality of life and reflects the priorities of families, women, and ethnic and racial minorities”⁵⁴.

Empirical evidence shows that the participation of women can change the role of politics because they bring a viewpoint that is different from that of their male counterparts⁵⁵. Studies have also revealed that issues that affect women, families and children, including the provision

⁵²Foukou, E (2020). “Why women are at the centre of Cameroon’s fight against COVID-19”, 13 November, accessed on 25 February 2023 at; <https://cameroon.un.org/en/100557-why-women-are-centre-cameroon%E2%80%99s-fight-against-covid-19>

⁵³ Workshop, Policymakers, Yaoundé, 16 March 2023

⁵⁴ Pepera, S. (2018), “Why Women in Politics?, Women Deliver”, 28 February, accessed on 29 January 2023 at; <https://womendeliver.org/why-women-in-politics/>

⁵⁵ See for example;

- Enid, S., Zachary S., & Makram, M., (2014), “Decentralization and Gender Equity”, Forum of Federations, p. 9, accessed on 5 March 2023 at http://www.forumfed.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/OPS14_Decentralization_and_Gender_Equity.pdf

- Newman, J., & White, L. A. (2006). Women, Politics and Public Policy: The Struggles of Canadian Women. Toronto: Oxford University Press.

- Darcy, R., Welch, S., & Clark, J. (1994). Women, Elections and Representation. (2nd ed.). Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

of potable water, primary schools and day care centers, which male representatives overlook, are treated as a priority by their female counterparts⁵⁶. Additionally, scholars such as Fox and Schumann as cited by Slack, Spicer and Montacer argue that women “are more likely to incorporate citizen input into policy decisions and community involvement into decision-making; to emphasize communication; and to perceive themselves as ‘facilitators’”. This view is similarly captured by the an expert of the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics) that,

*Women’s different life experiences and priority issues consequently result in perspectives that facilitate the placing of issues affecting both women and men on the policy agendas at local government level. The physical presence of both women and men in local government positions is a conduit for interests and needs of women and men being incorporated in politics and policies and therefore the numbers of women in politics matter if gender perspectives are to be incorporated in politics and policies in a sustainable way.*⁵⁷

Gender equality can thus in light of the literature be considered important in decentralisation because it increases participation and makes local authorities more responsive to the needs of their communities⁵⁸. The importance of gender equality in decentralisation was emphasized by all participants in this study. The need to ensure the equal participation of both men and women in local governance was captured by an expert at the policy workshop who argued that “both women and men are economic and social actors on which the community must base its development”.⁵⁹ This expert further argued that,

*At the political level, integrating gender into local management will not only make it possible to align with national and even international guidelines, but to improve and strengthen respect for the rights and values of all citizens, thus enabling them to participate decisions made that will have a positive impact on the future of the community*⁶⁰.

Participants also shared their views on whether the decentralisation process have contrinuted to the promotion of gender equality in the NW and SW. Some respondents to the questionnaires were of the view that the creation of SSRA has led to an increase in the participation of women in local authorities. One participant for example argued that although it was not one of the main

⁵⁶ Thomas, S. (1994). *How Women Legislate*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Dodson, D. (2006). *The Impact of Women in Congress*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Slack, Spicer, and Montacer, 2014, p. 9

⁵⁷ Expert Opinion, 2008, cited in International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics), 2008,

“Women’s Participation in Local Governments”, iKNOW Politics, p.5, accessed on 27 February 2023 at;

<https://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/cr20women27s20participation20in20local20governments20en.pdf>

⁵⁸ Fox, R., & Schumann, R. (1999). “Gender and Local Government: A Comparison of Women and Men City Managers”, *Public Administration Review*, 59(3), 231-242, in Slack, Spicer, and Montacer, 2014, p. 9

⁵⁹ Workshop, Policymakers, Yaoundé, 16 March 2023

⁶⁰ Workshop, Policymakers, Yaoundé, 16 March 2023

reasons for the setting up of SSRA, their operationalization has contributed to its promotion. According to this participant,

Gender inequality was not part of the problem raised by the teachers and lawyers in 2016. However, the assemblies have some gender oriented structures. Both legal gender in Cameroon are represented. (R6H)

Another respondent emphasized the positive contribution the setting up of SSRA has had on gender in the following words,

There has been an increase in gender equality. All political parties have increased the number of women representatives. Civil society organizations have increased their role in sensitization and encouragement. (R26A)

Another respondent similarly said:

The Regional Assemblies have protected gender equality in the sense that there are about 30% of women in the assembly. They have equal voices as the men and discussions are done in the same platform between the men and the women whenever deliberations are on. (R3H)

Similarly, another participant considered the presence of women in the Regional Executive Council as evidence that it is taken seriously. According to this respondent:

The setting up of Regional Assemblies has promoted gender equality in that the assemblies have female commissioners, they encourage gender-based activities through their participation in capacity-building seminars as well as encouraging women to participate in politics. (R19A)

This view was shared by another participant who explained how it has promoted gender equality. According to this respondent, decentralisation in the special status regions of the NW and SW has promoted gender equality “by bringing in more women into the regional assemblies”. Another participant emphasized the efforts made by the SSRA in the following words:

The Regional Assemblies have created a department of women empowerment which has been clamoring for the equality of women in different sectors of society. Also, the creation of the position of the independent conciliator is being occupied by a woman in the South-West which is a step on gender equality. (R17A)

Some respondents however believed the realisation of gender equality was not a matter for the SSRA alone and that progress was gradually being made in Cameroon, including the NW and SW regional assemblies. They pointed that this progress could be seen through the country’s commitment to major international instruments including the Convention on the Elimination

of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Declaration of Heads of State and Government of the African Union on Equality between Women and Men, and the Sustainable Development Goals. One participant for example said:

Gender equality in Cameroon overall is making slow progress In spite of the efforts. But there are efforts nonetheless. This is not because of the regional assemblies, no, it has been a national government policy for a while now. Its success or failure cannot be gauged on the existence of the regional assemblies. (R9A)

The findings of this study reveal that as with many countries in the world, the increased participation of women in SSRA as in other institutions in Cameroon will enable the country benefit from the unique contribution they make when significantly involved in politics. Albright as cited by Pepera once stated in this respect that, “the world is wasting a precious resource in the dramatic underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, often resulting in the exclusion of women’s talents and skills in political life”⁶¹. In spite of the political and legal efforts made by the government to promote gender equality together with the ongoing decentralisation efforts, and the steps taken by the SSRA to increase the participation of women, the findings therefore show that the pace of progress needs to be improved.

3.1.2. Limited promotion of Gender Equality by SSRA

In contrast to the views presented above, some participants were of the view that the creation of SSRA has rather undermined gender equality. Also apart from the views above, other participants believed there has been no effect on gender equality. One participant for example stated that:

The setting up of regional assemblies has greatly undermined gender. This is true since the assemblies are made up of mostly politicians and most especially chiefs, business people and some retired politicians who are 99% men. (R2H).

The concern that the composition of the House of Chiefs made it a predominantly male institution was held by another participant who equally said “It has undermined gender equality, in that no woman is found in the house of chiefs” (R1S). Another responded had a similar view but also shared his optimism that it would eventually contribute to gender equality in the following words: this view but participant similarly said:

⁶¹ Madeleine Albright, as cited in Sandra Pepera, 28 February 2018

It has rather undermined gender equality. This is seen from the composition of the executive bureau of the different regional assemblies. Today with the upsurge of female emancipation, more women will become involved since the special status is still on the radar and pretty new concept. (R11N).

The idea that the composition of the House of Chiefs tilted the balance towards the male gender was also raised by a participant who said:

The setting up of regional assemblies has affected the gender equality only within the house of the Regional Assembly where there are councillors who identify as female. But within the House of Chiefs, most especially as women are never traditional rulers in the NW and SW, gender equality has been neglected (R7A).

In this same light, some participants emphasized the low representation of women in the SSRA. This underrepresentation or unequal representation was considered by some to undermine gender equality. One participant for example said “Very few women are represented in the assembly as such most of their ideas are not fully represented” (R17J). Similarly, another participant argued that:

Women are largely underrepresented in regional assemblies hence limiting grassroots involvement. Out of the 90 councilors required to run regional affairs in both regions, a majority are male. Such roles are known to be socially constructed for men. (R28A)

Some participants emphasized that both the quality and quantity of representation still need improvement. One participant for example said:

The regional assemblies have not had an effect on gender equality. For instance, in the South West regional assemblies, most of the top positions are occupied by males, the president, the vice president, and all commissioners. The Secretary is the only female. Furthermore, the close collaborators of the president who are appointed are also made up of males thus equality has been undermined. (R8A)

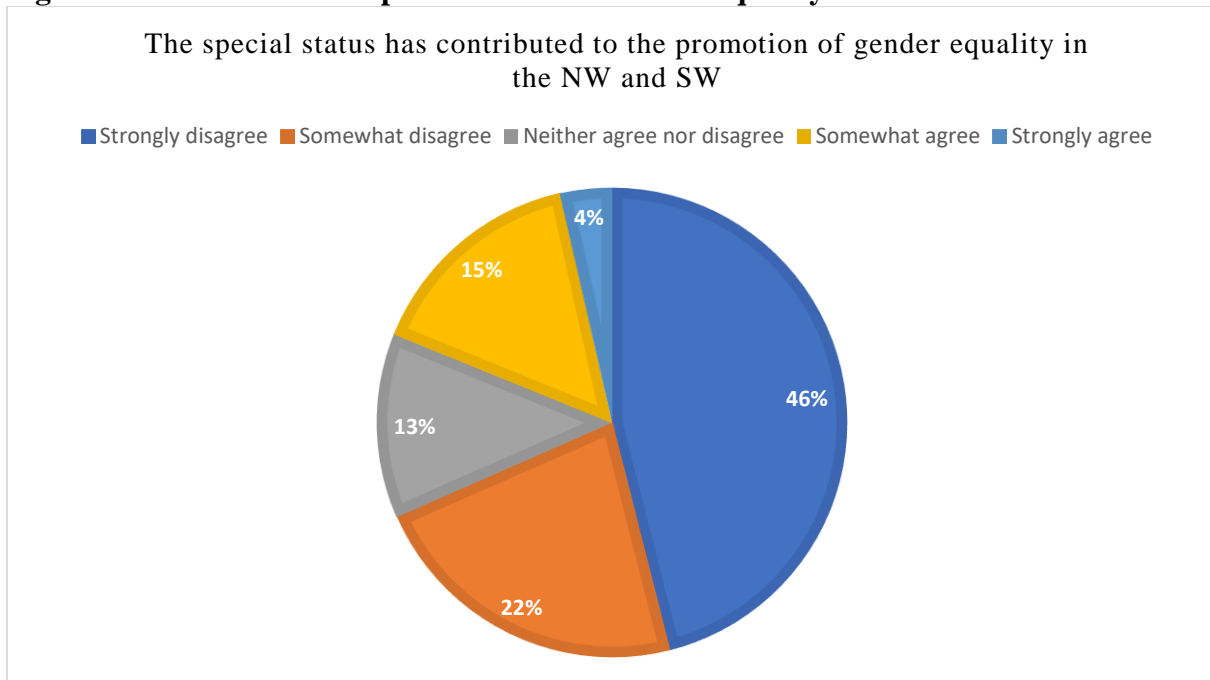
The views that emerged from the qualitative component as presented above were similar to those obtained from the quantitative survey. The frequency distribution and pie chart below show that most respondents believed the regional assemblies have not contributed to the promotion of gender equality.

Table 5: Contribution of Special Status to gender equality

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	
24	7	8	16	0	55
13	22	11	8	0	54
15	10	6	5	2	38
40	5	2	4	2	53
13	7	2	2	4	28
105	51	29	35	8	228

Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

Figure 9: Contribution of Special Status to Gender Equality



Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

68% of respondents either strongly or somewhat disagreed that the special status has contributed to the promotion of gender equality in the NW and SW. 19% of the respondents either strongly or somewhat agreed that it has contributed to gender equality.

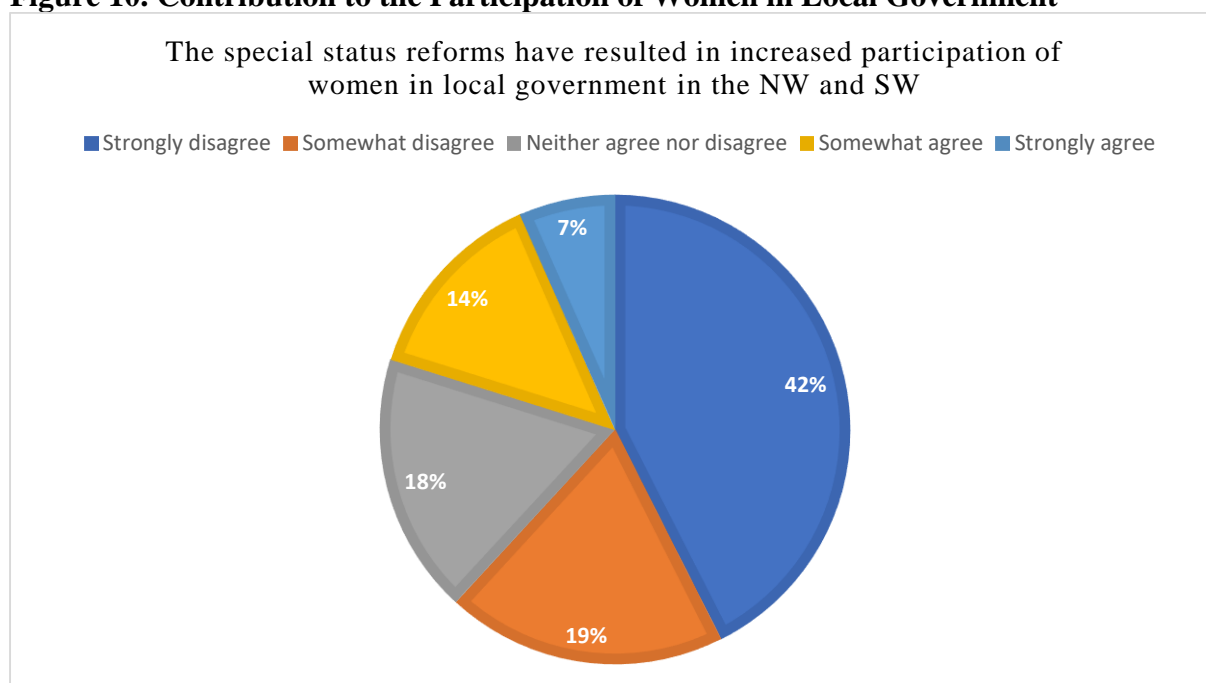
The view on whether the special status has contributed to the increased representation of women in the SSRA were also shared by participants in the quantitative survey. The frequency distribution and pie chart below show that most respondents either strongly or somewhat disagreed that the special status reforms have contributed to the increased participation of women in local authorities of the NW and SW.

Table 6: Contribution to the participation of women in local government

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	
28	8	11	7	1	55
15	12	14	9	4	54
11	13	6	4	4	38
37	5	7	2	2	53
6	6	3	9	4	28
97	44	41	31	15	228

Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

Figure 10. Contribution to the Participation of Women in Local Government



Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

Figure 10 above shows that 42% strongly disagree with the statement and 19% somewhat disagree, while a relatively small percentage of respondents (18%) have no opinion. On the other hand, 33% of respondents somewhat agree or strongly agree that the reforms have resulted in increased participation of women.

Data from other sources on the national representation of women shows similar results. According to UN Women for example, progress on women’s rights has been made but “work still needs to be done in Cameroon to achieve gender equality”⁶². Data obtained by UN Women

⁶² UN Women, 2021, Cameroon, UN Women, <https://data.unwomen.org/country/cameroon>

in 2021 shows that women occupied 33.9% of seats in the national parliament and that the proportion of elected seats held by women in deliberative bodies of local government was much lower, 24.5%⁶³. Similarly, a participant at the policy workshop under the theme ‘Promoting Decentralisation in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon’, stated that “women represent a very small proportion of officials within the Councils” and that “they are more often present among temporary and/or non-executive staff”⁶⁴. According to this participant, of the 10,626 municipal councilors in Cameroon, 2,541 are women, giving a representation rate of 24%⁶⁵. Although this remains “below international and regional standards which are respectively 30% (Beijing Conference) and 50% (Agenda 2063 of the African Union)”, it was remarked that it is indicative of a strong resolve to increase the qualitative and quantitative participation of women. The reason advanced for this was that the increase in under two decades can be considered significant. “Between 2007 and 2012, the percentage of female Municipal Councilors was 16%”⁶⁶.

These findings highlight the possibility of barriers preventing women from participating in local government, even with the implementation of special status reforms. Although the views that the SSRA have contributed to the promotion of gender equality are not negligible, the high percentage of respondents who disagreed they have, suggests that more efforts need to be made for the local authorities in the NW and SW to serve as vehicles for the promotion of gender equality. It also suggests that there are possible challenges faced in promoting gender equality by the assemblies. Addressing this is important because as already stated above gender equality is key to good governance and effective decentralization.

3.2. Regional Economic Development

In much the same way as the protection of the common law subsystem and the English education subsystem, the effectiveness of the special status in the NW and SW in contributing to the economic development of these regions has remained a subject of debate. The need for the regional assemblies to contribute to the economic development of the regions that has been significantly undermined by conflict need not be overemphasized. Fombe and Enoh⁶⁷ contend that the conflict has had a devastating effect on the economy of these regions, leading to the

⁶³ UN Women, 2021. Op cit.

⁶⁴ Workshop, Policymakers, Yaoundé, 16 March 2023

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ . Fombe and Enoh,2020, p.68

closure of businesses, loss of livelihoods, and displacement of people. Moreover, the conflict has led to a steep decline in the quality of infrastructure and services, further hindering economic development. Interest in the effectiveness of local authorities in promoting economic development in the NW and SW however predates the enactment of laws relating to the special status and the setting up of regional assemblies in the NW and SW.

Nkwi⁶⁸ and Ndikum and Foncham⁶⁹ are examples of scholars that examined the effectiveness of decentralisation in promoting economic development in the NW and SW before the creation of SSRA. These studies show that decentralised local authorities in the two regions have had little or no impact on economic development. Recent scholarly sources shed more light on the situation within the context of the special status. Nkwetta and Asongu⁷⁰, for example, argue that the special status has not translated into meaningful economic development in these regions due to a lack of political will and inadequate resource allocation. Furthermore, the resources allocated to these regions for their development have been argued to be insufficient to address the deep-seated economic and social issues that they have faced over the years and continue to face.

The views in the literature presented above were corroborated by most participants in this study. One participant for example said “the regional assembly is not effective yet as the people are still to see the importance on their economic and social wellbeing and welfare”. (R21J) Another participant said that the special status has “given the two regions a new focus on ... economic challenges, especially in terms of infrastructural development”, but that “nothing concretely has been achieved in two regions given that they are still in crisis”. (R53J) Another participant simply used the following words to say whether the regional assemblies have effectively contributed to economic development: “no impact, economic hardship, youth unemployment”. (R3H)

The majority of participants were of the view that the special status was however meant among other things highlighted above to promote economic development in the NW and SW. The results from the quantitative survey are nonetheless similar to those of the qualitative component. As can be gleaned from frequency distribution table below, well above half of the

⁶⁸ Nkwi, W. N., 2009, p.49

⁶⁹ Ndikum and Foncham, 2014, p.57

⁷⁰ Nkwetta, D. N., & Asongu, S. A. (2021), “Assessing the impact of special status on economic development in Cameroon's anglophone regions”. *Journal of African Business*, 22(1), 36-52.

respondents (177) disagreed that the instruments and measures taken to promote the core aims of the special status including economic development have been effective.

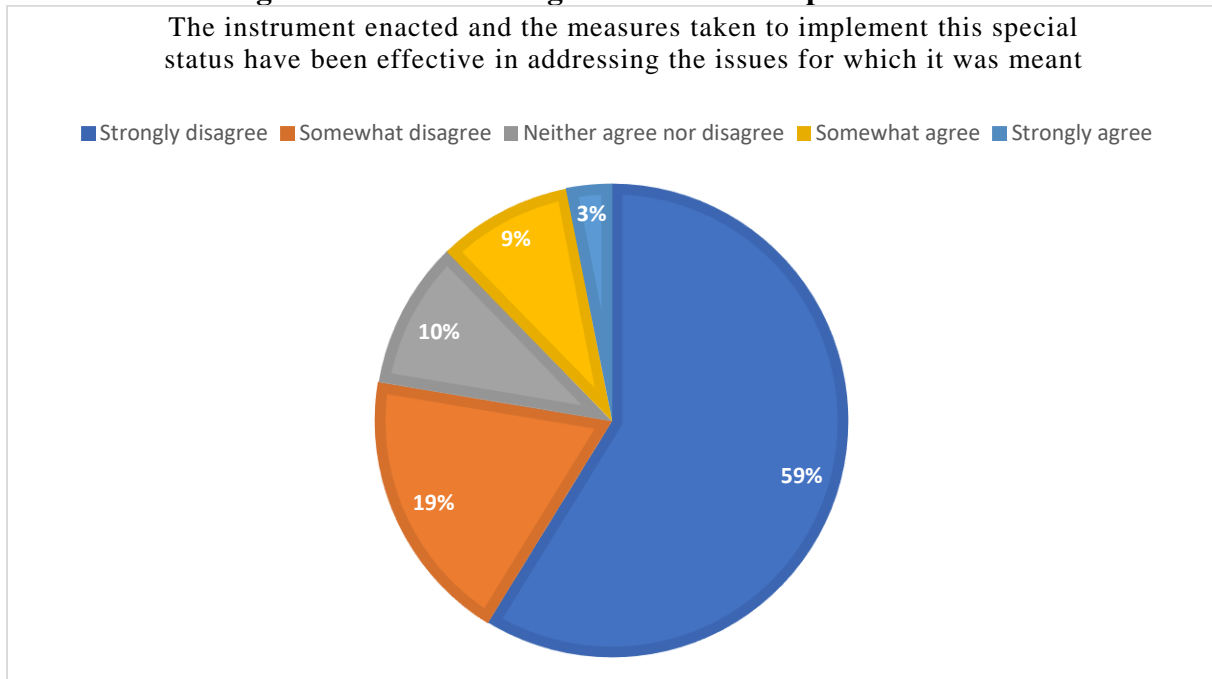
Table 7: Effectiveness of implementation instruments and measures of the Special Status in achieving core aims including economic development

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	
38	4	8	4	1	55
24	15	6	8	1	54
16	12	5	3	2	38
40	7	4	2	0	53
16	5	0	4	3	28
134	43	23	21	7	228

Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

The pie chart in Figure 11 created from the frequency table above shows that 78% of respondents either strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed that the instruments and measure devised to implement the special status have been effective in addressing the issues for which it was meant as against only 11% who strongly agreed or somewhat agreed.

Figure 11: Effectiveness of Implementation Instruments and Measures of the Special Status in Achieving Core Aims including Economic Development



Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

As the pie chart above equally shows, some participants were of the view that the SSRA have contributed effectively to economic development. This view is also represented in the literature. Scholars such as Mbuagbaw and Fonkeng⁷¹ for example argue that special status in the North West and South West Regions has led to the creation of new economic opportunities, such as the development of the agro-industry sector, which has created jobs and increased economic activity. In spite of these differences in views, there is a consensus among scholars that the ongoing conflict in these regions is a major block/impediment to economic development as mentioned. Kouamé⁷² in this vein notes that the conflict has led to a decline in foreign investment, loss of revenue, and reduced access to markets, which has negatively affected economic activity in these regions. Moreover, the conflict has led to a brain drain, as many skilled professionals have left the region, further hindering economic development.

To address the problem of economic development effectively, most participants held the view that more the SSRA will need more autonomy. One participant for example said this could be done “by giving full powers to the regional assembly presidents to be able to carry out socio-economic development in his/her region without much government control”. (R21J) According to this respondent, sufficient autonomy will enable SSRA to “involve the local community in development initiatives” and “identify and execute projects of vital importance in the communities such as water, electricity, roads, and bridges, amongst others”. (R21J) Another participant emphasized the need for financial autonomy to enable SSRA effectively promote economic development stating that there is a

need to give decentralised entities some financial autonomy so that they can carry out socio-economic development. Elected authorities are still under the powers of appointed authorities for example councils controlled by the Senior Divisional Officers when it comes to budgeting and recruitment. (R14A)

Similarly, another participant said that with regard to achieving the aims of the special status inclusive of economic development, the implementation has been “below satisfaction” and according to this respondent, this could be explained by “the degree of power still under the authority of the central administration represented by the governors in the regions”. (R1N)

The findings above show that involving local communities in decision-making processes and prioritizing projects based on the local needs of the population and resources is crucial for

⁷¹ Mbuagbaw, T. L., & Fonkeng, G. E. (2020). “Special status as a catalyst for economic development: Evidence from the North West and South West regions of Cameroon”. *Journal of African Business*, 21(4), p.72

⁷² Kouamé, A. K. (2020). Political crises and economic growth in Cameroon: Evidence from the Anglophone regions. *African Development Review*, 32(4), 481-492.

effective economic development. Additionally, addressing the challenges of limited resources and capacity is necessary to achieve the full potential of decentralization policies for economic progress. The effectiveness of the regional assemblies in promoting economic development is also seen to depend largely on the political and security situation in the NW and SW. To achieve the full potential of decentralization policies, it is necessary to sustainably address the ongoing security challenges, the problem of limited financial resources, increase the participation of local communities in decision-making and implementation processes to ensure that projects are prioritised based on local needs.

4. Challenges to the Implementation of Special Status

As can be gleaned from the preceding sections, views by the majority of participants that the SSRA have not been effective in addressing the main issues they were created for and additionally that they have not been widely perceived to promote gender equality can be due to the existence of important challenges. While some of these challenges are either implied or explicit in the views presented above, participants explicitly shared their views on the obstacles to the effectiveness of the SSRA which are the focus of this section. It is important to note that overcoming these challenges is necessary to ensure the implementation of Section 62 of the 1996 constitution which allows for regionalism of the ten regions with consideration for the specificities of certain regions with regard to their organisation and functioning.⁷³ The two Anglophone regions in this context are to be considered beyond the devolution of administrative authority that comes with decentralisation, as two distinct regions within the special status regime. However, over three years following its adoption, the special status potentially faces significant challenges which may explain why some participants in this study believed it does not reflect the content of Section 327(2) of Law No. 2019/024 which allows for a specific organisational and operational regime for decentralisation in the NW and SW, based on their historical, social and cultural values.⁷⁴

The challenges to the implementation of the special status identified by participants from the two regions and policy actors include: limited stakeholder involvement in the conception and adoption of the special status, the near absence of effective administrative and financial autonomy of the SSRA, poor general understanding of the special status, language issues, the limited representation of women and, ongoing war and reigning insecurity. Among these challenges, the near absence of autonomy for the regional assemblies requires particular focus according to the views of participants. The idea that effective decentralisation is difficult without significant autonomy is supported by a significant research literature. Regional governments with special status are considered in the literature to have unique characteristics due to their greater autonomy and control over their finances as can be seen in cases such as the South Tyrol region of Italy⁷⁵ and the Basque and Navarra regions of Spain⁷⁶ among others. The absence of such autonomy according to such studies can make a special status region

⁷³ Cameroon Constitution (1996) "The Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon" 1996

⁷⁴ General Code of Regional and Local Authorities. Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development.

⁷⁵ Bergmann, A., & Hinterhuber, H. H. (2017). "Fiscal Autonomy and Fiscal Sustainability in South Tyrol", *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, 4(1), 121-134.

⁷⁶ Diaz-Gimenez, Robles-Zurita, & Santaaulalia-Llopis, 2016, p. 522

ineffective to say the least. In the Basque Country for example, the effectiveness of regional governments has been assured by giving them complete responsibility for the provision of health services, education, and social services, which allows them to tailor these services to local needs and preferences⁷⁷. The identification of the near absence of autonomy as the main impediment to the decentralisation process within the framework of the special status can be explained partly by contradictions in the law. While Section 8 of the General Code of Regional and Local Authorities provides for administrative and financial autonomy in the management of regional and local interests. Section 324 (2) among others makes decisions of SSRA subject to endorsement by non-elected representatives of the state who are governors at the level of the region. The extensive powers given to non-elective positions including that of the Public Independent Conciliator (Sections 367 to 370) potentially saps the autonomy envisaged in Section 8. The views of participants regarding the specific challenges outlined above are discussed in detail below.

4.1. Limited Stakeholders' Involvement in the Conception, Adoption and Implementation of the SSRA

The limited time and the feeble involvement of stakeholders in conceiving and adopting the special status can be considered as one of the factors that have affected its effective realisation. The total time between the end of the Major National Dialogue which proposed the special status, and the tabling of the bill to the parliament in an extraordinary session, was about two months. The Prime Minister had set up a Special Status Working Group which released a document unveiling the potential delineations of a special status arrangement. However, between the end of the Major National Dialogue and the bill's tabling in Parliament, there were hardly any initiatives by the government to encourage consultations, or to solicit and receive memoranda, submissions, and contributions on the content and structure of special status arrangements, from civic stakeholders (elected officials, religious leaders, educationists, legal community) notably those from the regions most concerned by Anglo-Saxon specificities. The content and structure of special status was therefore largely an outcome produced by the drafters of the General Code of Regional and Local Authorities (GC-RLA) appointed by the government.⁷⁸ The special status was paradoxically conceived following a gathering (Major National Dialogue) boycotted by key figures of one party (non-state armed actors/separatists)

⁷⁷ Diaz-Gimenez, Robles-Zurita, & Santaaulalia-Llopis, 2016, p. 522, op. cit.

⁷⁸ Simo, P., Gats, T. & Njoya, D.F.N. (2022) "Asymmetrical Devolution: Competencies, Governance, and Autonomy of Special Status Regions". Cameroon Anglophone Crisis Peace Policy Paper. Arbre à Palabre-Palaver Tree, Constitutional Options Project

in the conflict.⁷⁹ The conception already did not depict broad inclusiveness and thus was poised to encounter operational challenges upon adoption.

A good number of Anglophone lawmakers in the upper and lower houses contested the adoption of the special status which they saw as being imposed on their people with little hope to resolve the problem on the ground. The contestation this time around by the people's representatives was not on a usually typical party line as it did not only emanate from the opposition, but also from some Anglophone lawmakers militating in the ruling party (CPDM). In an interview offered to the media, late Senator Henry Kemende of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) – the main opposition party in the parliament at the time, said: “What we would have expected is to empower the regions to determine policies over the educational, judicial, legislative and executive system, to determine issues at a national level, and not just a local level.”⁸⁰ The senator proceeded by describing the special status as something not new in the history of Cameroon. He comparatively placed the implementation special status in the federal and unitary systems of government and assumed that former system operated the special status with considerable consent of the people concerned while the latter/current system has undermined the people's consent:

It is no novelty before we joined the then La Republique du Cameroun, Cameroun had a central government that gave the Anglophone regions a special status and a state, but they consulted the people. This time now, ... why did they not consult the people concerned.”⁸¹

As earlier noted, some members of parliament from the ruling party expressed their anger as they could not make recommendations or amends to the bill. The reaction of Questor Cyprian Awudu Mbaya, was noticeable as he questioned the Minister of Decentralisation and Local Development in parliament: “why didn't you just take the text and the president would have just signed a decree? We cannot change even a comma because you will defend it.”⁸²

⁷⁹ RFI (2019), “Secessionists boycott talks on Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis”. 01 October 2019. Accessed on 3 March 2023 at; <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20190930-cameroon-national-dialogue-resolve-anglophone-crisis-biya-secessionist>.

⁸⁰ Fröhlich Silja (2019) “Cameroon's Anglophones to get 'special status'”. 23 December 2019. <https://www.dw.com/en/cameroon-anglophones-special-status-too-little-too-late/a-51747683>. Accessed on 27 February 2023.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

A participant in the same light described the drafting of the special status as more of a formality carried out with limited stakeholder participation to ensure core issues pertaining to the Anglophone demands for autonomy were effectively addressed:

The Special status was drafted as if it were a formality. The state did not pick up a sincere position in drafting this bill. It is simple; when the state will be ready to address the grievances of the masses, then we will say the special status is special in anyway. It must not be special simply because it is called that way.
(R25A)

The limited stakeholders' involvement or simply popular consultations in the conception and adoption of the special status has been an issue of great concern as it has significantly affected implementation. The restricted stakeholder involvement had then laid a foundation for ineffective autonomy of the two regional assemblies.

Limited citizen participation in regional governance following the adoption of the special status was also considered as an obstacle to its effectiveness. This is shown by high percentage of views on the near absence of citizen's in governance on the frequency distribution table and pie chart below. The frequency distribution table shows that a large number (121) strongly disagreed and that a further 33 somewhat disagreed, while only 12 respondents strongly agreed.

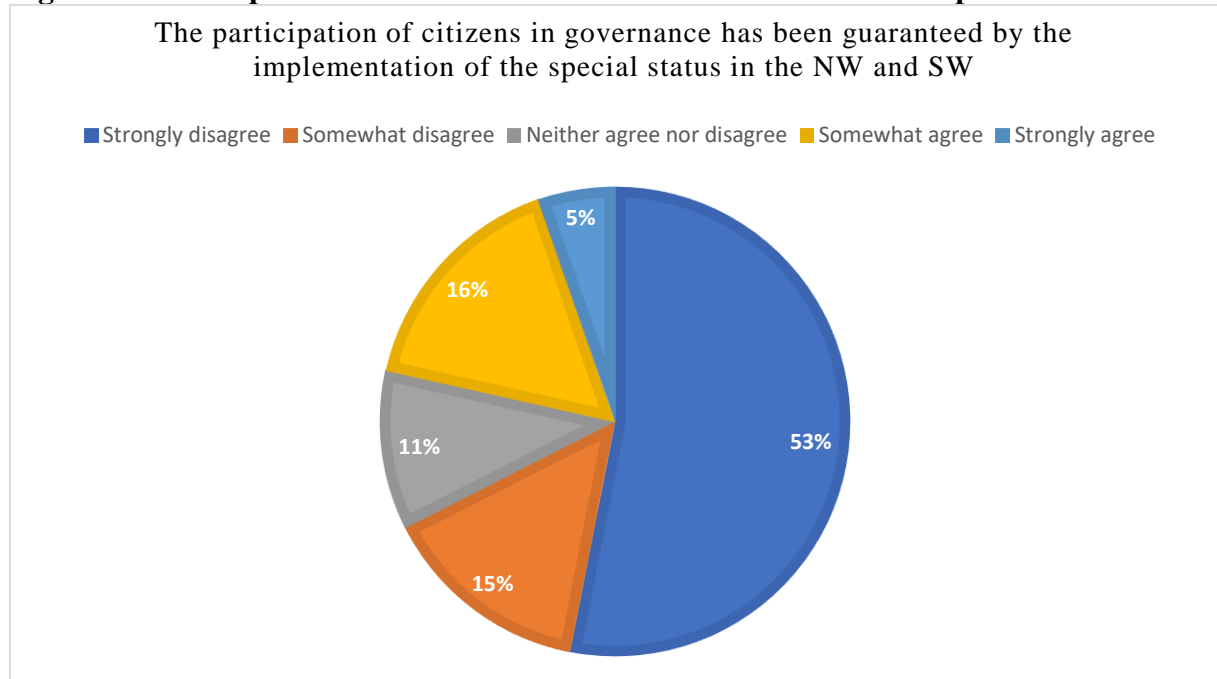
Table 8: Participation of citizens in governance as a result of the special status

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	
34	7	8	6	0	55
19	10	5	18	2	54
15	8	5	6	4	38
40	5	5	3	0	53
13	3	2	4	6	28
121	33	25	37	12	228

Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

The pie chart generated from the frequency distribution above shows that among respondents, a total of 68% either strongly or somewhat disagreed that citizen participation in governance is guaranteed by the special status implemented in the NW and SW. Only 21% either strongly or somewhat agreed.

Figure 12. Participation of Citizens in Governance as a result of the Special Status



Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

A revision of the special status through a consultative process with stakeholders in the two regions could be in order to address this challenge. They also show that SSRA need to do more to involve citizens in decision making and implementation to increase effectiveness.

4.2. Near Absence of Effective Administrative and Financial Autonomy

Special status implies devolving to the concerned regions, competences that make them unique compared to the other regions of the state. This involves granting exclusive autonomy over domains that are key in sustaining the services and values that are considered different in comparison to other regions. It should be noted that these exclusive domains of competence required for special status regions do not translate in unlimited powers. Regional assemblies can exercise them freely to the extent that they clearly serve the interests of those they represent and do not undermine the implementation of national interests of the state⁸³. This means that the state may only intervene or veto decisions made in the exercise of such powers by the special status authority if these clearly put national interests in peril. Such intervention or veto is therefore expected to be an exception and not a routine. Subjecting routine and regular decisions of special status regions to endorsement by a central authority can be considered as denying them this right to exclusive powers at the core of their effectiveness. The findings of

⁸³ Dardanelli, P. (2019). *Independence and Regionalism in Europe*, Routledge.

this study however show that in practice, the state interference in the functioning of the regional assemblies has led to an overlap of powers and worse, the subordination of the assemblies denying them exclusive competence in areas identified in law such as administration, finance, education and common law practice which define their autonomy.

Administrative autonomy characterised by power relationships has been identified as lacking in the functioning of the two regional assemblies as their elected officials are statutorily and in practice answerable to unelected supervisory authorities. Consequently, the special status adopted for the two Anglophone regions is yet to be effectively implemented. More than a year into the adoption of the special status, Cho Ngu Ernest, the director for human resources for regional and local authorities in Cameroon's Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development raised the concern that many government ministers were reluctant to transfer resources to the regions as stated in the country's decentralisation code and constitution.⁸⁴ Such delays can be said to have contributed to the slow implementation of the special status.

One respondent compared the slow implementation of the special status with the long delay relating to the implementation of regionalism only recently in 2020, that is 24 years after it was adopted in the 1996 constitution: "The same bottlenecks that delayed and have stood in the way of the implementation of the 1996 constitution providing for decentralization still stand till date. Centralised services are still fully in charge." (R5H) It was similarly captured by another respondent: "There is no special status so we can only talk about implementation of decentralisation which is very slow because the government is not willing to truly decentralise." (R12A) The seeming resistance of the central government to surrender due powers to the regions is further captured by another respondent who sees the status quo protectively maintained by supervisory authorities.

The gaps or challenges are numerous. The governor, SDOs, are still in control of power with the peoples' representatives having little or no say in local governance. There is nothing special in the special status because the status quo has not changed. The state is still reluctant to relinquish power to the local dependencies. (R21J)

⁸⁴ Moki, E.K. (2021). "Cameroon Regional Councils Starved of Resources to Solve Anglophone Separatist Crisis. VOA, 19 May 2021, Accessed on 03 March 2023 at; https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_cameroon-regional-councils-starved-resources-solve-anglophone-separatist-crisis/6205996.html.

Another respondent attributed the weak autonomy of the SSRA to the ambiguity regarding it in the 2019 law on decentralisation. According to this participant, it is not clearly specified in this key special status document as it still reserves major powers for the supervisory authorities.

The body is not autonomous and even the very article of its creation does not give any power to take independent decisions that can have direct impact on the governing of these regions. The head of the region is a governor who is an unelected official, but through whom all must be approved. (R9A)

The law on decentralisation with regard to the implementation in effect does not give exclusive decision-making powers to the regional assemblies in matters affecting their respective regions. The supervisory authorities retain considerable powers. Under Section 73(3) and (5) of the GC-RLA, the supervisory authorities (Governor and Senior Divisional Officer) are “responsible for national interests, administrative control, ensuring compliance with laws and regulations, as well as maintaining law and order”. They also have a right to information, which mandates the regional local authorities to inform them of all decisions adopted (Section 74 of the GC-RLA); and a right to intervene, for instance through the right to attend sessions of the regional and municipal councils and to take the floor during the said sessions. One participant saw these non-elected officials as overshadowing the regional representatives to the extent of keeping them considerably dependent: “The challenges by me is the fact that the central government is still at the front line. All their needs are supplied by the state and due to this they can’t operate on their own.” (R1H). Another respondent explained how the overbearing presence of supervisory authorities in the process has restricted elected regional authorities from effectively participating in key decisions their region:

The structure created as a follow-up of the special status are quite good but unfortunately have no power to take decisions for the interest of the regions. Their decisions are censored by the regional governors and other members of the executive. This makes it impossible to exercise their functions. (R3H)

Another participant in the same vein described regional representatives as naturally submissive in way of paying allegiance to those who are appointed over them: “The bodies created have no power and are effectively subordinated to their appointed overlords, which means that even if they had different ideas, they can never wrestle power from the centre. Loud sounding, nothing of an arrangement.” (R9H). The general perspective from fieldwork responses sees the special status exercised in a top-down approach thus continuing to keep the regional assemblies dependent and consequently with little capacity to addressing problems: “It is top-bottom

administrative decision if it was bottom-up administration, it would've solved the problem(s).” (R39J)

The Special Status provisions of the GC-RLA do not carve out a specific form and organisation of the regional public administration, in the said regions. Unlike the rules governing the functioning of the Regions deliberative organs, and its Executive Council, there are no specific provisions on the type of public administration the Special Status regions will need, to discharge their mandates. As the rules provide, in such situations, the “generic” regime applicable to all Regions will be applicable to those in Special Status. A good example could be drawn from the adoption of a uniform budget irrespective of the fact that the NW and SW have clearly different circumstances and have other institutions such as the house of chiefs which do not exist in the other eight regions:

The first challenge is the non-acceptance of a good faction of the population of the special status. The budget of the regional assembly is the same as that of the regional council giving the impression that there is practically no difference with the other eight regions. (R2A)

The following respondent's feedback on the poor devolution of power in different sectors has captured the challenges to the implementation of the special status in the two regions:

The overbearing power of the appointed officials on regional assembly. Devolution is itself ineffective via the special status and the creation of the various assemblies, because these organs are practically handicapped to cause significant change in economic, health, social, educational, sports, and cultural development affairs of the region. Limited visible engagement of the regional assembly by the central government in the formulation of national public policies... (R27A)

The treatment of the question of autonomy according to some participants has not been given the consideration it deserves to ensure effectiveness because many Anglophones have demanded for more than decentralisation. In its place, they have called for a federal system at a minimum to guarantee the autonomy of the two regions. One respondent for example said “the demands of the citizens of the two regions have gone above decentralisation. They are now requesting for other forms of autonomy higher than the special status such as federalism or separation.” (R53J)

The Frequency table and pie chart below show that the majority of respondents believed the special status has not offered decision-making autonomy to the NW and SW. The frequency

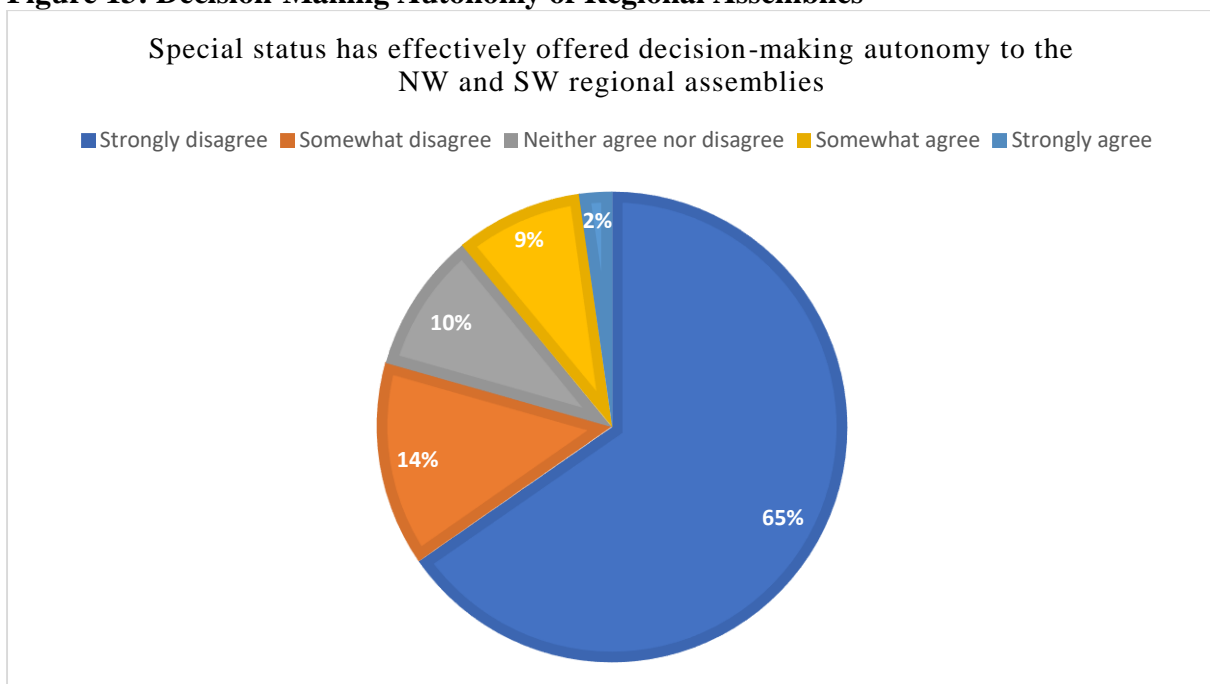
distribution table below indicates that this was the most common response, with 149 respondents selecting this option.

Table 9: Decision-making autonomy of Regional Assemblies

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	
43	5	6	1	0	55
22	12	8	9	3	54
19	10	4	4	1	38
48	2	1	2	0	53
17	3	3	4	1	28
149	32	22	20	5	228

Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

Figure 13: Decision-Making Autonomy of Regional Assemblies



Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

The pie chart above shows that a whopping 65% strongly disagreed that the special status has effectively offered decision-making or governance autonomy to the NW and SW regional assemblies and that an additional 14% somewhat disagreed.

The findings of this study show that the financial dependence of the regional assemblies on the central government has rendered them heavily dependent and significantly limited in their

ability to autonomously carry out projects in their region. The budget is not determined in line with the needs of the assemblies or the special status regions. The same budgetary allocation made to the other eight regional councils – without a special status – is provided to the North West and South West regional assemblies hosting among others, an additional structures such as the House of Chiefs. The funding of the regional assemblies is thus deemed inadequate and insufficient given the volume of the tasks.⁸⁵

The Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development (MINDDEVEL) is the government supervisory body for the activities of the regional assemblies. Such supervision which has been described by many observers as far more interfering than mere monitoring, reduces the capacity of the assemblies to take the necessary lead. In this regard, one respondent for example said “one of the outstanding challenges has to do with the overbearing role of the representative of the state and MINDDEVEL. The Assemblies with the special status require greater autonomy in financial matters and decision making.” (R1A). Similarly, another participant held the view that, “there is no financial autonomy in the exercise of projects. Their powers are restricted as they still consult supervisory authorities for the approval of the budget and the recruitment of workers.” (R17A).

The above results from the qualitative component were corroborated by those from the quantitative survey. The frequency distribution table shows that 152 respondents out of 228 believed that the special status has not offered financial autonomy to the regions.

Table 10: Effectiveness of the Special Status in promoting financial autonomy

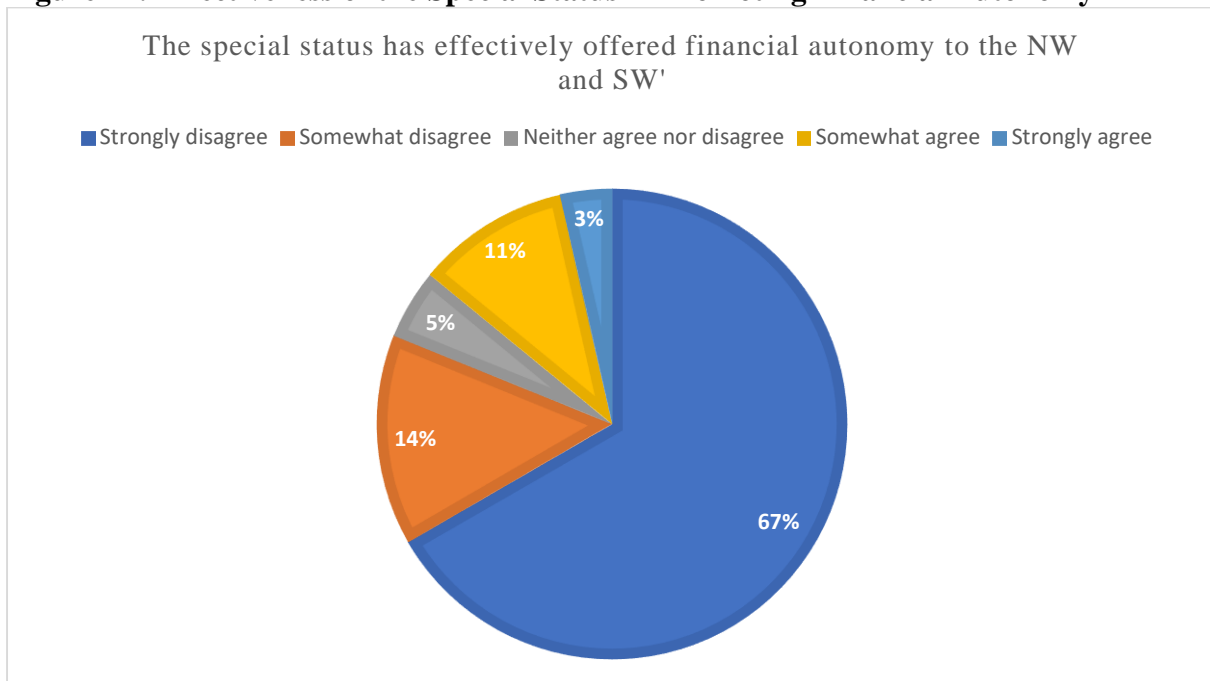
Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	
47	6	1	1	0	55
22	13	1	15	3	54
19	9	4	3	3	38
48	0	3	1	1	53
16	5	2	4	1	28
152	33	11	24	8	228

Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

⁸⁵ Le Billon, P., & Waizenegger, A. (2020). “Conflicting trajectories of decentralisation in Cameroon: Impact of the Anglophone crisis”. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 58(1), 5-23.

These views are represented in the pie chart below which shows that the majority of respondents (67%) strongly disagreed that the special status has effectively offered financial autonomy to the NW and SW and that an additional 14% somewhat disagreed that is has.

Figure 14: Effectiveness of the Special Status in Promoting Financial Autonomy



Source: Based on 337 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

The findings above show that the SSRA will require more financial autonomy to effectively carry out their assigned missions. This will potentially require the granting of exclusive powers in their areas of competence and the review of supervisory positions by non-elected officials in the regions as suggested by most participants. As the literature shows⁸⁶, effective financial autonomy can be achieved by giving the SSRA significant powers to raise revenue through taxes and the exclusive management of public services under their core areas of competence such as education and the courts.

4.3. Poor General Understanding of the Special Status

The poor understanding of the special status among the population of the two Anglophone regions has been caused by the mystery built around it from conception to operationalisation. The population largely perceive the special status as an instrument imposed on them since they were not effectively consulted in the conception and adoption. The powers of the regional

⁸⁶ see for example Bergmann & Hinterhuber, 2017

assemblies remain unclear as their responsibilities is determined by laws implemented in the country’s political, Yaoundé.⁸⁷ The general lack of understanding has been a major obstacle to the implementation as pointed out by a respondent: “The word special status has not been understood in both regions. And this makes it so difficult to go operational.” (R10H)

Poor communication as to what is the special status meant for and what have been its realisations on the ground has further contributed to its lack of understanding by the public in the two regions. Some fieldwork respondents see the system as still centralised with many citizens of the regions not familiar with the idea of the special status: “The information and activities with respect to special status are not readily available to the public. The activities are not seen by local populations, everything still seem centralised.” (R3N). “The first thing is that the people have not completely understood what it is all about as they believe the powers are still centralised.” (R7J). “Many do not understand what the special status is all about. Outright rejection of the concept by some denizens of the region.” (R10N).

The frequency distribution table below demonstrates that most respondents (179 out of 228) strongly or somewhat disagree that there is a good understanding of the special status in these two regions.

Table 11: Understanding of the Special Status

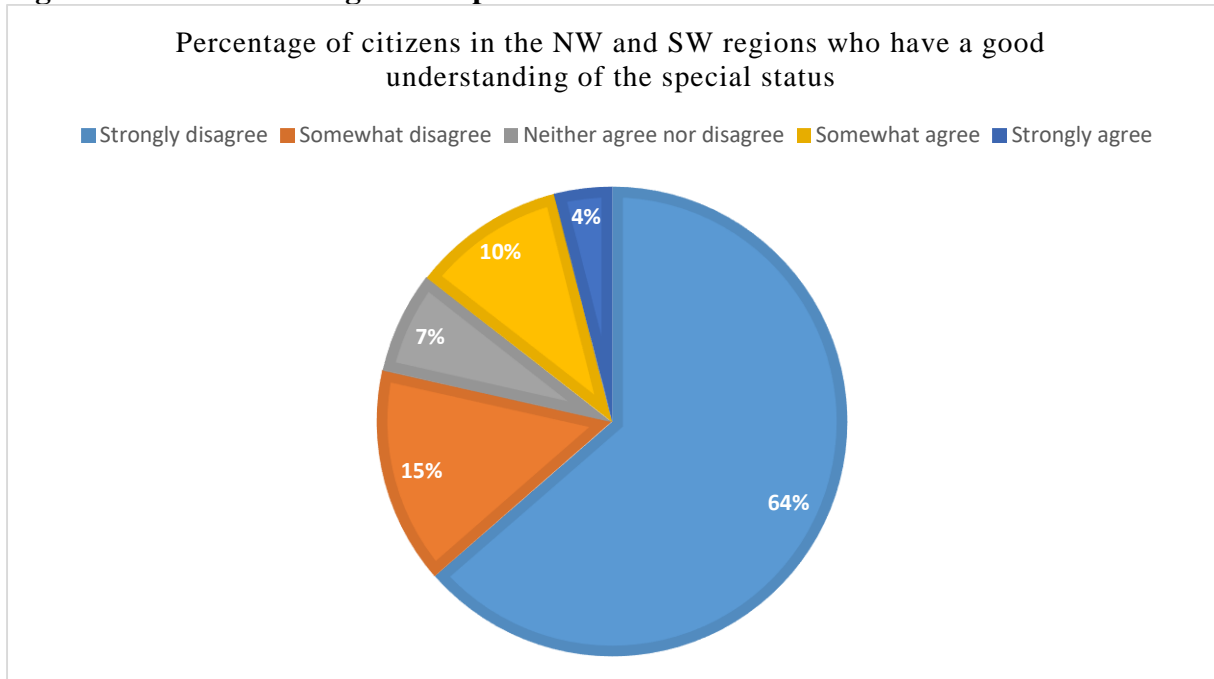
Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	
42	7	2	4	0	55
29	10	4	9	2	54
16	8	4	6	4	38
40	6	3	3	1	53
18	3	3	2	2	28
145	34	16	24	9	228

Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

The pie chart below relates to the level of understanding of the special status among citizens in the NW and SW of Cameroon. It shows that a significant majority (64%) of respondents strongly disagree with citizens having a good understanding of the special status.

⁸⁷ Maxwell Bone & Akem Kelvin Nkwain, 2023, “Cameroon grants ‘special status’ to its restive regions. They don’t feel special.” January 13, 2020, Access on 03 March 2023 at; <https://africanarguments.org/2020/01/cameroon-grants-special-status-anglophone-conflict/>

Figure 15: Understanding of the Special Status



Source: Based on 228 questionnaires. Study on the effectiveness of decentralisation in the NW and SW.

These results suggest that good section of the population is lacks knowledge or awareness of the special status. They also efforts to raise awareness of the special status and the role of other SSRA are needed in the North West and South West regions.

4.4. Language Issues

The use of French and English languages amidst the operationalisation of the special status was also identified as a key challenge. The situation according to respondents remains the same as it was prior to the adoption of the special status.

The priority given to the French language over the English language in offices, schools and public communication is pointed out by some fieldwork participants as a key challenge to the implementation of the special status in the North West and South West regions. “Language barrier. The computers for the regional assemblies were programmed in French making their usage difficult and questioning at the same time objectives of the bilingualism commission.” (R4J) “The French system still dominates the English system...” (R22A). “...Three years after the Major National Dialogue, administrative offices and public schools still have staff that coordinate only in French.” (R28A).

The influence of French language in schools and courts in the two Anglophone regions where the main language of expression of beneficiaries is English remains as has been shown in relevant sections above was thus considered a major challenge. These results suggest that the instruments required for the effective operationalization of a local public service alluded to in Sections 22(3), 37(2), 42(2), 278(5), 367(3) 369(3) and 493 of the GC-RLA, need to be put in place in a manner as to enable SSRA exercise autonomy in the recruitment of public service personnel that meet the cultural and linguistic exigencies of the special status regions particularly in key areas such as education and justice.

4.5. The Limited Representation of Women

As it can be gleaned from the literature and findings above, the increased representation of women in SSRA will improve their performance. In spite of this, the findings however show that their representation in the SSRA can still be described as proportionately low when compared to that of men. Several challenges including; voting patterns for parties, population density, women's labor force participation, and the representation of women in parliaments have been identified as challenges to the political representation⁸⁸ of women in the literature. In this study, gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs, limited access to financial resources, difficulties in accessing education, were found to represent the main obstacles to the qualitative and quantitative representation of women in SSRA.

One participant in the policy workshop for example argued that the proportion of women in local authorities is explained by their lack of financial resources needed to effectively participate in politics⁸⁹. According to this participant, even when “women have money they prefer to use it in taking care of their families rather than invest it in politics”⁹⁰. Similar arguments have been advanced in studies such as those by Sudarkasa⁹¹ and AWDF⁹² who argue that the limited numbers of women in leadership positions in the Africa, can be explained by their lack financial resources. Similarly, have stated that “women have lower incomes and less financial freedom than men”⁹³. In the same vein, Cornwall contends that most women in

⁸⁸ Aksel, S. & Daniel, S., (2015), “What Determines Women’s Political Representation at the Local Level) A Fine-grained analysis of the European Regions”, *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 56 (5-4)

⁸⁹ Workshop, Policymakers, Yaoundé, 16 March 2023

⁹⁰ Workshop, Policymakers, Yaoundé, 16 March 2023

⁹¹ Sudarkasa, N. (1986), “The status of women” in indigenous African societies. *Feminist Studies*, 12 (1) pp.91-103.

⁹² African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF), 2010, African women and Political participation. Lecture by H.E Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, Published online by AWDF, accessed from; <http://www.awdf.org/browse/1416>.

⁹³ Enid, S., Zachary, S., & Makram, M. (2014). “Decentralization and Gender Equity”, accessed on 5 March 2023 at http://www.forumfed.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/OPS14_Decentralization_and_Gender_Equity.pdf

Africa are so poor that they are not in a position to generate the money for political campaigns that are now highly commercialized⁹⁴.

Stereotypes were also found to constitute a major obstacle to the full participation of women. A common stereotype considered by a participant as an obstacle for example is that women stay away from politics because it is a dirty game⁹⁵. Although other participants were of the view that women are not afraid of engaging in politics such stereotypes are not insignificant and need to be broken. The idea that stereotypes are a major challenge to the participation of women is largely attributed to the Women in Development (WID) approach. The WID approach was originated in the early 1970s as a movement by female development professionals in Washington⁹⁶. The main argument of the WID approach is that the disadvantages experienced by women originate within stereotypes and customary expectations that are held by men, internalized by women and promoted through various institutions of socialization at the same time⁹⁷. To break these stereotypes and effectively promote gender equality in public life, the approach affirms that equal opportunity programs or legislations can be introduced and legislation which discriminates against women can be removed⁹⁸.

Another challenge identified was the limited access to education for women and girls, due mainly to cultural restrictions and the security situation in the NW and SW. One workshop participant for example said, limitations to the educational development of women and girls reduces their potential to participate in political and development processes⁹⁹. This participant argued that educational development for women and girls empowers them and increases their potential to participate in politics. This is similar to the view of Detrez and Peksten¹⁰⁰ who show that spending on key social welfare areas including education increases the female labor force participation and the proportion of seats occupied by women in the national parliament.

Finally, the predominance of men in the planning and implementation of policies by local authorities was also considered as a factor that undermines gender equality¹⁰¹. Although some participants at the policy workshop share a contrary view, intimating that efforts are made to

⁹⁴ Cornwall, A. (2005), "Readings in Gender in Africa". Indiana University Press.

⁹⁵ Workshop, Policymakers, Yaoundé, 16 March 2023

⁹⁶ Tinker, I., (1990). "The Making of a Field: Advocates, Practitioners and Scholars", In Tinker I., ed. *Persistent Inequalities. Women and World Development*, New York, Oxford University Press.

⁹⁷ Pajvančić-Cizelj, A. (2011). "Gender and Development". *Temida*, 14 (1) pp.67-82.

⁹⁸ Moser, C., (1993), "Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice and Training". Routledge, London.

⁹⁹ Workshop, Policymakers, Yaoundé, 16 March 2023

¹⁰⁰ Nicole, D. & Dursun, P. (2018). "Women Friendly" Spending? Welfare Spending and Women's Participation in the Economy and Politics", *Politics & Gender*, 14 (2), pp. 137 - 161

¹⁰¹ Workshop, Policymakers, Yaoundé, 16 March 2023

ensure the equal participation of both men and women in the planning and implementation of policies, these contradictions suggest that significant efforts are also required to close the gap in this regard.

Significant efforts can be said to have been made in the implementation of Cameroon's policy on gender balance in the SSRA. In spite of these efforts, evidence from this study shows that the gender gap remains wide and that closing it successfully will have important implication on the effectiveness of the SSRA.

4.6. The Ongoing Conflict and Insecurity

The aspect of stabilising the regions before embarking on their development appears a missing link since the ongoing conflict has been hindering the implementation of the special status prescribed by the law on decentralisation. Some authors have identified the ongoing war and the resulting high rate of insecurity as having affected the delivery of services by the Regional Assemblies¹⁰² and their capacity to respond to the needs of the population.¹⁰³ Many participants presented the war and its resulting high rate of insecurity in the two regions as serious obstructions to the implementation of the special status: "The special status has not been implemented fully due to continuous violence and attacks from separatists." (R3S). "Violence has prevented the execution of projects funded by the local councils. Chiefs are still not able to return to their palaces. Insecurity still reigns. Slowness in Implementation of resolutions." (R2S). "The crisis is still drafting in and makes it difficult for councillors to go to the local masses especially in the villages." (R6N). "We can't be talking of implementation when the war is still going on. On almost every few days we record deaths. (R9J). "Violence and abductions have remained the order of the day In spite of the call for peace." (R17J). Another respondent, saw behind this persisting insecurity, the existence of spoilers¹⁰⁴ who prioritise selfish interests and block the way to the effective implementation of the special status. "The non-granting of ceasefire makes the implementation of the special status difficult and

¹⁰² Fombe, L. (2019). "Local governance and sustainable development in Cameroon: The case of Bamenda City Council". *Journal of Development and Communication Studies*, 6(2), 42-56.

¹⁰³ Nsoh, J. A. (2020). "Local governance and the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon: The response strategies of the Regional Assemblies". *Journal of Governance and Development*, 16(1), 31-50.

¹⁰⁴ 'Spoilers' are individuals or groups that actively seek to hinder, delay or undermine conflict settlement. They often benefit from the war system, and would be negatively affected by an end to conflict. This is similar to the idea of 'dividers', which are negative factors that increase tensions between people or groups, reduce their ability to resolve conflicts non-violently and may lead to violent conflict.

impossible. Some have commercialized the war and will not want it to end soon. This makes the implementation of special status difficult.” (R19J).

The slow implementation of the special status is also attributed to the prevailing insecurity which has been preventing the elected regional officials from meeting with members of the public, especially those residing in severely affected areas albeit in strong need of the services of the regional assemblies. One participant explained this challenge in the following words:

Generally, it is slow, by now the expectation is that we should have been voting our governors that way we can force them to be accountable to the people without any fear. Also, the issue of insecurity due to the ongoing war has discouraged both the implementers and the public. No one wishes to be exposed to violence given the fact that there is a lot of victimization. (R26A).

Similarly, another participant said:

The office of the public independent conciliator is yet to be enjoyed by the entire local population because of the security situation which needs not to be overemphasised. Insecurity itself is a major challenge. The regional councillors are yet to meet the local population to explain to them what is all about. (R11A).

The special status amidst the violent conflict underpinned by high level of insecurity – killings, abductions, torture and rape – is undermined by the conflict. It is therefore as many participants argued, highly unlikely to be effectively implemented without the sustainable resolution of the ongoing conflict and more context sensitive security measures. The need to achieve sustainable peace in two regions in the light of the foregoing can therefore be considered as a prerequisite for the effective implementation of the special status. The SSRA notwithstanding can contribute to improving the security situation in the two regions. To expect an effective contribution from them, the SSRA will require more autonomy and resources as the findings above have shown.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

It is now three years since the government embarked on the implementation of the special status decentralisation in the NW and SW. The government has been intent on pursuing this alongside its policy of deconcentration. Internationally, there has been support for effective decentralisation especially in the NW and SW to create an enabling environment for peace as intended by the government. This research focused on examining the views of stakeholders in the NW and SW on the results of the special status and whether it has effectively addressed the issues for which it was designed. We therefore asked the questions: has the special status effectively protected the common law and the English education subsystems?; have SSRA been effective in promoting gender equality and economic development?; and what are the challenges faced in implementing the special status? Our conclusion of findings and recommendations are as follow.

5.1. Conclusion

Without a strong decision space in the educational, legal and economic functions and without significant revenue autonomy the SSRA are unlikely to improve on their current performance which from the responses of most participants can be described as unsatisfactory. The views of most participants show a difference in the conception of the special status. The idea that SSRA are better placed to implement national interests and that they consequently act in the interest of both the state and the local population by addressing local needs more effectively¹⁰⁵, was held by most participants. This is in contrast to that held by the government that the interests of the state are better safeguarded by persons designated by the central government to represent it in the regions.

In spite of the differences in conception of decentralisation held by different stakeholders, the study shows that more robust measures will need to be taken to ensure significant political, fiscal and administrative autonomy for the special status to produce the expected results of protecting the English speaking subsystems that are historically associated with the NW and SW. To perform their functions effectively, these areas do not just need to be largely devolved to the SSRA but corresponding roles such as those of the governor and regional delegates such

¹⁰⁵ Manor, J., (1999), *The Political Economy of Democratic Decentralization*, The World Bank, Washington, D.C., p.2 accessed on 22 March 2023 at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/386101468739238037/pdf/multi-page.pdf>

as for education, housing and urban development, state property, surveys and land tenure, and public service in deconcentrated services need to be removed.

It can be gleaned from the study findings that the implementation of special status has largely not been effective in protecting the common law subsystem. The powers of the SSRA in relation to the protection of the common law subsystem among others are clarified to some extent in legal instruments but more needs to be done to promote their understanding.

The results also indicate that due to the near absence of autonomy in making and implementing policies on education, the regional assemblies of the NW and SW are also not significantly involved in policy formulation and implementation on education that touches on English subsystem at the national level. This situation is unlikely to change if exclusive power on education are not given to the SSRA. Furthermore it is demonstrated that effective protection will require that teachers that cannot speak English fluently or whose first language of instruction is not English, should not be deployed to teach subjects and courses in English.

With regard to gender equality, the equal representation of men and women in regional governing bodies at all levels is shown to be both necessary and required for the promotion of equality and effective participation by all. While the presence of women in SSRA from inception is considered a step in the right direction, the findings show that that more efforts need to be made for the local authorities in the NW and SW to serve as vehicles for the promotion of gender equality. The tendency for the House of chiefs to be filled only by men can potentially undermine efforts to promote the equal representation of both men and women in SSRA. The findings in this light reveal that in spite of the legal basis for the promotion of gender equality by and within SSRA, women are still qualitatively and quantitatively underrepresented. To promote gender equality, creative measures to ensure the representation of women in the House of Chiefs and their overall representation are therefore needed. The use of legislated gender quotas as the literature shows can be useful in addressing this problem. This can be done by using candidate quotas that require a minimum proportion of women in a candidate list with a target proportion for female candidates of at least 40 percent. Although gender equality was not one of the main reasons for the creation of SSRA, its effective promotion will be necessary to increase participation in regional governance and the quality of service delivery.

SSRA have played a negligible role in promoting economic development since their creation. It is demonstrated that the failure to significantly involve local communities in decision-making processes and prioritizing projects based on the local needs of the population explain the weak performance in this domain. Poignantly, the study's findings show that the effectiveness of SSRA in delivering economic development among others will remain unlikely without a sustainable resolution of the ongoing conflict coupled with more context or locally driven security measures.

Given the unique situation of the SSRA which have a more elaborate administrative structure and are operating in crisis hit environments, it is necessary to increase their financial capacity by promoting their autonomy to raise and spend income through taxation and the provision of public services. The current reliance of SSRA on the allocation of financial resources from the central government which match those of other regions which have different challenges and status, has undermined their effectiveness.

5.2. Recommendations

Decentralisation within the special status regions can benefit from context driven measures to ensure administrative, political and fiscal autonomy. Such measures will enable the SSRA to effectively recruit and manage personnel of a local public service and effectively focus on and deliver projects based on local priorities. The following recommendations are therefore made to contribute to such context driven measures.

- A peaceful and sustainable resolution of the ongoing conflict needs to be firmly pursued by the government of Cameroon and international partners to create a more enabling environment for SSRA to carry out their assigned missions.
- It is necessary to enact legal instruments that will ensure the exclusive competence in key areas including but not limited to finance, education, justice and the development of economic infrastructure.
- Women do not only represent the majority of the population in the SSRA but continue to make a significant but often ignored contribution to the economic well-being of their families and the regions. This makes their full participation important for the improvement of democratic governance and effective service delivery by SSRA.

Higher legislated gender quotas should be introduced to improve women's representation in regional assemblies.

- In addition, international actors can play an important role as facilitators. Although decentralisation and local governance are endogenous processes, external agencies can do a lot to facilitate it in such crisis-hit settings. This can be achieved for example by providing financial support and incentives for effective implementation of projects in areas such as social housing and the development of health infrastructure, drinking water infrastructure, sanitary infrastructure, educational and road infrastructure provision and management by SSRA, that can directly impact the livelihoods of the residents.

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