

***Sumediang* and Subaltern Development in Bakossi-Cameroon: A Historical Assessment of the impact of a Women's Common Initiative Group c1985-2015**

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Abstract

Since the Beijing Conference, there has been a growing concern about the contribution of women in local and global development. Before the conference, the role of women especially in African political and socio-economic development was relatively underprivileged due to a number of traditional and institutional stereotypes amongst which was the believe that a woman was made for child bearing and food preparation. Following the Beijing conference and the economic crisis that plagued most African countries in the 1980s and 1990s, women gradually became conscious of the necessity for them to contribute to the alleviation of not only their condition but that of the entire society in which they live. This saw the emergence and proliferation of women's common initiative groups and self-help schemes. In this paper, we argue that the contribution of such groups especially in subaltern studies has not acquired the desired coverage. We therefore articulate the contributions of one of such organizations called Sumediang; a leading women's Common Initiative Group among the Bakossi ethnic group of Cameroon in addressing the over-arching challenges confronting women of the area. Our theoretical base is Women and Development (WAD) and our methodological approach is historical with interviews and some primary source literature study as the main data collection tools.

Key Words: *Sumediang*, Subaltern, Women, Empowerment, development,

Introduction

In the West early development initiatives, had begun to preoccupy economists and colonial officials since the advent of colonialism. These initiatives identified development with modernization and assumed the wholesale adoption of Western technology, institutions, and beliefs to those they termed peripheries for them to achieve development.

In this way, they posited development as a linear process whereby “backward,” tradition-bound peoples would slough off their historic impediments and embrace modern (that is, Western) institutions, technologies, and values (Webster, 1988). By doing this, it was believed that fragile peripheral economies would be ready for “**take-off.**”

However, questioning whether this prosperity would extend equally to all classes, races, and gender groups research has found out that this development paradigm largely ignored women (Connelly et al, 2013) and undermined women’s economic opportunities and autonomy (Baserup, 1970). They seriously challenge the argument that, benefits from development projects would automatically “trickle down” to women and other disadvantaged groups. While such findings overtly tell women that it is not reasonable to depend on such modernization oriented projects for their welfare, they have indirectly increased women’s activism in the field of development as they have prompted new perspectives in theorizing women’s participation in development with the aim of helping to integrate women into the national economies of their countries.

Theoretical Basis

The study hinges on the Women and Development (WAD) framework which argues that patriarchy exists in all societies and is the fundamental source of inequality. The framework is adopted for its critique of the modernization perspective for largely ignoring women and for advocating the need to create alternative social institutions and projects, separate from men’s, within which women can fulfill their needs. It therefore argues for a development approach that recognized the dangers of integrating women into a patriarchal world, and seeks instead to create “women-only” projects, carefully constructed to protect women’s interests (Parpart 1989; Rathgeber 1990).

The WAD paradigm stresses the distinctiveness of women’s knowledge, women’s work, and women’s goals and responsibilities. It argues for recognition of this distinctiveness and for acknowledgment of the special roles that women have always played in the development process. The WAD perspective gave rise to a persistent call to recognize that women are the mainstay of agricultural production in many areas of Africa, although their contribution has been systematically overlooked and marginalized in national and donor development plans (Connelly et al). Campaigns designed to change policies and place women’s issues and concerns on national and international agendas have therefore been a key area of activity for people working within this paradigm, and disseminating information has been an important strategy.

Efforts to strengthen women's role in development within the WAD perspective include making bureaucracies more responsive to women's needs and strengthening bonds among women through active, autonomous local groups and networks. We have adopted this framework from the background of the concerns for Third World Poverty of the 1970s and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank commitments to waging war on poverty through the provision of basic human needs for all (Moser 1989). This antipoverty campaign recognized and tried to serve, women's practical gender needs by focusing on improving women's access to income through such efforts as small-scale, income-generating projects. In the same light, WAD thinkers and planners had agreed on the centrality of poverty alleviation, as a major objective (Jaquette 1982) and our study of *Sumediang* as a women's common initiative group is carried out within the perspective that from the Mid-1980s, with the economic crisis that plagued most African countries, women generally began to realize the need to galvanize their resources in order to improve their lot. This urge was most manifested amongst grassroots women on whom the burden of the economic crisis rested most (Diduk, 1997; Phil, 2008).

Institutional Support for Women and Development (WAD) in Cameroon

In Cameroon, women represent 52% of the population, contribute 75% of the agricultural work and produce 80% of the food (Cameroon, 2010). Despite this the weight of tradition and culture on women still remains very strong in Cameroon and prevents women from attaining parity with men in terms of gender disaggregated data. This situation requires a firm institutional support for women to be able to participate in development and poverty alleviation. The government of Cameroon had long understood its role in terms of women and development as early as 1967 with the passing of Law No. 67/2 F/19 of June 12, 1967 on freedom of Associations and the creation of a Women's Education Department in the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1975 (Cameroon, 2010). However, despite these early efforts, awareness of women's unionism, especially in the rural areas was limited to what is locally termed '*njangi*' groups or *Tontines* exclusively for socio-economic benefits of its members (Mbonbowo, 2014). Although some associations were formed as early as the 1960s, organized Women's Common Initiative Groups (C.I.Gs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) whose activities were generally concerned with poverty alleviation, rural development and the general improvement of the living standards of the population only became proliferate in Cameroon after 1990 with the passing of law No. 90/053 of 19 December 1990 relating to Freedom of Associations (amended by law No. 99/011 of 20 July 1999) and the creation of the Ministry of Women Empowerment and the Family in 2004 from the 1984 Ministry of Women's Affairs (Cameroon 2010).

Through these institutional frames, the government of Cameroon has demonstrated the political will and commitment in implementing WAD initiatives as recommended by the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals. These initiatives have enabled the harnessing of women's efforts for sustainable development and poverty alleviation.

Apart from ratifying international conventions, the government of Cameroon in 1999 made a policy declaration for the integration of women in development with seven priority areas of concern amongst which were women and education; women and poverty alleviation, and women and economic empowerment. To meet these commitments the government began to set up programmes and projects for women with the assistance of bilateral and multilateral partners. These included amongst others, the Global Programme for the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality which contributed to the financing 240 projects by women in some regions of the country to the tune of 170 Million FCFA (Approximately 340,000 USD); the Programme for the Improvement of Rural Family Income (PARFAR) that enabled the construction of twelve (12) Women Empowerment Centres in some regions of the country; and the Poverty Reduction Project and Actions in Favour of Women (PREPAFEN) that granted loans to women and women's groups to the tune of 785 Million FCFA (Cameroon,2010).

The initiatives of government have not only made women's needs to be increasingly met in established programmes and projects but has also led to women taking up more responsibilities within their communities. The Cameroonian woman especially at the grassroots has become more resourceful amidst increasing hardship resulting from the economic crisis. Through such government's efforts, women have been able to put in place innovative livelihood strategies in all forms of informal sector activities which have enabled most families to depend on women for the sustenance of their socio-economic base.

In addition to training programmes for women and girls who have dropped out of formal school to reinforce their capacities and empower them with economic skills, women are encouraged to group themselves into self-help schemes or common initiative groups and funds and equipment are allocated to them by government with the assistance of development partners. Women are further assisted in building their managerial skills in project formulation and management and rotating savings and credit schemes have been encouraged by government. These have since assumed a useful position in the informal banking system in Cameroon targeted to respond to the needs of communities in general and women in particular who cannot access the formal banking system because of bureaucratic bottlenecks and lack of collateral (Cameroon, 2010). From these initiatives, it is possible to observe that the government of Cameroon has not only permitted women and women's groups to participate in development but has made the environment conducive for them to operate.

Unfortunately, as noted by Connelly and colleagues (2013) much of the theorizing of people working within the WAD perspective is undocumented and the initiatives of women working to alleviate rural poverty and empower women have received little attention in subaltern studies in Cameroon. Apart from government's active engagement at the policy levels as well as in monitoring and evaluation, there is need for the academia to get concerned with community level women's participation in development as a priority area of research. It is in this context that we discuss the contributions of *Sumediang* and development amongst the Bakossi ethnic group in Cameroon.

Methodology

The research used both qualitative and quantitative approaches. We adopted the sampling by convenience technique in establishing our list of resource persons. In this regard we considered available executive members (both past and present) of the association and other civil society as well as government stakeholders in our interview schedules. We also benefitted from these persons relevant literature which was at their disposal during our interview sessions. We also had focused group discussions with rural women in selected villages in the area of study and other direct beneficiaries of *Sumediang* activities. During such trips we also had a first-hand appraisal of the contributions of the association in the development of the area thereby making use of the participant observation technique. This enabled us to corroborate the oral data as well as the primary and secondary literature. We established a simple interview guide and an observation sheet for our interviews and field trips.

Ethically we carefully observed the principle of informed consent and in our data presentation, we consciously considered the need to do objective reporting. However, we understand that in history, evidences, from face value, do not speak for themselves except when analyzed in terms of carrying an argument to a logical conclusion. In this process, one can never be certain that the consideration of other important factors and issues was not omitted or disregarded (Maree, 2009). These evidently raise further questions regarding the completeness of the analysis made for which our historical delimitation of the topic and theoretical framework sets our limits and should guide the reader.

Origin and Evolution of Sumediang Women's Association

Sumediang was founded in Tombel Town, KupeMuanenguba Division of the South West Region of Cameroon in June 1985. Their motto is 'Unity-Solidarity-Development' (Epolle, 2014).

The association was conceived as a Not-for-Profit Non Governmental Organization (NGO) having as its goals to ameliorate in a sustainable manner the standards of living of the Bakossi woman in particular and the community in general (Eneme 2015). In the words of one of its pioneer leaders, MrsEbah Lydia, Sumediang was created ‘to remove the basket (esuo) and the carrying straps (muor) off the backs of the Bakossi women and bring trade and commerce to her doorsteps.’ This will save her the pain of trekking long distances to Mbuasum to sell cocoyams, in exchange for a little salt and oil. ‘We saw the possibility of Bakossi women organizing themselves to make community farms at village level, and the produce from such farms would be sold in co-operative stores which would be stocked with other provisions (Ebah, 1985). These aims were to be achieved by

- promoting the education of the Bakossi girl-child through sensitization and scholarship awards
- empowering Bakossi women socio-economically by providing financial and material assistance to enable them set up income generating activities
- encouraging the formation of community based Bakossi women organizations in villages and towns, as self-help schemes
- soliciting for development funds from government, internal and external Bakossi elites and donor agencies around the world,
- reducing poverty among Bakossi women
- encouraging peace and solidarity among Bakossi women
- creating partnerships in development and emancipation with other Women’s organizations in the country and around the world
- sensitizing women on current global feminist ideas
- fighting widowhood practices and other inimical cultures that discriminate against the Bakossi woman (Sumediang, 2014).
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Thus Sumediang was founded as an indigenous association piloted by educated women to act as the mouth piece of the rest of the Bakossi woman-folk and as a forum through which Bakossi women could brain storm on a range of developmental issues, discuss their experiences and redefine their goals for self-help, empowerment and development. As regards the membership of the association, Sumediang is open to all Bakossi daughters and well-wishers who should be at least eighteen years and above. Admitted members may reside within the national triangle or in the Diaspora and should be able to express themselves in either French or English. Several autonomous branches have been founded in towns and villages as well as abroad in countries such as the UK and the USA.

There are currently about seventeen autonomous branches spread out throughout country. These include Bangem, Tombel, Nyasoso, Ngusi, Buea, Kumba, Tiko, Douala, Yaounde, Ngaoundere, Muyuka, Bafoussam, Nyandong, BangaBakundu, Makedmbeng, Ebonji, Maroua and Edea (Sumediang 2014). These branches are however affiliated to the National Association. To ensure that the group is better coordinated, three zones were carved out and these include: Tombel, Bangem and the Urban zone with each zone having its coordinator responsible to the National President. The association currently has a membership of between 1000 (Eneme, 2015) and 1585 committed members (Epolle, 2014) in the country alone.

The association is self financing with contributions and donations coming mainly from members. There are two important sources of income for the association and these include individual annual registration fees of 2000 FCFA and annual dues of 12000 FCFA per annum (Sumediang, 2014). Other sources of income include proceeds from the sale of produce from commonly run projects such as grinding mills, food crop farms, poultries and animal ranches (Epolle, 2014). These are supplemented by free-will donations and funds received from donor agencies around the world. It is from these funds that the association is able to undertake certain development projects for the benefit of Bakossi women.

Table 1: Evolution of Sumediang Membership in Selected Branches 1985 and 2015

Branch	1985	2015
Yaounde	65	180
Nkongsamba	15	100
Douala	69	130
Kumba	110	230
Buea	45	150
Bangem	20	175
Tombel	20	280

Source: Established from Sumediang Branch Minutes of Meeting Books, April 2015.

***Sumediang* and Subaltern Development in Bakossi-Cameroon**

In this section, we present some of the achievements of *Sumediang* in relation to their aims and objectives. This includes its activities in the fields of agriculture, agro-industry, livestock farming and micro-finance.

All these contribute to the alleviation of poverty and the improvement of the living standards of the Bakossi woman. These constitute our understanding of social and economic development as the capacity of a society and its members to increasingly deal with their environment (Rodney 1982); as a positive shift in the underlying structures of production occasioned by changes in the composition of inputs and out puts (Kindleberger and Herrick (1977) and as the improvement in material welfare, especially for persons with the lowest incomes, the eradication of mass poverty with its correlates of illiteracy, disease and early death (Rodney 1982).

Also, in considering that *Sumediang* has contributed to development we see development as a society being able to produce concrete structural changes whose benefits, must be spread to the whole society and should be manifested by changes in the social institutions of the people, by a movement towards equal distribution of incomes in a way so as to benefit the greatest majority, and by the closing of gender, sectoral and regional gaps (Aka, 2002). Recent studies on Women and Development in Africa show that women face several obstacles that retard their full participation in development within their communities (Kamau, 2015; Wangoli-Wanjawa, 2015; Mbugua, 2015; Nasong'o, 2015;). In its study and evaluation of the situation of Women in Sub-Saharan Africa, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women alluded to the fact that rural women make up one fourth of the world's population and their contributions could be crucial to the well-being of families, communities and economies and in the advancement of the Millennium Development Goals (UN-Women, 2012).

Agriculture and food processing

In Cameroon and elsewhere in Africa, women are known to produce up to 80 percent of the food (Cameroon 2010). Yet, when it comes to agricultural inputs and services, the share reserve for women is very meager: they receive only 7 percent of agricultural extension services and less than 10 percent of the credit offered to small-scale farmers and own only 1 percent of the land (African Development Bank, 2002). Discriminatory practices in the agricultural sector cause women to be concentrated in subsistence agriculture and most often unpaid farm work, thereby excluding them from large scale profitable agricultural ventures. The formation of women's cooperatives and self-help associations was seen as a veritable strategy to empower and organize women.

It is in such a context that *Sumediang* has been actively engaged in the agricultural sector since its creation in 1985. From its early beginnings the association concentrated in the production of food crops like cassava, cocoyam, maize and plantains.

The cultivation of such crops in the past was largely for subsistence. When surpluses were taken to the market, it was simply to complement what they needed. *Sumediang* understood that constituting its local branch members into self-help groups and carrying out extensive large scale food crop farms would benefit the members and their communities more. This however, did not stop women from continuing with their individual farms. Within a short time large scale farms belonging to *Sumediang* were established in Bangem, Tombel, Yaounde, Banga-Bakundu and Nyandong with extensive yields. From these yields, members experienced significant annual a estimated summary of returns is expressed in Table 2 and Table 3 below.

Table 2: Food Crops Produced by some Branches of Sumediang

Branch	Year est.	Farm sizes (ha)	Crops
Bangem	1986	3	Cassava, maize, plantain, cocoayam
Yaounde	1986	1	Cassava and plantain
Banga-Bakundu	1987	2	Plantain, cassava and yams
Nyandong	1987	4	Cassava, Maize, Cocoyams
Kumba	1986	3	Cassava, Maize
Nkongsamba	1986	2.5	Cassava, Maize

Source: Compiled by authors from field work, 2014.

Proceeds from these farms not only went a long way to bring revenue into the association but also improved the financial capacity of members. According to *Sumediang* regulations, sixty percent of the proceeds is shared amongst members while forty percent is reserved for other projects of the association. Table 3 below presents the average annual income of some *Sumediang* branches for agriculture for 1989 and the supposed benefits of each member.

Table 3: Supposed income from Agriculture and Returns to individual Members for 1999

Branch	Income	Members involved*	Approx annual return per member involved
Bangem	3, 200.000	38	50,526
Yaounde	1,700.000	13	78,461
Banga-Bakundu	3,000,000	23	78,260
Nyandong	4,600,000	30	92,000
Kumba	3,300,000	31	63,870
Nkongsamba	3,150,000	18	105,000

*Members who signed up for the project share 60% of the annual income of the project.

Source: Established from the annual Reports

In most of the branches, these annual proceeds are distributed between October and December and beneficiaries testify having used the funds to send children back to school or prepare them for Christmas and New Year festivities. Furthermore, to encourage the *Sumediang* branches to improve on their agricultural activities, the national organ from time to time provided farming tools to the branches. In 2002 for example, about 2 million francs CFA worth of farm tools was distributed to *Sumediang* branches in KupeMuanenguba Division during celebrations marking the Rural Women's Day.

Apart from producing and commercializing food crops, *Sumediang* has over the years promoted food processing (Ekwoje, 2014). It has donated cassava and maize grinding mills to most of its branches. In 1988, it donated corn mills to all rural branches to the tune 17,000,000 with the support of foreign partners. In 1995 it donated cassava grinding mills to cassava producing rural branches such as the Nyandong, Banga-Bakundu, Bangem, Eboko-Bajoh, Nyasoso, Muyuka, and Ngusi to the tune of over 14,000,000 FCFA (Epolle, 2014). In the year 2000, *Sumediang* donated a palm oil mill to the Bangem Branch estimated at 9,000,000 and from 2007, it has sustained the provision of farming tools (hoes, Machetes, wheel-barrows, spades and pick-axes) annually costing the association about 5,000,000 each year (Nzung, 2014).

The introduction of processing facilities/mills and other farming inputs helped to reduce the task women encountered in the past and this improved not only their output but also ameliorated living standards in the rural areas. The use of grinding mills further guaranteed the durability and value of the goods they produced and this meant more income for the family and stable food supply for their households, hence curbing poverty and hunger in households.

Livestock and poultry farming

In 1999, the Centre for Rural Transformation (CERUT) came up with an innovative project on 'pig credit' called the 'Hand Over the Gift Scheme' for rural women in Kupe Muanenguba Division (*Sumediang*, 2014). The project supplied *Sumediang* branches in the division with hybrid (crossbreed) of female piglets at affordable costs of 5000 FRS per piglet. The selected women and groups were also drilled on improved techniques of keeping livestock. As the name of the project implied 'Hand over the Gift', the women were expected to reimburse CERUT with a piglet and the remaining piglets were then passed over to the next woman in the group. Although it concerned predominantly pig farming, it also included the keeping of goats and sheep.

Some participants in the CERUT pig scheme testified having made an estimated annual average of about 400,000 FCFA and the project is said to have positively touched the lives of over 1000 families across Bakossi-land (Epolle, 2014). Cecilia Enongenea member of *Sumediang Tombel* has provided annual estimates of her income from pig farming to which she was introduced by the CERUT-Sumediang project in 1999. She has been in this activity since then.

Table 4: Estimated Average Annual Income from CERUT-Sumediang Pig Project 1999-2009

Year	Pigs/piglets sold	Estimated income
1999	-	-
2000	1	123,000
2002	3	270,000
2004	3	245,000
2006	5	525,000
2008	4	480,000
2009	7	920,000

Source: Compiled from *Sumediang*, 2015 and Epolle, 2014

In addition to a huge pig farm which she still runs, Cecilia Enongene and many others are engaged in poultry farming. The impact of this activity cannot be underestimated. According to Mesumbe Dipita of *Sumediang Bangem*;

Presently, (2013) no one goes to buy chicken from Melong (in the neighboring Littoral Province) because many poultries have sprouted in the division (Kupe-Manenguba). Besides, men no more boast of providing all the animals; pigs, goats, fowls for funerals because many women have poultries and piggeries. Women have become champions in the development of Kupe-Manenguba (Mesumbe, 2016).

Sumediang Microfinance

From its creation in 1985, the establishment of Microfinance had been an important issue on the *Sumediang* plan of action. The main aim was to empower and encourage women to engage in self-help development projects in their communities through the provision of low interest loans. According to *Sumediang* (2014) the aim of the Microfinance institution is to empower the population to carryout micro projects (Etuge, 2014).

Since the creation of the *Sumediang* microfinance (SUMFI) several women and women's groups have been given loans at moderate rates and this has helped them in undertaking many projects in urban and rural areas of Cameroon. As a Micro-finance, SUMFI is not limited to the Bakossi area. It is expanding in the rest of Cameroon. Currently there are branches in Yaounde, Douala, Kumba, Tombel, Bangem, Mundemba and Mbonge. It encourages membership of all Cameroonians. The establishment of these branches was thanks to the increase in membership in the association in the different branches around the country. The Douala and Kumba branches of SUMFI are the most recent; opened in April 2015. Other branches are expected to be opened in Nyandong, and Buea in 2016. Besides, the opening of the bank has opened up a window of opportunities to many youths who have been employed to work in the microfinance (Sumediang 2015).

Table 5: Summary estimates of Loans granted by SUMFI 2010-2014

Year	Amount
2010	27,000,000
2011	44,000,000
2012	39,000,000
2014	48,000,000
Total	150,000,000

Source: Compiled from *Sumediang*, 2015 and *Epolle*, 2014

Education, Health and the Promotion of Bakossi culture and Language

Other areas in which the contribution of *Sumediang* has been felt include, education of the girl child, healthcare, social inclusion and the promotion of the Bakossi culture and language. Generally, until recently the Bakossi man believed that only the education of the male child was important because he was going to remain in the family and contribute to its growth, while the girl child was going to get married to another family (epolle 2014). Hence spending money on her was a waste of resources. *Sumediang* set as one of its objectives, the demystifying of this position by sponsoring the needy Bakossi girl-child with funds they got from their projects. It also encouraged excellence amongst the Bakossi girls by awarding competitive scholarships. Table 5 below indicates the number of scholarships awarded for selected years. These awards which were both financial and material were valued at between 100,000FCFA and 150000FCFA (Epolle, 2014). Apart from awarding scholarships to Bakossi girls, *Sumediang* also organized adult literacy classes for women in Ngusi and Nyandong and provided them opportunities to get loans which they used to sponsor their children.

Sumediang was also heavily engaged in the fight against HIV/AIDS and STIs by sponsoring village talks through the Local Aids Control Commissions. The association has also assisted in the provision of hospital equipments. In 2001, the association donated beds and mattresses to the Nyandong health centre worth 3,000,000FCFA (Ebah, 2015). In 2008, the association donated drugs and about 200 bedsheets to the Bangem district hospital worth 180,000 (Enang, 2015). In 2009, the association visited the Tombel hospital and made a donation of medical equipment and assistance to patients to the tune of 750,000FCFA (Ebah, 2015). As regards rural health and sanitation, the local branches of *Sumediang* carry out regular cleanup activities in their villages every month. The association assisted the Tombel council in the 'water for life' project with the sum of 500,000FCFA (Sumediang, 2014). They have also assisted the Bangem water project with 500,000frss (Epolle, 2014).

Table 6: Scholarships to Bakossi Girls and Needy Students

Year	No of students/pupils supported
2000	200
2002	150
2004	178
2006	230
2008	200
2010	213

Source: *Epolle 2014, p.47*

In terms of promoting the *Akose* language, the Sumediang made the language the official language of communication in all *Sumediang* meetings. They found that most Bakossi women shy away from speaking the language in public. The association has net-worked with the All Bakossi Conference in organizing *Akose* language courses in major towns in Cameroon such as Yaounde, Douala, Buea and Bamenda for children of Bakossi parents living therein. This has gone on regularly during the third term holidays since the inception of the association and stimulated cultural awareness amongst Bakossi youths and children. During these courses, traditional dances/and the preparation of traditional Bakossi meal lessons are also held (Epolle 2014)

Challenges Facing Sumediang

There are several obstacles which Sumediang still faces in attaining its objectives. The most important of these is their inability to acquire enough funds to sponsor their activities.

Apart from annual contributions of members and the forty percent share of the proceeds in each income generating activity that a group undertakes, Sumediang has found it very difficult to acquire funds from government and the international community. The income generating activities in themselves have dwindled in the past five years due to lack of funds (Epolle 2014, Seguino, 2009). Apart from the absence of funds, the deplorable nature of roads in KupeMuanenguba impedes the effective realization of Sumediang projects in the Division especially in the rainy season months. During this period, transport is limited to motor-bikes whose owners charge exorbitant prices and economic activities in the area are almost at a stand-still. Food produced by Sumediang women hardly reaches the market in good state.

Another problem that limits women contribution to development in Kupe Muanenguba Division is the problem of the availability of land. The association is often expected to apply to the village head for a piece of land for any development project. Which sometimes receive a negative response (Ebah, 2015). In places where the land was provided, it was often not satisfactory to the women. This has made expansion of *Sumediang* projects very difficult. Bakossi society, like many other African communities is still highly patrilineal. In such societies preference by birth rites and socio-economic benefits are given to men. Women are not considered in matters of property rights. So women in Bakossi land as well as the Sumediang is seen as a woman's thing and not worth much energy by the men. Male chauvinism amongst the Bakossi has reduced the impetus of the association and limited the support which would have come from a concencious male contribution to the development of the association.

Internal managerial problems and disagreements within the association are also worth mentioning. In any human society the success or failure of a group largely depends on the commitment of its members. The attitude of *Sumediang* women towards development is not positive due to divergence of opinions among women. This has resulted in occasional failures of conceived projects and the declining membership. Internal problems such as illiteracy especially in the rural branches account for poor record keeping and the inability to monitor and evaluate branch progress and achievements (Ebah, 2015). Similarly, the existence of many family and clan group associations especially in towns has also contributed to the decline of Sumediang membership as most women pay allegiance to their individual village development rather than that of the general ethnic group which they feel sometimes take long to reach their own doorsteps (Malu, 2001).

Conclusion

In this study, we have examined the contribution of *Sumediang* in development amongst the Bakossi ethnic group of Cameroon.

The study has identified some areas in which the association has contributed significantly to improved status of women, family and community; hence impacting positively on development. This is based on our understanding as the improvement of the living conditions of an average person and the closing of sectoral as well as gender gaps especially related to empowerment, equality as well as access to finance and education. We found out in the study that *Sumediang* remains one of largest Women's organizations in Kupe Muanenguba Division in the South West Region of Cameroon. We have however identified illiteracy, limited funds, institutional limitations, poor road, and access to land as major impediments to their attainment of their objectives. These limitations are in line with WAD's findings on problems confronting women as they attempt to contribute to development especially amongst the grassroots.

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