

Local Development and Quality of Life Among the Baka People.

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ABSTRACT: The Baka are fundamentally rooted in their culture and closed off from the world. However, for several decades now, they have been gradually adhering to the policy of decentralisation, which forces them to completely change some of their long-standing customs and practices. Common sense suggests that this indicates a new conception of life in which they derive much more happiness than before. Nevertheless, this viewpoint is strongly contested on the grounds that the quality of life for the Baka has rather deteriorated over the years. The aim of this study is therefore to assess the impact of decentralisation on their daily experiences. Consequently, the question arises as to whether the Baka's involvement in local development projects improves the quality of life they lead. In anticipation of an answer, we have formulated a negative hypothesis. This has been operationalized into four research hypotheses, all of which were confirmed by a content analysis of the narratives of three Baka individuals from the Dja and Lobo department. This result led us to conclude that decentralisation is not yet well understood or appreciated by the Baka. Furthermore, we suggested several prerequisites: an emphasis on citizenship education; the learning of democracy and national culture; and a new social contract between Bantus and Pygmies based on reciprocity, partnership, dialogue, and mutual respect for sociocultural differences.

KEYWORDS: Local development, Engagement, Quality of life.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the effective implementation of decentralisation in 2010, there has been a resurgence of the abusive exploitation of land and subsoil resources by decentralised local authorities. Those in the South Cameroon region are the most dispossessed, particularly in terms of forest resources. This is particularly evident in the municipal areas of Djoum, Oveng, and Mintom II, where the chaotic exploitation of the forest profoundly disrupts the ecosystem, leads to the establishment of large wood processing units, and encourages the settlement of villagers in areas previously occupied by the Pygmies. The latter are then forced into: forest exodus and settlement along roadways; the adoption of new subsistence habits and techniques; the practice of capitalism; and so forth. Some believe this indicates a new conception of life among these Pygmies, in which they experience significantly more happiness than before. However, this viewpoint is strongly contested, on the grounds that over the years, the quality of life for the Baka has actually deteriorated. Indeed, two opposing camps have emerged: on one side, the conservatives who reject decentralisation and its projects, retreating into the unfathomable depths of the evergreen virgin forest; on the other side, the innovators who accept, embrace, and actively engage in local development projects.

The issue at hand is therefore the quality of life of the Baka following their involvement in decentralisation. The aim of this study is to determine whether their engagement in local development projects provides them with the satisfaction, well-being, and happiness they seek. At a time when the state promotes national unity, "living together," and emergence by 2035, it seems urgent to definitively address this issue.

Notional and Theoretical Framework

1) Decentralization and local development

Decentralization is the granting of autonomy to local authorities, which, under the control of the government, manage themselves freely through elected councils. It is manifested by the transfer of specific competencies and appropriate resources from the central power to decentralized local authorities (DLA). Enshrined in Cameroon by the constitutional revision of 18 January 1996, it has been in effect since 2010. One of its objectives is to promote local development. This is a dynamic process in which municipal executives pledge and implement initiatives and actions aimed at sustainably improving the level, environment, and living conditions of their populations by involving them at all stages of implementation. Local development thus requires the active participation of beneficiary populations. To achieve this, local elected officials: i) organize public hearings during which populations, communities, or individuals submit projects that impact the development of the locality; ii) engage in participatory planning of development issues; iii) create consultation frameworks for collecting, federating and advocating for the interests and positions of local development committees; iv) develop a participatory budget that defines the allocation of available community resources for project implementation; v) establish participatory frameworks that ensure the effective execution of selected development projects. Ultimately, the aim is to involve local populations in enhancing the quality of their daily lives.

2) Quality of life, well-being, happiness, and satisfaction

Quality of life is the judgment an individual makes regarding his private life. Its modalities include well-being, satisfaction, and happiness (Bergmsa and Engel, 1988). In fact, well-being is a pleasant sensation of pleasure, physical and psychological balance resulting from an absence of needs, illness or disability and concerns (Benrais, 2001). Happiness, on the other hand, is a fleeting and pleasant sensation experienced based on current emotions, relating to feelings and moods (Argyle, 1997). Satisfaction "refers to the achievement of desires and the fulfilment of goals set by the individual" (Creusier, 2013: 9). It is an emotional state that results from the perceived relationship between what one wishes to obtain from their work and what that work actually provides (Lemoine, 2004).

3) Engagement, acceptance, adherence, involvement, and investment

Work engagement refers to a worker's dedication to their job. However, a distinction is made between professional engagement and organizational engagement. The former is a worker's behavior towards their work, depending either on their perception of work in general and their specific role (Faverge, 1972; 1974), or on the relationship they establish between their work life and personal life (Curie and Hajjar, 1987). Overall, work engagement leads to productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness in relation to the objectives assigned to the individual. Its main determinants are satisfaction, well-being, and happiness derived from this activity. The latter engagement refers to a worker's behavior towards their employer or the institution employing them. Meyer and Allen (1991) distinguish: continuance commitment, which is a working relationship established and maintained around contribution/reward dynamics; affective commitment, which relies on identification with the employer's values and objectives; and normative commitment, which is based on adherence to professional ethics and deontology.

It is therefore understood that engagement implies acceptance, adherence, involvement, and investment in a task or activity being undertaken. Acceptance of a job is the agreement, consent, or approval given by the worker for their work. Adherence to a job is a behavior exhibited by the worker that involves committing oneself wholeheartedly to their work. In this sense, the individual is both the author and the actor of their work. Investment in work refers to the act of putting all one's energy, efforts, and resources into an action or activity. Involvement is "the extent to which a person identifies with, assimilates into, the task they are undertaking, actively participates in its execution, and considers their performance as important for evaluating their own worth" (Louche, 2007: 86).

The traditional economic system of the Baka.

The Baka live deep within the dense, evergreen forest that serves as their nurturing mother. The resources they derive from the forest are minimally transformed before being invested in food, medicine, architecture, and so forth. The method of production for these resources respects the rhythms and cycles of nature, allowing for their continual renewal. Consequently, the forest shapes Baka demographics in terms of morphology, birth rates, morbidity, life expectancy, migration, marriage rates, mortality, and so on (Abega, 1998; 1992). Thus, work is limited to subsistence activities: hunting, gathering, foraging, etc.

Traditionally, work is divided by gender and specialization. However, with the exception of specific activities related to gender roles, men and women cooperate in work groups. The Baka consider anything that comes directly from the forest ecosystem and is directly related to the satisfaction of primary needs (food; medicine; construction materials; hunting tools; ritual items, etc.) as an economic good. Its value is assessed by its size, weight, and ease of transport. This value does not imply accumulation or particular behaviors associated with its acquisition. The Baka do not recognize a "granary economy," as they practice an economy that does not require the accumulation of goods or foresight: everything can be found and obtained in the forest at any time and upon demand.

In fact, the concepts of "possession" and "private property" are virtually non-existent because their system of sharing diminishes the allure of wealth and excludes tyrannical behaviors and capitalism. Indeed, all products resulting from work are equally and entirely shared within the group. For hunting products, no hunter shares their own catch, nor does anyone receive a share of it: the owner of a catch is compensated through the sharing of others' catches. In times of scarcity and for modest catches, the owner is served last. For individual catches, the husband gives the meat received from the sharing to his wife for cooking. It will be consumed alongside a portion of the wife's gathered products. When it comes to collective catches, all are pooled together. A network for exchanging prepared dishes is then organized so that each woman responsible for a menu divides it into as many portions as there are people for whom the menu is intended. The sharing of honey is unique. The owner is the one who discovered the hive. He carries out the harvest and shares it only with companions he has specifically invited to participate in the operation. However, he reserves the largest portion for himself. As for fishery products, each woman retains her catches for her nuclear family.

This system of sharing does not value individual activities but rather promotes collective ones. Thus, it mitigates (but does not reject) individualism and reinforces community unity. It allows for individualism and rivalry without compromising the balance and cohesion of the group. Therefore, it is the group that serves as the economic unit, with the couple at its center. Hunting, gathering, and foraging bring group members together each day and ensure their subsistence. The division of tasks provides a complementarity that conditions intra-family exchanges. Today, hunting and gathering are gradually giving way to complementary agricultural activities. This agriculture has led to the Baka's integration into a large-scale economy and has created new demands: financial economics and mastery of numeracy and accounting. The Baka earn money through the sale of agricultural products, game, rents, safaris, and more. They are either employed by logging companies, seasonal workers in the food plantations of the Bantus, or domestic workers for private individuals. Others sell their own products at periodic markets in Bantou towns and villages.

Key Concepts of Baka Culture

To achieve a good social relationship, protagonists must understand and communicate with one another. To communicate, they need to speak the same language. To speak the same language, they must use the same concepts. However, more than just simple words, concepts denote a world whose representations inform ways of being and doing. These ways differ from one another according to the culture of each participant in the relationship. This presents a challenge since concepts do not refer to the same representations. Hence, there is a need to conduct a semantic analysis of Baka cultural concepts to better understand their behaviors. In this context, the following concepts are particularly relevant:

- 1) Life, well-being, happiness, and satisfaction: These concepts primarily revolve around harmony with the forest and the enjoyment of immediate pleasures, such as eating, drinking, taking care of oneself, building huts, sleeping, having fun, dancing, singing, etc.: they do not pertain to wealth, activity, or occupation.
- 2) Freedom and free will. The Baka word means "free men." For the Baka, freedom is the latitude to come and go as they wish; to speak and express themselves as they see fit; to practice their religion; to gather, etc. They have a clear awareness of "the other" and their own specificities. Baka communities are democracies without elected institutions: all rights are guaranteed. Primacy is given to respecting traditions, with practices and norms established to allow everyone to take charge of him and make his own decisions.
- 3) Work. This encompasses all subsistence activities without altering nature. These activities are intrinsically linked to existence: they are not viewed in terms of remuneration; the Baka work to live rather than to earn money. Thus, work occupies 73% of their time, which they spend eating, dancing, and drinking. The social system encourages a culture of work characterized by activity, enthusiasm, passion, strength, vigor, ingenuity, etc.
- 4) Leadership and power: Baka communities are acephalous. Power and its exercise depend on age or experience. Four individuals serve as natural leaders whom no one is obliged to follow: the patriarch, the greatest hunter, the diviner-healer, and the matriarch. Their leadership is democratic, transformational, and transactional.

- 5) Decision-making. In Baka communities, decisions are made by simple majority. They require both agreement and quality and have the immediate effect of actively seeking information that may resonate with the undertaken action.
- 6) Space and time. For the Baka, space is the dense evergreen forest of which they are a part; it is the revered woodland conceived as a gift from God (Komba). Time is materialized through subsistence activities and determined by the cycles of forest species (hunting time, gathering time, rainy season, etc.). It is not about forecasting in a conventional sense. The Baka favor punctuality and immediacy in interpersonal or group relationships.
- 7) Mobility. The Baka are nomadic. However, their movements always occur within a specific and well-defined area of the forest and are dictated by the resources available in that space.

Explanatory Theories

Our research orientation and hypotheses are based on three groups of theories:

- 1) Social relationship theories, particularly Rusbult's (1980) Investment Theory, which posits that an individual's level of commitment to an activity is influenced by the investments he has made.
- 2) Motivational theories, especially Maslow's (1943) theory, which includes the satisfaction of basic needs as a motivation for workers in their jobs, and Bandura's theories (1997, 1986), which suggest that individuals only engage in work if they are confident in their abilities.
- 3) Well-being theories, notably: i) Bottom-up theories, which argue that well-being is the sum of positive events arising from various spheres of an individual's life; ii) Top-down theories, where well-being is significantly influenced by the individual's personality and their perception of daily life; iii) the goal theory, which states that individuals feel happy to the extent that they can satisfy their needs and achieve their goals.

Methodological framework

1) Approach and research type

We adopted the hypothetical-deductive approach outlined by Ouellet (1982). Indeed, without any theoretical biases, we began by observing the behaviors of the Baka concerning local development projects and the quality of their lives. This allowed us to formulate, through induction, a working hypothesis that was subsequently transformed into a general hypothesis through deduction after the preliminary survey.

2) General hypothesis and its operationalization.

Hypothesis	Variables of the hypothesis	Empirical Indicators of Variables	Modalities Of the variables
General Hypothesis: The engagement of Pygmies in local development projects does not improve their quality of life.	Dependent variable : quality of life	- sense of satisfaction - sense of well-being - sense of happiness	- good - poor
	Independent variable: The engagement of Pygmies in local development projects	- acceptance of the projects - adherence to the projects - involvement in the projects - investment in the projects	- total - partial - none
Research hypothesis N01: The acceptance of local development projects by Pygmies does not improve their quality of life.	Dependent Variable: same as above	Same as above	Same as above
	Independent Variable: The acceptance of local development projects by Pygmies	- agreement - approvals - consensus	- total - partial - none
Research Hypothesis N02: The adherence of Pygmies to local development projects does not improve their quality of life.	Dependent Variable: same as above	Same as above	Same as above
	Independent Variable: The adherence of Pygmies to local development projects	- attachement - apport - contribution	- total - partial - none
Research Hypothesis N03: The involvement of Pygmies in local development projects does not improve their quality of life.	Dependent Variable: same as above	Same as above	Same as above
	Independent Variable: The involvement of Pygmies in local development projects	- identification - participation - contribution/retribution - compliance to standard - affectivity	- total - partial - none

Research Hypothesis N04: The investment of Pygmies in local development projects does not improve their quality of life.	Dependent Variable: same as above	Same as above	Same as above
	Independent Variable: The investment of Pygmies in local development projects	- boldness - willingness - trust - assurance - tenacity	- total - partial - none

3) Investigation

It involved assessing the feasibility of the study. To achieve this, we first reviewed the documentation related to our theme in order to identify elements that would determine the relevance of our work. We then conducted semi-structured interviews with several Baka individuals from the relevant sites based on the information collected. In light of the results obtained, we decided to conduct a case study and purposefully select one subject from each Baka community in Djoum, Oveng, and Mintom II. To gather the data necessary for verifying our hypotheses, we opted for the interview method using the following thematic guide:

Topics	Sub topic	Responses modalities	
Biography	Matrimonial status	Married/divorce/single/widow (er)	
	Sex	Male/female	
	Age	20-30 ans/30-40 ans/ 40 ans and +	
	Sub division of origine	Djoum/Oveng/Mintom II	
	Permanent place of residence	Forested zone/beside the road	
	Academic level	GCE A level/FSLC/GCE O Level and more	
Quality of live		Yes	No
	Well-being		
	Happiness		
Acceptance of local development projects	Satisfaction		
	Agreement		
	Approbation		
Adhesion to local development projects	Consent		
	Attachement		
	Input		
Involvement in local development projects	Contribution		
	Identification		
	Participation		
	Retribution		
	Compliance to standard		
Investments in local development projects	Affection		
	Boldness		
	Will power		
	Trust		
	Assurance		
	Stubbornness		

The interviews were conducted face-to-face with the subjects in their place of residence, following the principles outlined by Chilland (1992) and Mucchielli (1985). To validate the collected data, we also spoke with relatives, descendants, and/or peers of the subjects in their absence. The discourses of the three subjects were analyzed using the method of "automatic discourse analysis" as recommended by Bardin (1991).

4) Results

- Descriptive Analysis of the Discourses

a) Descriptive Analysis of the Discourse of Mynthyéné. Mynthyéné is a 27-year-old young man from the Baka community. He is married and a father of three children. He lives in the forest camp of Meyos in the Djoum district. He has never been to school. He considers the quality of his current life to be unsatisfactory, as he does not experience either well-being or happiness. In fact, for the past two years, at the instigation of local agents, he has had to stop his hunting activities to engage in a cocoa cultivation project with Bantu partners. However, although he has given his initial agreement, he does not fully approve of the project nor has he given his consent. Consequently, he does not attach much importance to it and contributes only the bare minimum of his resources or availability. According to him, he does not identify with cocoa cultivation; he only does it for

financial needs. Although he respects the terms of the implicit contract signed with his partners, he does not have any affection for this work. This results in a lack of boldness, confidence, assurance, and perseverance on his part.

b) Descriptive Analysis of the Discourse of Eyenga. Eyenga is a 35-year-old woman who has been widowed for three years. She lives in the forest camp of Adjap in the Oveng district with her 12 children. She was raised by Catholic sisters who provided her with a pious education and allowed her to attend school until the third year of technical secondary education. She considers the quality of her life to be very satisfactory because she is not happy, this life provides her with well-being. For the past three years, she has been involved in a large-scale cassava cultivation project led by the National Participatory Development Program (NPDP) and the Oveng municipality. This project has her agreement, approval, and consent. Although she is not particularly attached to her work, she values it and invests all her resources or availability into its success. Even though her commitment to her work is total and unwavering, she does not identify with it. She also respects the terms of the implicit contract signed with the municipality. However, she is neither bold nor confident, nor sure nor persistent; she is simply willing.

c) Descriptive Analysis of the Discourse of Ekong Assongo. Ekong Assongo is a 50-year-old married man. He lives in the roadside camp of Mekoto in the Minton II district with his wife and their four children. He holds a GCE Ordinary level. He considers the quality of his life to be somewhat satisfactory because, while it provides him with satisfaction, he does not feel as happy as he once did in the forest. For the past three years, he has been involved in a poultry farming project led by the PNPD and his local municipality. However, from the beginning until now, his agreement, approval, and consent have remained mixed. Even so, he spares no effort to succeed. Although he does not identify with this work, he undertakes it for financial and material objectives. His commitment is not emotional as he continues his hunting activities when he returns to the forest. He feels obliged to adhere to the ethics and deontology of his work if he wants to succeed. Despite the motivation that drives him, he lacks boldness, confidence, assurance, and perseverance.

- Content analysis of the Discourses

We have uncovered the structure that organizes them as well as the underlying ideas through an analysis of the semantic surface of the discourses. We chose the method of frequency counting of key terms within the discourses, allowing for statistical treatment. The results are compiled in the following table:

Variables	Key words	Mynthyéné	Eyenga	Ekong Assongo	Occurrence (%)
Quality of life	Well-being	No	Yes	No	33,33
	Happiness	No	Yes	No	0,00
	Satisfaction	No	Yes	Yes	33,33
	Occurrence (%)	0,00	100,00	33,33	33,33
Engagement to local development	Agreement	Yes	Yes	Yes	100,00
	Approval	No	Yes	No	100,00
	Consent	Yes	Yes	Yes	100,00
	Attachement	No	No	No	0,00
	Input	Yes	Yes	Yes	100,00
	Contribution	Yes	Yes	Yes	100,00
	Identification	No	No	No	0,00
	Participation	Yes	Yes	Yes	100,00
	Retribution	No	Yes	No	100,00
	Compliance to standard	Yes	Yes	Yes	100,00
	Affection	No	No	No	0,00
	Boldness	No	No	Yes	100,00
	Will power	No	No	No	100,00
	Trust	No	No	No	0,00
	Assurance	No	No	No	0,00
	Stubbornness	No	Yes	No	0,00
	Occurrence (%)	37,50	56,25	43,76	45,83

The table above shows that: i) 33,33% of the subjects assert that the quality of life they lead has improved since their involvement in local development projects; ii) 45,83% confirm that they are engaged in local development projects. Therefore, 66,67% of the Baka are not satisfied with the quality of they live; 54,17% are not genuinely involved in local development projects. The study has shown that the quality of life for the Baka does not improve, despite their engagement in local development projects; that none of the subjects are confident, certain, or resolute; that none identify with the work they do; and that none derive happiness from it. It is evident that despite this engagement, the quality of their lives does not improve, which confirms our general hypothesis.

Interpretation and Discussion

Our results have led us to conclude that the Baka engaged in local development projects are not happy. This is understandable, as there is a profound imbalance between their perceived expectations and their lived or factual situation (Nuttin, 1996; Dopolo, Fraccaroli and Sarchielli, 1994). The benefits they derive from these projects are insufficient to meet their most basic needs (Maslow, 1954). Consequently, they feel discouraged, disappointed, and frustrated (Murray and Kochanska, 2002). They feel betrayed, exploited, and disillusioned. Unable to learn from their failures, they abandon their projects and return to the forest (Baliff, 1992).

In terms of work, conditions are detrimental and discriminatory. Indeed, Baka workers experience physical, psychological, and gender-based violence in the workplace. They do not maintain fulfilling relationships with either their Bantu colleagues or partners or with the municipality, which disparages them (James, Demaree and Wolf, 1984). Furthermore, the ratio of contributions to rewards is unbalanced (Karnas, 2009). Under these conditions, they are often more unhappy than happy, more dissatisfied than content, and more anxious than enthusiastic. They experience neither pleasure nor satisfaction at work nor a sense of personal efficacy. They are stressed, exhausted, harassed, and thus susceptible to various occupational health issues such as depression, psychosomatic disorders, musculoskeletal problems, sleep disturbances, cardiovascular diseases and accidents, among others.

In terms of health, daily life in roadside camps is far less desirable than that in forest camps. Indeed, in roadside camps, the health status of the Pygmies has not improved. Due to overcrowding, there is a marked increase in parasitic load affecting endemic diseases. Additionally, the poor construction of modern huts makes the Baka more vulnerable to cold and seasonal changes, thereby increasing their susceptibility to bronchopulmonary infections. There is also a proliferation of jigger fleas that has reached epidemic proportions. Alcoholism, as seen wherever it prevails, wreaks havoc on health. The general scarcity of game significantly contributes to the impoverishment of their diet. Due to the exodus from the forest, the camps are left to women, children, and the elderly who suffer from malnutrition. The rising infant mortality rate is also an indicator of the deplorable health conditions faced by the Baka.

From an economic standpoint, the Baka, without having been provided with the means to understand it, are currently confronted with the issues of numeracy, calculating profitability, and capital. In these areas, they are continually deceived regarding the value of the products they exchange. Consequently, it is very difficult for them to remain "equal" within the modern social system and to navigate confidently in the world of money, in a capitalist system where market law prevails. Furthermore, they are very poor managers and inconsistent workers (Abega, idem). Additionally, the relationships between the Baka and the administration are unequal, difficult, and conflictual. The main obstacle lies in access to civil registration. This difficulty leads to multiple consequences, such as the inability to establish legal businesses, undertake business trips, or take legal action in cases of abuse, among other issues. Taking advantage of this situation, business partners exploit the Baka as servile labor for hard and poorly paid work, confiscating their goods.

However, this analysis is based on a western view of happiness, well-being, and satisfaction, which some distorts that of the Baka. Indeed, when we base our understanding solely on Baka culture, we can assert without fear of contradiction that those who have engaged in local development projects are just as happy as others. They remain mobile and live in harmony with the forest, alternating between an idealized forest camp and a roadside camp where life essentially revolves around eating, drinking, sleeping, having fun, dancing, singing, and so on. They are free in their movements and live according to their ancestral customs and traditions.

2. CONCLUSION

The issue investigated was the degradation of the quality of life of the Baka despite their engagement in local development projects overseen by the PNDP and the municipalities. The most prominent and contentious reason was the inability of these projects to provide them with satisfaction, happiness, and well-being. The question we then posed was whether decentralization, through local development projects, positively impacted the quality of life of the Baka. As a hypothesis, we responded negatively. This was operationalized into four research

hypotheses, all confirmed by an analysis of the content of the speeches of individuals from three Baka communities in the districts of Djoum, Oveng, and Mintom II in the Dja and Lobo department. This led us to validate our general hypothesis and conclude that decentralization is not yet well understood or appreciated by the majority of the Baka due to their cultural roots, social cognitions of devaluation, and the stigma they face. Furthermore, we suggested as prerequisites: an emphasis on citizenship education; learning about democracy and national culture; and a new social contract between Bantus and Pygmies based on reciprocity, partnership, dialogue, and mutual respect for sociocultural differences.

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