

Greener Journal of Social Sciences

ISSN: 2276-7800

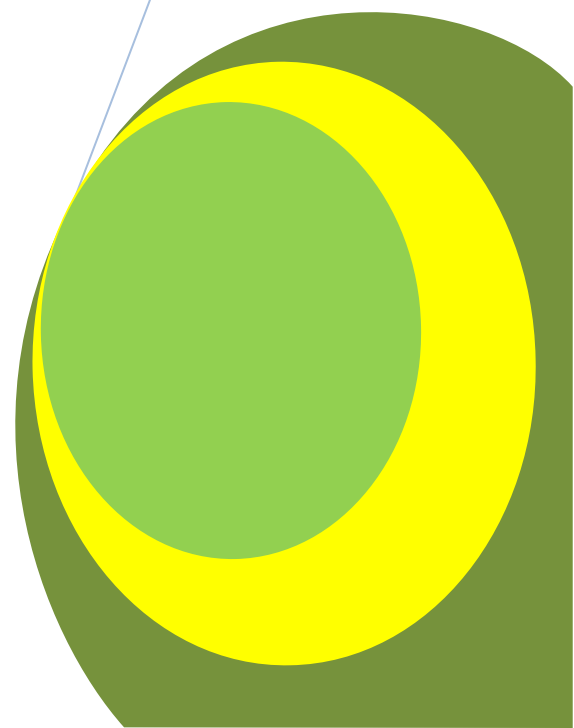
ICV: 5.99

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.15580/GJSS.2015.1.020215027>

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Research Article (DOI: <http://doi.org/10.15580/GJSS.2015.1.020215027>)

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ABSTRACT

Since the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals, the global focus on poverty reduction has been enormous. However, poverty still remains a major challenge especially in sub-Saharan Africa where the proportion of people below the poverty line is on the rise. Efforts towards poverty reduction in this region have included among other things the creation of local development agencies. This paper uses both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection to examine the contributions of local development agencies towards poverty reduction in the South West Region of Cameroon. The paper concludes that though local development agencies are a major partner in the fight against poverty, their successes are usually short-lived. No real transformation takes place as five years down the road, the number of poor does not reduce, nor the poor transformed into non-poor.

Key words: Poverty, poverty reduction, transformation, the poor.

INTRODUCTION

One of the major challenges facing the world today is that of poverty. Despite positive strides towards reducing global poverty, sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) still staggers under the weight of poverty. According to Breth (1997), poverty in sub-Saharan Africa is worse than that of any other region except South Asia. The UN (2013) reports that sub-Saharan Africa is the only region in the world where the proportion of people below the poverty line has been on the rise, with the poor being worse off than the poor in the rest of the world. The proportionate differences in the poverty gap indices relative to the headcount measures in sub-Saharan Africa are much higher making the incidences of poverty highest compared to the rest of the world (ECA, 2005; UNDP, 2006). It is for these reasons that while the incidences of global poverty have declined sharply over the last 20 years due to the East Asian miracle, for sub-Saharan Africa poverty levels have increased in both absolute numbers and severity (Ramphela, 2006). This situation can be attributed to diseases, conflicts, droughts and famine that have plagued the continent for a long time.

As an African country south of the Sahara, also plagued by the poverty malaise, the government of Cameroon is very pre-occupied with the problem of poverty reduction. Quantitative analysis of the poverty incidence in Cameroon, according to the Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper (Republic of Cameroon, 2003: xi), showed that income poverty remains high, affecting 40.2% of the population in 2002. Poverty in Cameroon is said to vary according to regions increasing more than two-fold between urban (22%) and rural areas (50%) and for the unemployed in urban areas (40%). Access to basic social services (education, health, water, roads) is said to be more difficult for the poor than for the non-poor (IMF, 2003). However, using the household as the unit of analysis, the 2008 Cameroon PRSP progress report explains that "it is difficult to analyse trends in monetary poverty because there is no data source on household income" (IMF, 2008:36). What the report therefore uses are economic growth profile, civil service wages and some sources of income in rural areas like cash crop and food crop. In terms of living conditions, the report further said that in 2005, only 59.2% of Cameroonians owned homes, and only 6.9% had

flushing toilets. Just about 53% of Cameroonians had access to safe drinking water, the report continued (IMF, 2008: 37). Furthermore, the Growth and Employment Strategic Paper (GESP) which is the reference framework for government action over the period 2010 – 2020 states that of a population of 17.9 million in 2007, 7 million (39.1%) were poor (IMF, 2010). Although recent reports on poverty shows that poverty decreased from 39.9% in 2007 to 38.7% in 2011, the rate of decline did not keep up with demographic growth and thus the number of poor increased (IMF, 2014). The GESP further reveals that while urban poverty in Cameroon has reduced by 5 points, rural poverty has increased by close to 3 points due to increased household size, low levels of education and limited access to means of production (IMF, 2010:15). The poverty situation of the country has pushed the government to engage fully in poverty reduction and to device various means to achieve this development goal. The government has involved all ministerial departments and also created development agencies at the regional levels not only to ensure national and local development but also to assist in the fight against poverty.

The South West Development Authority (SOWEDA) is one of such local development agencies that were created by the government of Cameroon to address both development issues and fight poverty in the South West Region. SOWEDA has carried out several developmental and poverty reduction projects in the region among which is the Livestock and Fisheries Development Project (LFDP). The main goal of the SOWEDA Livestock and Fisheries Development Project was to reduce poverty among the people of the South West Region of Cameroon. The SOWEDA Livestock and Fishery Development Project (LFDP) went operational on July 1st 2000. Scheduled to last for five years, the project only ended in 2007. It was extended for two more years due to irregular disbursement of funds to SOWEDA from the African Development Bank (ADB), the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa, and the Government of Cameroon, which were the main sponsors of the project. The total cost of the LFDP is estimated at eight billion, seven hundred and fourteen million, six hundred and forty thousand francs CFA (8,714,640,000FCFA) that is about US\$17,429,280. Of this amount the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa contributed 46.8%, the ADB 43.2% and the Government of Cameroon (GOC) contributed 10% (Nanko, 2007). The LFDP covered all six divisions of the South West Region namely Fako, Meme, Ndian, Manyu, Lebiam and Kupe-Muanenguba. Using the Livestock and Fisheries Development Project therefore, this paper sets to determine the contribution of SOWEDA as a local development agency to the reduction of poverty in the South West region of Cameroon. Specifically, the paper identifies the profile of the beneficiaries of the SOWEDA LFDP project; determines respondents' level of poverty before the project and finally determine the level of contribution that the project has made towards poverty reduction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The centrality of poverty reduction as a development goal was institutionalized with the propagation of the Millennium Development Goals. Extreme poverty was identified as one of the major problems plaguing the world and its eradication became a matter of extreme urgency. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is one of the regions hardest hit by poverty. According to the 2013 Millennium Development Goal Report, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty has been halved at the global level. Likewise the proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 a day also fell from 47 percent in 1990 to 22 percent in 2010. However, despite the above positive strides, 1.2 billion people still live in extreme poverty, the majority of who are in sub-Saharan Africa. The report further states that sub-Saharan Africa is the only region that saw the number of people living in extreme poverty rise steadily from 290 million in 1990 to 414 million in 2010, accounting for a third of the world's destitute. This situation has been attributed to the fact that poor health and lack of education deprive people of productive employment. Furthermore, corruption, conflict and bad governance waste public resources and discourage investments (UN, 2013).

Efforts at reducing poverty over the years have seen the introduction of Poverty Reduction Strategic Programmes (PRSPs). These are long term development plans developed by governments of poor countries involving a wide spectrum of stake holders and presented to the World Bank and the IMF (IMF/World Bank, 1999a; 1999b). PRSPs came about because stabilization packages and Structural Adjustment Packages had resulted to a one-size-fits-all economic policy which were often poorly adapted to a country's specific needs and did not really make poverty reduction a priority (Chene, 1989; Mkandawire & Soludo, 1999). The PRSPs represented a major departure from the previous development strategies whereby the World Bank and the IMF dictated the directions of economic policies in poor countries. The PRSP approach was based on five core principles drawn from the World Bank's Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF). These include: being country driven; being results oriented; being comprehensive and long term in perspective; being prioritized and being partnership oriented (IMF/World Bank, 1999c; Klugman, 2003).

Although PRSPs provide a unique opportunity for governments to clarify their approach towards reducing poverty and involve social actors in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of poverty reduction programmes (McGee and Brook, 2001), the World Bank (2004) reveals that African governments are encountering a number of

difficulties in the formulation and implementation of credible national poverty reduction plans. Cheru (2006) argues that most African countries in their PRSPs still emphasize the importance of economic growth for poverty reduction. However, the links between growth and poverty are very weak because most PRSPs have not considered the full range of policy actions required for growth and poverty reduction. They do not include decisive measures to redistribute wealth and promote equality and also do not give greater attention to social safety nets. Furthermore, as Cheru (2006) remarks, critical gaps still remain in linking policies and programmes to poverty impact because of gaps in the diagnosis of poverty. The focus of poverty diagnosis has been more on income poverty and growth (GDP, fiscal revenue, exports etc.) and less on the multidimensional determinants of poverty such as gender, HIV/AIDS, environment, food security etc. (Zuckerman & Garrett, 2003; UNDP, 2003:17) and this hampered the potential contribution of PRSPs to poverty reduction.

Poverty reduction actually involves reducing the number of poor people and/or transforming poor people into non-poor people (Thin, 2004). The process of poverty reduction requires an understanding of the specific characteristics of poverty in the given community and that the root causes and structural factors of poverty are addressed in poverty reduction interventions. Cornwall and Brock (2005) on their part insist that in order to reduce poverty development planners and poverty reduction projects must focus on improving the social, economic and environmental conditions of the poor and their access to decision making. It should be a process by which the causes of deprivation and equity are addressed. Poverty reduction is generally carried out through projects conceived for that purpose. While some projects try to reduce poverty by increasing the availability of basic human needs like health care, clean water, food and education or increasing income required to provide these needs, others try to create an enabling environment for the poor to create wealth for themselves. It is therefore imperative that poverty reduction projects recognize and develop the potential of the poor, increase their productive capacity and reduce barriers limiting their full participation in the society. Furthermore, the participation of beneficiaries and/or the poor has been envisaged to be a very critical component of poverty reduction and development projects and policies (Cornwall et al., 2005).

The Poverty Situation of Cameroon

The UNDP 2013 Human Development Report ranked Cameroon 150th of 186 countries with about a third of the population living below the poverty threshold of US\$1.25 a day in 2009 (UNDP, 2013). Earlier reports by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD, 2001) had shown that although the poverty level of Cameroon had improved from 51% in 1996 according to the First Cameroonian National Household Survey known in French as "Première Enquête Camerounaise Au près de Ménages" (ECAM 1) to 40% in 2001 as per the Second Cameroonian National Household Survey of 2001 (Deuxième Enquête Camerounaise Au près de Ménages ECAM 2)), poverty still remains a major issue in Cameroon. This improvement of the poverty situation mainly benefitted people who live in urban area, 22.1% of whom are poor, compared to 49.9% of poor people in rural area. This makes poverty in Cameroon a fundamentally rural phenomenon. However, recent reports on poverty in Cameroon show that there have been net increases in both urban and rural areas. Urban poor has increased due to internal migration while the variability of agricultural production has been an obstacle to rural poverty reduction (IMF, 2014).

As per the third Cameroonian National Household Survey of 2007 (NIS, 2008:6), the poverty threshold per adult per day stood at 738 CFAF (approximately US\$1.5). This makes 22,454 CFA francs per month (US\$45) and 269, 443 CFA francs per year (US\$540). This amount is the minimum required to meet an individual's basic needs and includes consumption both in kind and in cash. The profile of poverty in Cameroon is characterised by three indicators. First is the poverty rate which measures at 39.9% and indicates the percentage of the population living under the poverty threshold. Second is the depth of poverty which stands at 12.3% and indicates the average gap between annual spending on consumption per adult equivalent of poor households and the poverty threshold. The third indicator is the severity of poverty which is estimated to be 5% and reflects inequalities among the poor. These statistics show that of the 17.9 million Cameroonians in 2007, about 40% (7.1 million) lived under the national poverty line (NIS, 2008:6). It was also discovered that the educational level of the household head is a determinant of household poverty. Reports from the National Institute of Statistics (2008) also show that households that are only engage in farming are generally poorer than those involved in non-farm activities only or those involved in both farming and non-farm activities. This is so because typically farming households rarely have enough income to acquire other basic necessities.

The government of Cameroon like most countries in sub-Saharan Africa has been very involved in reducing poverty and improving on the livelihood of its citizens. According to the Cameroon Vision 2035 (MINEPAT, 2009), when the economic crisis broke out in 1985, the government embarked on an economic revival process with donor assistance. The government carried out some stabilization and structural adjustment programmes which led to the discontinuation of medium and long-term initiatives and planning. Cameroon therefore went through a long period of re-adjustment with successive reforms like the privatization of state-owned corporations, the reduction of salaries for

civil servants etc. The structural adjustment and stabilization packages did little or nothing to improve on the lives of Cameroonians. With the failure of the Structural Adjustment Packages and other stabilization packages, and with the introduction of the PRSP, the government of Cameroon completed its full PRSP in 2003 (Baye, 2005). The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) emphasized macro-economic and sector strategies and was aimed at accelerating growth, reducing poverty and helping Cameroon achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The macro-economic and sector strategies were done through the implementation of poverty reduction projects. It is the satisfactory implementation of the above strategies, according to the Cameroon Ministry of the Economy, Plan and Regional Development (MINEPAT, 2009), that led to Cameroon attaining the completion point of the Heavily Indebted Poor Country initiative (HIPC) in 2006 and which also enabled a significant cancellation of the country's debt. However, the above efforts and growth recovery have not been strong enough to reduce poverty in the short term as according to the Cameroon National Institute of Statistics (2008), 40% of Cameroonians still live under the national poverty line.

Through its Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper of 2003 to its Growth and Employment Strategic Paper of 2009, Cameroon has demonstrated willingness to address these issues. All its ministerial departments, development agencies and local councils are actively involved in this struggle. In the South West Region (SWR) of Cameroon, the South West Development Authority (SOWEDA) is one of the main organizations involved in the development of the region. SOWEDA is under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development which is one of the technical ministries through which the government of Cameroon fights against poverty. SOWEDA was created in 1987 by Presidential Decree No. 87/1874. It is a parastatal corporation whose mission is to promote and ensure the integrated rural development of the South West region. SOWEDA enjoys management and financial autonomy under the technical supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. In its mission to develop the SWR, SOWEDA has carried out several projects among which is the Livestock and Fisheries Development Project whose goal was to reduce the poverty of the inhabitants of the region and improve on the livelihood of beneficiaries.

METHOD

This article is based on a study carried out between October 2012 and January 2013 in the South West Region of Cameroon. The South West Region (SWR) is one of the two English speaking regions in Cameroon (the other eight regions are French speaking) with head quarters in Buea. It has six divisions (Meme, Fako, Ndian, Kupe-Muanenguba, Lebialem and Manyu) and twenty-seven subdivisions. The SWR had a total population of 1,316,079 as of the 2005 official census (BUCREP, 2010) making 7.5% of the total population of Cameroon. The region is the seat of huge agro-industries and companies like the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), the Cameroon Tea Estate (CTE), PAMOL Plantation and the National oil refinery known by its French acronym, SONARA etc. These agro-industries and companies have attracted a lot of people looking for employment and this has made the region very cosmopolitan. Apart from those in formal employment, the greater population of the SWR is largely involved in farming and small and medium size businesses.

The South West Development Authority (SOWEDA) was purposefully selected for the study because it is a local development agency created by the government of Cameroon to take charge of the development of the South West Region. The Livestock and Fisheries Development Project was a mega project carried out by SOWEDA in the region with the goal of reducing poverty. The project concentrated on livestock and fisheries development because these are major economic activities of the region. The project lasted from the year 2000 – 2007 and was jointly sponsored by the Arab Bank for Economic Development, the African Development Bank and the Government of Cameroon. Of the six divisions covered by the study, four of them were selected for the study. Fako and Ndian divisions were selected because they are two maritime divisions where fisheries and fish-farming activities are intense, and Meme and Manyu divisions were also selected because they had existing livestock cooperatives which shows the intensity of livestock activities in these divisions.

The study was Ex Post Facto and it assessed whether long term project objective of poverty reduction has been realized five years after the project ended. A sample of 168 men and women who had benefitted from the project were identified and studied. Respondents were selected using a stratified snowball sampling method. Beneficiaries of each selected division were stratified according to sex to ensure an equal representation of men and women and the respondents were selected from both strata of each division using the snowball method. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were employed in the study. The questionnaire was the main instrument for data collection and was administered on all 168 respondents. The questionnaire elicited information on how project beneficiaries experienced and perceived poverty; what they understand as poverty; whether they still considered themselves poor five years after the end of the project and why. The questionnaire further covered issues relating to impact of project on the lives of beneficiaries. The questionnaire was complemented by interviews conducted with some randomly selected respondents and also with management of the implementing body,

SOWEDA. Interview with SOWEDA management focused on how the project was conceived, designed and implemented and also on how poverty was conceived and operationalised in the project.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

For reasons of clarity, the results have been presented and discussed according to gender. An equal number of male and female respondents were selected for the study and the presentation gender is to highlight and increase the availability of gender disaggregated data on poverty reduction.

Profile of Respondents

The majority of respondents were above 41 years. This can be understood because this is the age when most people have very demanding family challenges like education, health etc. and it is imperative that they get into income generating activities. While more women fell between the age group of 41 – 50 years, men were more in the above 50 years group. Over 60% of both male and female respondents were married while the rest were unmarried. Level of education is one of the factors identified in Growth and Employment Strategy Paper of Cameroon as a contributing factor to poverty. More than 80% of respondents had acquired some formal education although most had only gone through primary school. The percentage for secondary and post secondary for women and men were 10.1% and 14.9% respectively. These figures contradict the IMF 2010 country report on Cameroon that shows that between 2001 and 2007, a greater proportion of household heads had completed high school and a higher institute of learning. The report further acknowledges that when the level of education of the household head is high, it contributes significantly in raising the household's standard of living. However, the report notes that education improves the livelihood of households only when the head acquires a tertiary education and rather worsens the living conditions of those whose heads only had secondary education and below as they turn out in large numbers (IMF, 2010). Furthermore almost all male (married and unmarried) respondents (82%) were heads of households while only 17.8% of female (mostly unmarried) respondents were heads of their households. This can be understood as men are legally and traditionally recognized heads of households in Cameroon. In relation to the number of persons per household, the size of most (76.8%) households was 6-10 persons for both male and female respondents. This is higher than figures from the National Institute of Statistics (2008) which states that the average size for poor household is 6 members as opposed to 3 for those that are not poor. The number of persons in a household is one of the determinants of poverty as according to NIS (2008) the higher the number of dependents, the more vulnerable the household is and the greater its exposure to poverty. Furthermore, considering that most respondents were from rural areas confirms the fact that poverty in Cameroon is more rural than urban.

Respondents' Perception of Poverty

Analysis of data on perception of poverty from women and men's perspective revealed that respondents generally believed that poverty was some form of deprivation. In relation to income and material deprivation, at least 90% of each sex viewed poverty as 'not having any cash'. More than 90% were said poverty meant 'not being able to educate children'. About 80% also said that poverty is 'not being able to go to the hospital when ill'. Respondents also saw poverty as social deprivation as 32.1% said that poverty is 'lack of portable water and electricity' and 25% saw poverty as 'lack of opportunities'. A substantial proportion of women associated poverty to psychological and less quantifiable notions like 'lack of self esteem' (60%), 'lack of a voice' (45%) and 'feeling of vulnerability' (25%). Whereas the 'lack of a decent home' was an important poverty indicator for men (44%), only 29.8% women related the two. Further interrogation revealed men's attachment to material things and women's concerns with social issues. This is because while many males further saw poverty as 'lacking the good things of life' (good food, clothing, cars a home) and 'not being able to enjoy yourself as you want', many women saw it more as 'living in a dirty and crowded neighbourhood', 'feeling useless' and being always ill. In-depth interview on respondents' understanding of poverty also showed that male respondents were very particular about material poverty or income deprivation.

Poverty situation of respondents prior to project

In order to be able to determine the contribution of the SOWEDA project to poverty reduction, the study asked respondents to evaluate their previous situations before the project by assessing their situations and also by trying to identify some individual property that they owned before the project. In trying to determine respondents' income from their livestock and fisheries businesses before the project, almost all respondents said that they could not remember, because they kept no records.

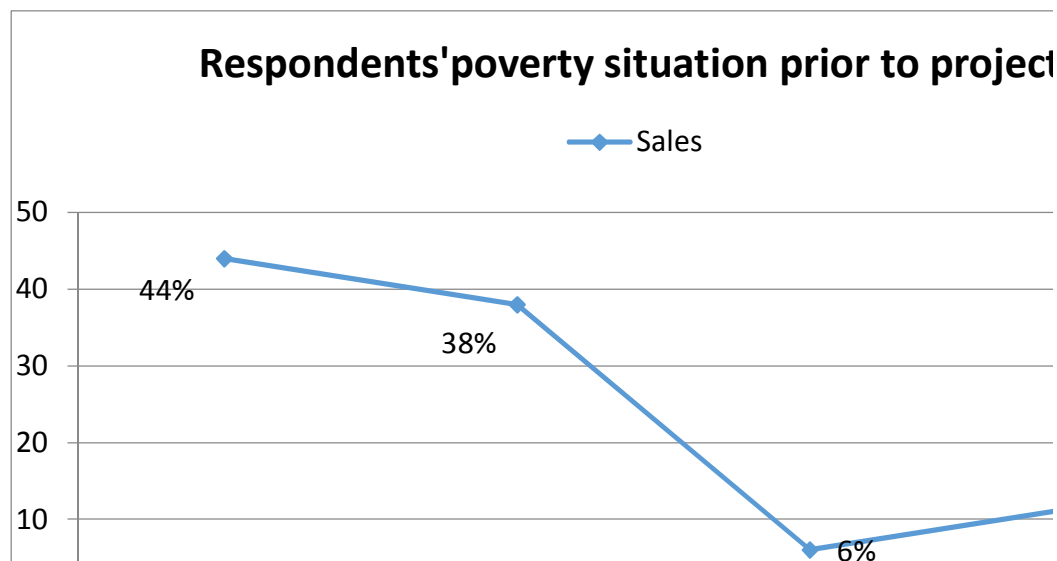


Figure 1: Respondents' poverty situation prior to project

Source: Fieldwork (Oct.2012 - Jan. 2013)

Data on Figure 1 shows that some 82% of respondents viewed themselves as poor before the project; 44% female and 38% male respondents. Respondents were able to determine their state of poverty before the project by relating their situation then to their understanding of poverty. That is, they assessed their situations not only in relation to financial and income deprivation that affects their ability to access things like education and health but also to social/consumption deprivation which involves the lack of amenities like water and electricity. They also related poverty to non quantifiable notions like 'self esteem' and 'voice'.

Individual property owned by respondents before project

To further assess respondents' poverty situation before the project, the study tried to identify some individual property that respondents had before they got involved in the project.

Table 1: Individual property owned before the project

Individual property owned before project	Response				Additional Information
	Female		Male		
	n	%	n	%	*It is worth noting that many men considered household property as individual property while most women did not. * women who owned houses and farmland were mostly unmarried women (single, widowed or divorced women)
House	23	13.7	53	31.5	
Farmland	6	7.1	47	56.0	
Car	1	1.2	2	2.4	
TV	6	7.1	39	46.4	
Sewing Machine	7	8.3	0	0.0	
Fridge	3	3.6	4	4.8	
Mobile phone	22	26.2	29	34.5	

Source: Fieldwork (Oct.2012 - Jan. 2013)

Before the project, individual property that respondents owned ranged from house, farmland, car, TV, sewing machine, fridge and mobile phone (Table 1). It is worth noting that these variables mostly fall under financial and material deprivations and do not cover all of respondents' understanding of poverty. However, while 56% of men owned farm land, only 7.1% women did same. This is not surprising considering the fact that in rural Africa and Cameroon, women generally do not inherit property, talk less of land. The table further reveals that men were also in majority of those that owned houses (31.5%), TV sets (46.4%) and mobile phones (34.5%). It should be noted that most married men considered household property as personal property.

RESPONDENTS PRESENT SITUATION

Ability to Access to Health care Services

Despite efforts by the government of Cameroon aimed at improving access to health services for its citizens, more than half (57.1%) of respondents as seen on Figure 2, confessed that it is not always possible for them and their family members to use the services of a health personnel when they are ill. Almost 18% women said that they could always make use of health services as opposed to 22% men. Further interrogation revealed that respondents' inability to always use health care services was due to lack of money and sometimes distance. Therefore the provision of health care services alone does not make health care accessible.

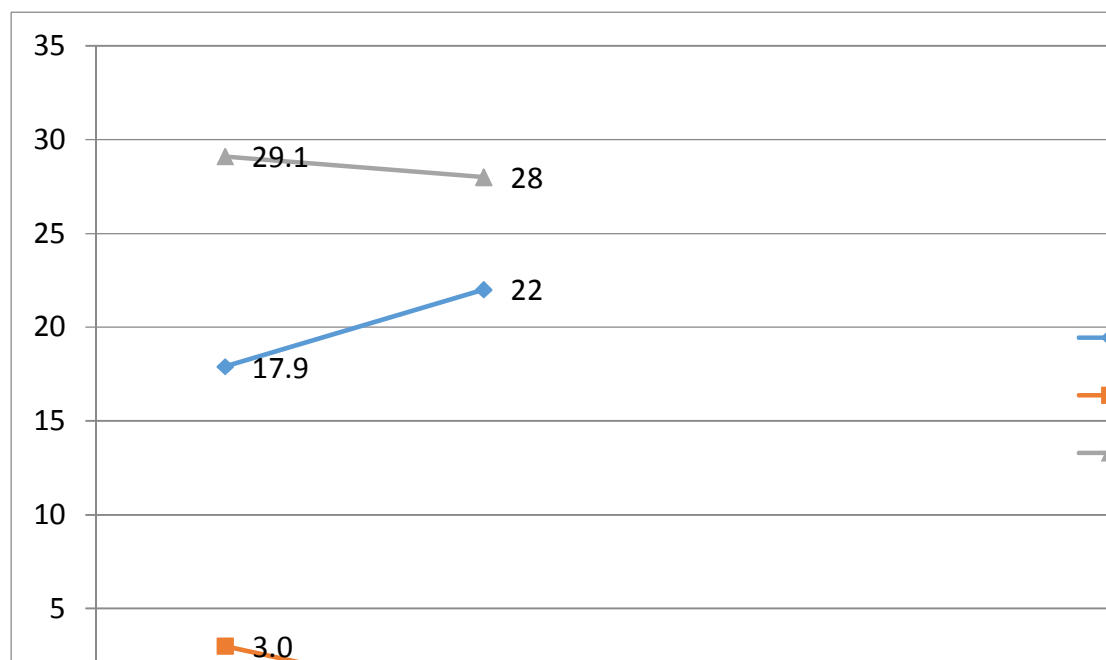


Figure 2: Ability to access to health care services

Source: Fieldwork (Oct.2012 - Jan. 2013)

Ability to educate children beyond secondary school

According to data on Figure 3, while over 82% of single males were able to educate their children to beyond secondary school, almost half (48.6%) of single female could not. More than 60% of married persons of both sexes also attested to their ability to educate their children to beyond secondary school. Most single women complained of being abandoned by the fathers of their children. The female respondent from Ndian who was interviewed lamented over her inability to educate her children. "How much am I making from this business? Even the government secondary schools are very expensive. One has to pay fees of over 35,000 FRS per child and then get uniforms and books. My first two children had to stop school in form two. I am hoping that the third one who is in class six will be able to go through secondary school".

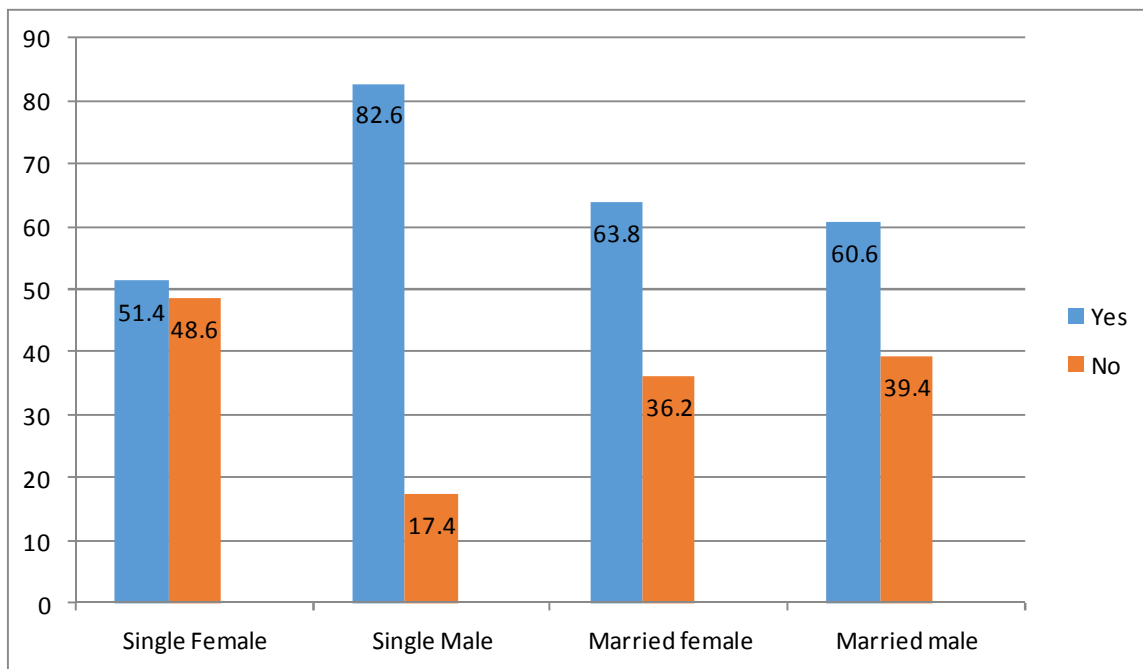


Figure 3: Distribution of respondents by their ability to educate children beyond secondary school by sex and by marital status

Source: Fieldwork (Oct.2012 - Jan. 2013)

Ownership of Houses

From Figure 4 below one realizes that more than 50% of men of both categories owned the homes they lived in while only 10.8% of unmarried women and 40.4 of married women did own homes.

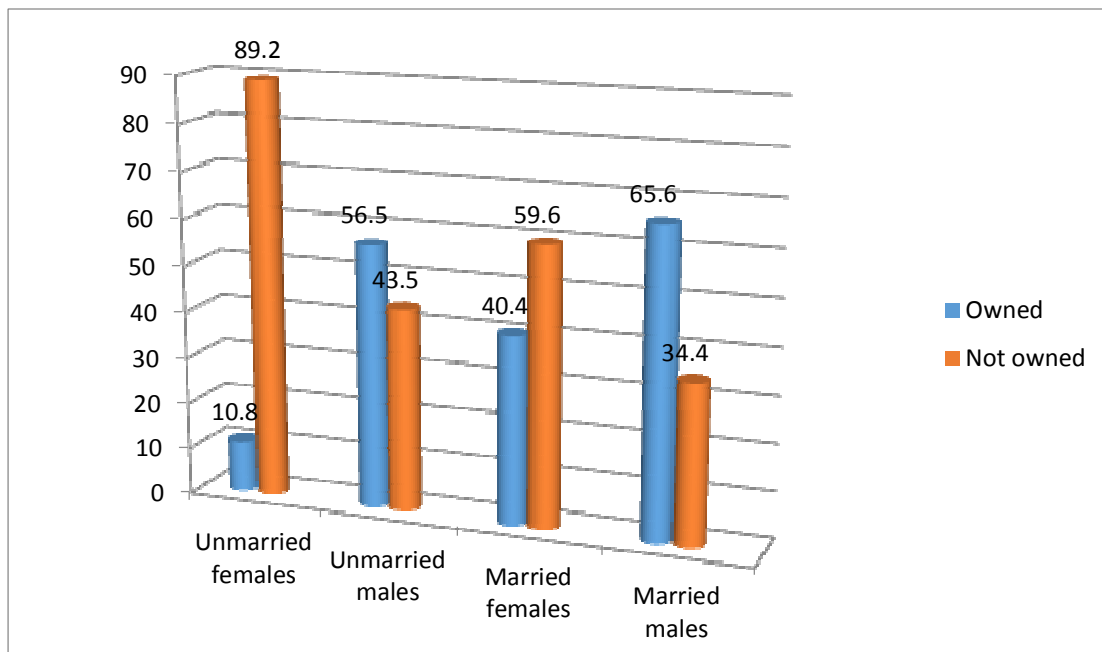


Figure 4: Distribution of respondents by ownership of home before the project, by sex and by marital status

Source: Fieldwork (Oct.2012 - Jan. 2013)

Income from livestock and fisheries activities

Table 2: Monthly income from livestock and fisheries activities

Monthly income	Response						Additional Information
	Female		Male		Total		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	*Most of the respondents were not very sure of their incomes since they did not keep records. The figures are mostly approximated *mode = below 50,000frs
Below 50,000frs	56	33.3	49	29.2	105	62.5	
50,000 – 74,000frs	6	3.6	12	7.1	18	10.7	
75,000 – 99,000frs	0	0.0	2	1.2	2	1.2	
100,000 – 149,000frs	1	0.6	1	0.6	2	1.2	
150,000 – 199,000frs	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	
Above 200,000frs	0	0.0	3	1.8	3	1.8	
Not certain	21	12.5	17	10.1	39	23.2	
Total	84	50.0	84	50.0	168	100	

Source: Fieldwork (Oct.2012 - Jan. 2013)

Although some (23.2%) respondents were not certain of their monthly income from their livestock or fisheries business as seen from Table 2, over 74% of respondents revealed that they made less than one hundred thousand francs (100,000frs - US\$200) a month from their fisheries and livestock businesses. Among these was an almost equal representation of women and men (36.9% women and 37.5% men). Some of these respondents acknowledged that for a while they realized an increase in income of between 10,000 frs – 20,000frs which falls in line with the one of the objectives of the LFDP which was to increase the incomes of beneficiaries and consequently their livelihoods. However, for most respondents, this increase was very short lived and very irregular. Focus group discussions revealed that the monthly income of livestock and fisheries farmers ranged from 30,000frs to 150,000frs (US\$60.00 – \$300.00) monthly. However only one (1) woman and four men made above 100,000frs (US\$200.00) which means that the majority made less than 100,000frs (US\$200.00)

CONTRIBUTION OF THE LFDP TOWARDS REDUCING POVERTY OF RESPONDENTS

Respondents' present poverty situation

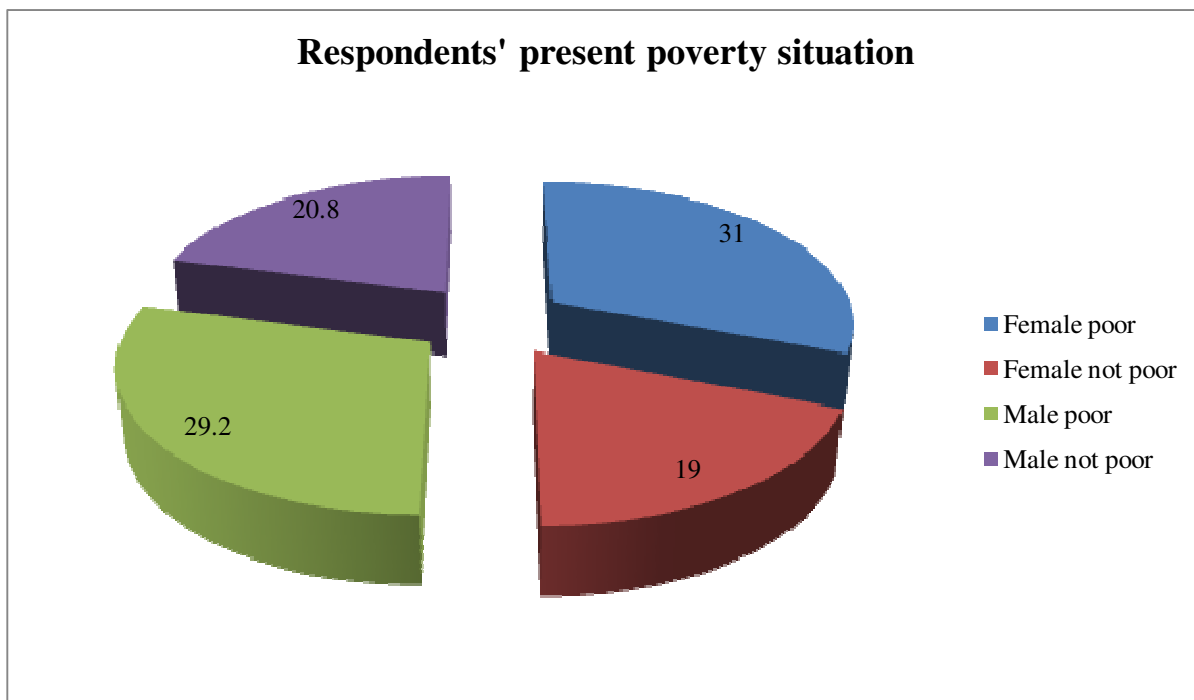


Figure 5: Distribution of respondents according to their present poverty situation by sex
Source: Fieldwork (Oct.2012 - Jan. 2013)

About 30% of respondents of both sexes still perceive themselves as poor five years after the project as seen on Figure 5. They said that taking care of the basic necessities (health, education, shelter, food etc.) of their families is still a major challenge. Furthermore, it was noticed that religion greatly influenced the responses of some respondents. Despite visible signs of poverty (looking malnourished, dilapidated houses, tattered clothes), observed by the researcher, about 30% of respondents (especially women) said that they were not poor. Further interrogation revealed that for these female respondents accepting one was poor was equal to being ungrateful to God for the gift of life.

In the focus group discussion, 23 participants out of 30 acknowledged that it was almost impossible for them to send their children to the university despite their livestock and fisheries business. Only a few (7 out of 30) had access to health care services for themselves and their households on a regular basis.

Benefits from the LFDP

The LFDP was able to offer diverse services to respondents as seen on Figure 6. The majority (more than 80%) of respondents of both sexes received loans. Mean while 42.9% of the women received training as opposed to 52.4% of the men. The cooperatives and cold stores were given to the communities and not up to 15% of respondents of both sexes benefitted from each of them. This is because these infrastructures did not last for long.

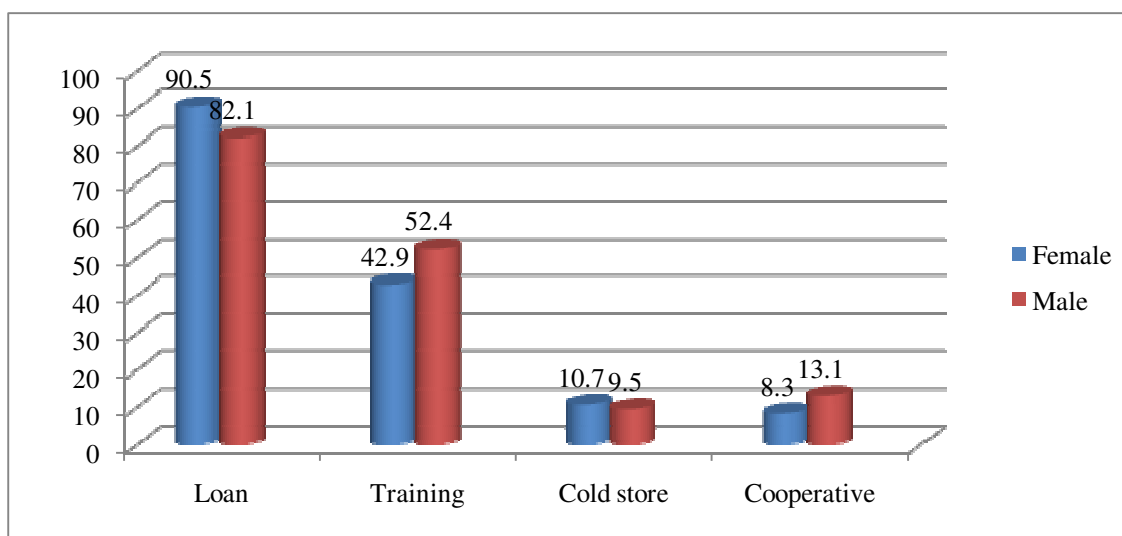


FIGURE 6: Distribution of respondents by the exact benefit they got from the LFDP and by sex

Source: Fieldwork (Oct.2012 - Jan. 2013)

The SOWEDA management further acknowledged during interview that these infrastructures were handed over to the communities prematurely without adequate training of community members for continuity. The present state of some of them leaves a lot to be desired. See pictures below.

Impact of the project on different aspects of respondents' lives

To assess the impact of the SOWEDA Livestock and Fisheries Development Project on different aspects of respondents' lives, all four levels of the likert scale were used, i. e. 'Strongly Agree', 'Agree', 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree'. However, the responses have been collapsed to two levels – 'Agree' and 'Disagree' because these two levels were very dominant in almost all the aspects but for Table 3(viii) where respondents were asked if they were able to provide better housing for their families with income from the LFDP. Of the 98.2% that disagreed to this, 23.8% strongly disagreed. Away from that, data on Table 3(i) shows that more than 30% of respondents of both sexes agreed that the LFDP had helped improve their lives at some point in time. Another 73.0% agreed that their productivity in livestock/Fishery business had improved as a result of the project. Among these were 29.9% women as against 43.1% men (see Table 3(ii)). An almost equal (32.1% women and 36.3% men) percentage of female and male respondents further agreed that the project helped increase their income as shown on Table 3(iii). However, while 28.5% male respondents agreed that with the project they were better able to pay health bills of their families, 28.5% female respondents disagreed with this (Table 3(iv)). Nevertheless, Table 4(v) shows that about 30% of both female and male respondents agreed that the project helped them pay for their children's education. Majority (68.5%) of respondents (mostly female) as shown on Table 3(vi) further disagreed that income from the project helped them pay their utility (electricity, water, telephone etc.) bills. However it should be noted that many respondents lived in areas that did not have these services.

It was a general mode of disagreement from both female and male respondents when it came to issues like the capacity of the project to reduce poverty and also respondents' satisfaction with project in general. 74.2% of respondents disagreed that the project was able to address all their poverty needs and another 86.9% further disagreed that the project was enough to get them out of poverty. Almost all (92.3%) respondents disagreed that the LFDP project was what their communities needed to get out of poverty and 78.3% also said that they were not satisfied with the project. 69.6% of respondents also disagreed that the project had helped improve relationship with their spouses. 82.3% and 87.6% of respondents further disagreed with having realized any increase in their status or any improvement in their relationship with others respectively as a result of the LFDP (see Table 3(ix), (x), (xi), (xii), (xiii), (xiv) and (xv) respectively).

Table 3: Impact of project on Different life enhancing facilities of respondents' lives

(i) Improvement in life	Response						Additional Information
	Female		Male		Total		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Disagree	31	18.7	2	7.2	43	25.9	*mode = Agree
Agree	53	31.9	70	42.2	123	74.1	*non response = 2
Total	84	50.6	82	49.4	166	100	
(ii) improved Productivity							Additional Information
Disagree	33	19.8	12	7.2	45	27.0	*mode = Agree *non response = 1
Agree	50	29.9	72	43.1	122	73.0	
Total	83	49.7	84	50.3	167	100	
(iii) improved Income							Additional Information
Disagree	30	17.9	23	13.7	53	31.6	*mode = Agree
Agree	54	32.1	61	36.3	115	68.4	
Total	84	50.0	84	50.0	168	100	
(iv) ability to pay health bills							Additional Information
Disagree	47	28.5	35	21.2	82	49.7	*mode for male = Agree
Agree	36	21.8	47	28.5	83	50.3	*mode for female = Disagree
Total	83	50.3	82	49.7	165	100	*non response = 3
(v) Ability to pay for Education							Additional Information
Disagree	37	22.0	29	17.2	66	39.3	*mode = Agree
Agree	47	28.0	55	32.7	102	60.7	
Total	84	50.0	84	50.0	168	100	
(vi) Ability to pay utility bills (electricity, water, telephone, etc.)							Additional Information
Disagree	54	41.5	35	26.9	89	68.5	*mode = Disagree
Agree	20	15.4	20	15.4	40	30.8	*most of the respondents who disagreed lived in areas that did not have these services.
Total	74	56.9	56	43.1	130	100	*non response = 38
(vii) Improved household feeding							Additional Information
Disagree	32	19.3	31	18.7	63	38.0	*Mode = Agree *non response = 2
Agree	52	31.3	51	30.7	103	62.0	
Total	84	50.6	82	49.4	166	100	

(viii) Ability to provide better housing						Additional Information	
Disagree	83	49.4	82	48.8	165	98.2	*Mode = Disagree
Agree	1	0.6	2	1.2	3	1.8	
Total	84	50.0	84	50.0	168	100	
(ix) Addressed all my poverty needs						Additional Information	
Disagree	60	36.8	61	37.4	121	74.2	*Mode = Disagree
Agree	23	14.1	19	11.7	42	25.8	
Total	83	50.9	80	49.1	163	100	*non response = 5
(x) Ability to get out of poverty						Additional Information	
Disagree	71	42.3	75	44.6	146	86.9	*Mode = Disagree
Agree	13	7.7	9	5.4	22	13.1	
Total	84	50.0	84	50.0	168	100	
(xi) Ability of community to get out of poverty						Additional Information	
Disagree	76	45.2	79	47.0	155	92.3	*Mode = Disagree
Agree	8	4.8	5	3.0	13	7.7	
Total	84	50.0	84	50.0	168	100	
(xii) Satisfaction with project						Additional Information	
Disagree	61	36.7	69	41.6	130	78.3	*mode = Disagree
Agree	23	13.9	13	7.8	36	21.7	
Total	84	50.6	82	49.4	166	100	*non response = 2
(xiii) Improved relationship with husband/wife						Additional Information	
Disagree	61	37.9	51	31.7	112	69.6	*Mode = Disagree
Agree	20	12.4	29	18.0	49	30.4	
Total	81	50.3	80	50.7	161	100	*non response = 7
(xiv) Increase in status						Additional Information	
Disagree	62	37.8	73	44.5	135	82.3	*Mode = Disagree
Agree	21	12.8	8	4.9	29	17.7	
Total	83	50.6	81	49.4	164	100	*non response = 4
(xv) Improved relationship with others						Additional Information	
Disagree	55	42.6	58	45.0	113	87.6	*mode = Disagree
Agree	10	7.8	6	4.6	16	12.4	
Total	65	50.4	64	49.6	129	100	*non response = 39
** It should be noted that most respondents agreed to many of these issues even though they experienced them just for a period of time. What they described as impact was more short term effects.							

Source: Fieldwork (Oct.2012 - Jan. 2013)

In-depth interviews on impact gave allowance for diverse responses and experiences. Seven of the eight respondents interviewed acknowledged that the project has been a bit helpful to them though only for a short while. One woman appreciated the fact that the LFDP trained them in fishing activities. "They taught us how to mend nets, store, treat and preserve fish and also gave us loans" she said. However, all respondents were categorical that their lives had not changed because the effect of the project was felt only for a short while. "Before the project I was just the way I am now. The project has not really changed my life that much" said one livestock farmer. All respondents said that the project had little impact on their lives and this is because "the money (120,000 FRS) I received as loan was too small, always smaller than what I applied for" complained one livestock farmer "and we were expected to start repayment one month after which is very unrealistic". "For a livestock farmer it is very difficult to make profit one month after investments" said another. Another major problem is that "I lost all my pigs to swine fever in 2007 and still had to look for money to repay the loan....some people still owe SOWEDA till today and they have been summoned by the gendarmerie several times for it". Other reasons advanced by respondents for little or no project impact on their lives included the following:

- 'I only got the loan once and the little impact it had in my life has long disappeared';
- 'I could not repay initial loan due to swine fever that killed all my pigs and SOWEDA would not understand';
- 'I received the loan twice and it had very little impact';
- 'The cold store and ice plant that the project started for us did not last for long and it was too expensive to run';
- 'The price of feed has increased so much with the bad roads and it reduces any gains from business';
- 'The cooperation did not work as expected as there was confusion as to who to run it';
- 'The cooperation is so expensive to run and maintained and it has put some of us in debts';
- 'Loan is not the only thing that I need to get out of poverty – roads are bad, prices of goods are too high';
- 'The cooperation in Mamfe did not work at all';
- 'Swine fever killed all my pigs and I borrowed money from the credit union to repay the SOWEDA loan';
- The loan interest was high (12%) and repayment starts very early so I dropped off the loan scheme

A female respondent from Ndian disclosed that their group applied for 3,000,000 FRS (\$6,000.00) for a group project in 2007 but was only granted 750,000 FRS (\$1,500.00). This money was not enough to carry out the group project that had been drawn. Furthermore, they had to give 50,000FRS (\$100.00) to the MC² worker "who helped us with the paper work". The remaining 700,000FRS (\$1400.00) was shared equally among the 14 members of the group with each person having 50,000FRS (\$100.00) which is very little. "Unfortunately two of our group members died without repaying their loans and our group president is down with a stroke and has not been able to repay. For this reason our group is still owing and thus not eligible for another loan. My life has gone back to what it used to be before the loan, if not worse" said the woman.

The one person who actually admitted that her life had been impacted positively was the female respondent from Fako who is involved in fish roasting. "From this my fish business I have been able to educate my son through secondary school, buy my fridge and TV and also buy a plot of land in Bonadikombo – Mile 4". However the positive impact is not attributed to LFDP alone as she also admitted using loan from Credit Union in her business. Talking about women's business generally she said "the problem with women is that they do not know how to differentiate money. They use business money for food and other things. Instead of using just the profits, they use the capital as well. They mix up everything and at the end they cannot repay loans". She however complained that "the interest on the loan is a bit too high at 10%, if SOWEDA really wants to help us they should reduce the interest to 5% or below".

No major impacts were cited in the communities apart from the cold store and ice plant that the project opened in Limbe, Kumba and Idenau. However, "these structures did not last for long" said one respondent from Limbe. "The machine for producing ice and the refrigerators for us to keep our fish kept getting bad, needing permanent repairs, and the electricity bill was too high for us to run the ice plant profitably". It was also reported that the Manyu Integrated Farmers Cooperative Society (MIFCO) actually never took off. "For a long time nobody knew who was running it" revealed one respondent from Mamfe (Manyu division). "MIFCO has never really had a steady building and at one point it was hijacked by rich farmers from Yaounde". "The cooperative was a total disaster. It ended up in the hands of a selected few; it never produced any feed at subsidized rate as it was supposed to and so it did not help us in any way. Up till today nobody knows exactly what has happened to it" said the male respondent. This fact was supported by the female respondent from Manyu who said that "the cooperative that was supposed to organize farmers and also produce feed for us at cheap rates has not really functioned well. At one time we did not even know who was managing it. The poorer farmers were completely left out and it was hijacked by the bigger and richer farmers".

All respondents appreciated the project and especially the loan scheme. "It is very difficult to have money these days and one should at least appreciate the little capital given to us by SOWEDA" said one man. Respondents were further unanimous in criticizing the fact that loan repayment started too early. There was also the issue of the

timing of the loan where respondents said that the loan did not follow the season of activities. The general complain was that loan approval and disbursement does not follow these seasons and this virtually defeats the purpose for the loan. "Fish, has its season and when loan is given during low season the money tends to be used for something else and does not serve its purpose" said one respondent. Livestock farmers also target festive seasons like Christmas but "SOWEDA does not give us the loans when we need it and so it is difficult to make maximum use of it" retorted one livestock farmer.

As for what else can be done to get respondents out of poverty, all respondents interviewed said that a project like the LFDP by itself is not enough to get any poor person out of poverty. "What the project does is make a bit of cash handy to solve some immediate problems but it cannot change one's life" said one woman. To be free from poverty many things have to come into play. For example the four respondents interviewed from Manyu and Ndiang divisions complained bitterly about the state of the road. "You can see for yourself that the road is very bad and so all other things are very expensive". Another said "we do not have clean portable water and so people keep getting sick and end up spending all the little money that they have.... how can one get out of poverty in this kind of situation even if SOWEDA was to give the money free of charge".

Focus group discussions with non-beneficiaries revealed that livestock and fisheries activities have not had a substantial impact on the lives of the farmers. In relation to how their livestock and fisheries businesses have impacted their lives, participants acknowledged that it is their source of livelihood and that is why they are still involved in it after all these years. "Our lives depend on this, which is why despite the difficulties, we cannot stop". The impact on their lives has not been very substantive. Both female and male participants confirmed that their businesses are more or less hand to mouth. Their businesses barely ensure their basic survival. They are able to eat at least once or twice a day, visit health institutions once in a while when ill, and also pay fees for children up to secondary school. Some of them have also been able to buy some household items like, television sets, phones, and a bike. No participant has been able to build a house or buy a piece of land with income from their fisheries or livestock business.

CONCLUSION

Despite the much effort that development agencies have been putting into the struggle against poverty, the poverty situation of sub-Saharan Africa still stands in contrast to most of the world. The efforts have been in the form of policies, programmes, projects and activities. The question that comes to mind therefore is how much contribution have these projects made to the struggle. This article has used empirical data to show that projects by local development agencies do not always make substantive contribution towards poverty reduction. The study analysed the contribution of the South West Development Authority's Livestock and Fisheries Development Project to poverty reduction. The study found out that the little changes that respondents realized in their lives was very short-lived. The project did not change the lives of the respondents; talk less of transforming them from poor to non-poor. This was evident because five years after the end of the project, over 60% of respondents testified that their lives had gone back to what it used to be.

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Cite this Article: Forsac-Tata D, Endeley JB, Sikod F, 2015. The Contributions of Local Development Agencies towards Poverty Reduction: Case of the South West Development Authority, Cameroon. Greener Journal of Social Sciences, 5(1):020-035, <http://doi.org/10.15580/GJSS.2015.1.020215027>.