



The local government system in

Cameroon



Key facts

POPULATION (Census 2005)¹: 17,463,836
AREA²: 475,442 sq km
CAPITAL: Yaoundé
LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTION TO GDP: -
CURRENCY: Central African franc (XAF)
EXECUTIVE HEAD OF STATE: President Paul Biya
NOMINAL HEAD OF GOVERNMENT:
 Prime Minister Phié mon Yang
FORM OF GOVERNMENT: republic
PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM: bicameral³
STATE STRUCTURE: unitary
LANGUAGES: French and English (official)
NATIONAL ELECTIONS:
National Assembly: last: 2007; turnout: 62%; next: 2012
Presidential: last: 2004; turnout: 82.2%; next: 2011
LOCAL ELECTIONS: last: 2007; turnout: 65.4%; next: 2012

SUMMARY

Cameroon is a parliamentary republic with two levels of government, central and local. Constitutional provision is made not only for local government but also for an intermediary higher territorial tier, although this has yet to be implemented. The main laws governing local government are Laws No. 17, 18 and 19 of 2004 on decentralisation, councils and regions respectively. The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation is responsible for government policy on territorial administration and local government. There are 376 local government councils, consisting of 320 urban or rural councils, 14 cities and 42 sub-divisions within the cities. Local councils are empowered to levy taxes and charges including direct council taxes, cattle tax and licences. The most important

mechanism for revenue-sharing is the 10% centimes additionnels communaux levy on national taxation, of which 70% goes to the councils. All councils have similar responsibilities and powers for service delivery with the exception of the sub-divisional urban councils which have a modified set of powers. Council responsibility for service delivery includes utilities, town planning, health, social services and primary education.

1. CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

Cameroon is a unitary republic with a bicameral parliament. The de facto head of state is the president, who is directly elected by universal adult suffrage for an unlimited number of seven-year terms. The parliament is called the National Assembly (Assemblée nationale). Elected every five years on a direct universal suffrage basis, it

has 180 members and sits three times a year, for a maximum period of 30 days per sitting. An upper chamber, the Senate, has been provided for under the constitution but has not yet been established. It will comprise 100 senators – 10 from each region – of whom seven will be elected by indirect universal suffrage and three appointed by the president, all for a five-year term. The president appoints the nominal head of government, the prime minister.

2. LEGAL BASIS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

2.1 Constitutional provisions:

Section 55 (2) of the constitution states that regional and local authorities shall have administrative and financial autonomy and shall be freely administered by elected councils.



2.2 The Main legislative texts pertaining to local government are:

- Law No. 2004/017 on decentralisation
- Law No. 2004/018 on councils
- Law No. 2004/019 on regions.

Other decrees and laws relating to local government include:

- Law No. 1987/015: sets up city councils
- Decree 1987/1365: sets up city council of Yaoundé
- Decree 1987/1366: sets up city council of Douala
- Law No. 1992/002: conduct of local elections
- Decree 1993/321: sets up urban and rural councils
- Decree 1995/80: specifies number of councillors to be elected per council
- Law No. 1996/06: local elections and framework for regional decentralisation.

3. STRUCTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

3.1 Local government within the state:

Cameroon is divided into ten administrative areas called provinces. Provinces are in turn divided into divisions (départements), which are further divided into sub-divisions (arrondissements) and districts which correspond to the 376 local government councils. Constitutional amendments in 2008 made provision for an intermediary provincial/regional level of local government, but this has not been implemented.

3.2 Ministerial oversight:

The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation (MINATD) is responsible for the preparation, implementation and assessment of Government policy on territorial administration. This includes the regulations pertaining to the organisation and functioning of regional and local authorities; exercising supervisory powers over regional and local authorities; and overseeing regular evaluation of the roll-out of decentralisation.

3.3 Council types:

There are three main types of local authorities or councils: rural or urban councils, city councils and sub-divisional urban councils within the cities.

3.3.1 Councils can be either rural or urban, but all lack the special status granted to city councils and their sub-divisions. All councils are headed by a directly elected mayor who is supported by a team of councillors, their number depends on the population size of the jurisdiction. The council can appoint commissions to work and report

Table 1b. Distribution of councils and population (Census 2005)

Region/province	Number of authorities			Population (Census 2005)
	Councils	Cities	Sub-divisions	
Adamawa	n/a	n/a	n/a	884,289
Centre	n/a	n/a	n/a	3,098,044
East	n/a	n/a	n/a	771,755
Far North	n/a	n/a	n/a	3,111,792
Littoral	n/a	n/a	n/a	2,510,263
North	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,687,959
North West	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,728,953
West	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,720,047
South	n/a	n/a	n/a	634,655
South West	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,316,079
TOTAL	320	14	42	17,463,83

Source: National Institute of Statistics, Cameroon

upon any relevant issue. Membership of a commission can include people who are not elected councillors. Commissions must be convened during the first year of a council's mandate. Typically, their remit would include planning, public works, education, markets and other facilities, or health.

3.3.2 City councils service urban areas. Their territory overarches that of sub-divisional councils, and they are headed by government delegates appointed by presidential decree who mirror all the duties and powers of mayors. They are assisted by an executive team composed of persons appointed by order of the president. The deliberative body of the city council is made up of the executive team: the sub-divisional council mayors and one additional councillor designated by each of the sub-divisional councils.

3.3.3 Sub-divisional councils are council areas created within any city council area. Most city councils have two or three sub-divisional council areas, with the exception of Yaoundé and Douala which have seven and six respectively. The sub-divisional councils are headed by directly elected mayors.

3.3.4 Special status urban councils: In some larger towns, due to local political complexities or strategic administrative considerations, executive power is vested in a government delegate appointed by the president. The rationale for an independent government appointee was to guarantee civic rights, particularly in urban communities divided between minority original inhabitants and majority non-natives; however special status can be granted to councils for other reasons – for example difficulty in the delivery of basic services, such as water.

In principle, decentralisation legislation has

abolished both this type of council, and the legal distinction between rural and urban councils. Many special status urban councils however, continue to be administered by presidential appointees. These government delegates work with the council chairperson, who is indirectly elected from amongst the councillors.

Ordinary councils can be converted to special status by presidential decree.

3.3 Traditional leadership:

No information provided for this edition.

4. ELECTIONS

4.1 Recent local elections:

The last local elections were held in July 2007, with a 65.37% turnout, the next are scheduled for 2012.

4.2 Voting system:

Councillors are elected by universal suffrage with elections taking place according to a mixed list system. The leader of the council is a mayor who is elected by and from amongst the councillors.

4.3 Elected representatives:

The mayor is supported by councillors, the number of which varies according to the population of the constituency as follows:

- Less than 50,000: 25 councillors
- 50,000–100,000: 31 councillors
- 100,001–200,000: 35 councillors
- 200,001–300,000: 41 councillors
- More than 300,000: 61 councillors

4.4 Women's representation:

In 2009 approximately 1.5% of councillors were women (149 out of almost 10,000) including 14 mayors (3.9%) nationally. Only Northern Province was without a single female mayor. South Province has three women mayors and

Centre Province has four, two of whom head sub-divisional urban councils in Yaoundé.

5. SYSTEMS FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

5.1 Legal requirement:

There is no legal requirement for community involvement in local authority decision-making.

5.2 Implementation:

Any citizen can suggest policy alterations or improvements to local or regional authorities. Any inhabitant of a given council can, at their own cost, request copies of minutes, discussion notes, budgetary documentation and accounts of the said council. Historically, political parties and or traditional leaders have communicated the needs of minority and special interest groups.

5.3 E-government:

There is no e-government strategy.

6. ORGANISED LOCAL GOVERNMENT

6.1 National local government association:

The United Councils and Cities of Cameroon (Communes et Villes Unies du Cameroun) association, was formed from the merger of the Cameroon Association of Towns (Association des Communes et Villes de Cameroun) and the Cameroon Union of Towns and Councils (Union des Communes et Villes du Cameroun). The association provides members with information, capacity building, training, and good practice dissemination, and also provides financial services.

6.2 Other local government associations:

The Public Body for International Cooperation (Organisme Public de Coopération Internationale) has also been set up to coordinate councils at divisional level and build links with local authorities overseas. Councils are permitted, and increasingly encouraged, to seek decentralised cooperation ties with local governments abroad, especially in Europe.

7. INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

United Councils and Cities of Cameroon acts in an advisory capacity to the national government on matters affecting local authorities.

In situations where approval for action is required from central government, senior divisional officers and provincial governors must acknowledge and respond to a council decision within 15 days.

8. MONITORING SYSTEMS

There are a number of central government bodies which monitor the finances of local authorities.

These include the audit unit of MINATD, the Directorates General of Treasury and Budget, and the Higher State Control.

The National Election Office (NEO) is a national body which supervises the election process. Its members are appointed by presidential decree after consultations with political parties and civil society; although no elected official, political party member, traditional ruler or member of the forces of law and order is eligible for appointment as member.

The NEO has regional and council representatives, and at council level the preparation and conduct of elections is overseen by council supervisory commissions.

A National Council for Decentralisation (Conseil National de la Décentralisation) and an Interministerial Committee on Local Services (Comité Interministériel des Services Locaux) were set up following the 2004 legislation. Legislation passed in 2003 provides for an Audit Bench (Chambre des Comptes) under the Supreme Court, to enforce proper standards in the collection and use of council taxes and accounting procedures. Decree 2004/099 provides for a Control Brigade to monitor the functioning and management of local and regional authorities.

9. FINANCE, STAFFING AND RESOURCES

Local authorities cannot set deficit budgets.

9.1 Locally raised revenue:

Local councils are empowered to levy taxes and charges including direct council taxes, cattle tax and licences, market trading licences, ground rents on shops and public transport licences. They can also charge a business levy, which is an annual licence payment calculated on a sliding scale according to the nature and size of an individual's economic activity, with a maximum assessment of CAF100,000 (US\$211).

9.2 Transfers:

Local authorities receive block grant revenue from central government through MINATD via its Special Council Support Fund for Mutual Assistance (Fonds Spécial d'Équipement et d'Intervention Intercommunale) (FEICOM) based in Yaoundé with ten regional branches. These grants are weighted according to a council's population, surface area and other considerations. FEICOM also authorises loans for revenue and capital spending. FEICOM's priorities, in line with other similar organisations in Africa, centre on capital projects of social value, including schools, utilities, healthcare and transport infrastructure. Loans are for a maximum of two years. The proportion of loan to grant depends on the type of project being funded. Top priorities for FEICOM's own resources include utilities and urban development. Funding is also available for the training of council staff.

FEICOM also provides councils with non-financial support, including expert technical assistance, project evaluation, and other facilities. This is a vital role, given the lack of technical competence in many communal structures.

FEICOM's key revenue role is the centralised collection and redistribution of the additional council tax (centimes additionnels communaux) (CAC). CAC is a 10% levy on certain categories of national taxation specifically destined for council finance. Taxes that this levy is applied to include

Table 2. Revenue and expenditure for Kumbo Urban Council (2003)

Revenue	XAFm	Expenditure	XAFm
Government transfer	negligible	General administration	12,233
Recurrent revenue	15.2	Staff costs	56.8
Fiscal revenue	35.6	Equipment	34.08
CAC	61.0	Sundries and losses	56.8
Indirect council tax	27.9	Fixed assets	79.52
Loans	43.2	Other expenditure	56.8
Reserves	30.5		
Other revenue	40.6		
TOTAL	254	TOTAL	284

Source: Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation⁴

general income tax, business tax, entertainment tax, and value-added tax. CAC revenue is collected and allocated as follows: 10% to central government, 20% to FEICOM and 70% to councils. Of the total that goes to councils, 20% goes to Douala; 40% to Yaoundé and 36% to other councils. The remaining 4% is retained by FEICOM and used for a range of purposes, for example to compensate councils for revenue that is paid beyond their borders, to support infrastructure projects in border councils or to help councils affected by natural disaster.

Forty per cent of forestry royalties are also redistributed to councils on a per capita basis.

The fragmented nature of revenue appropriation and the widely varying circumstances of individual communes has led to considerable inequalities in resources.

9.3 Local authority staff:

The secretary-general (head of the paid staff) and other administrative and technical officials of councils are appointed by MINATD, either from among the local staff of the councils or on secondment from relevant ministries in consultation with central authorities.

The training establishment for all local government officials is the Local Government Training Centre (CEFAM), based in Buéa in South-West Province. CEFAM is subordinate to MINATD and trains both current council personnel and new recruits, on two course cycles. There is so far no statutory instrument regulating the individual status and career structure of local government personnel. This often leads to a lack of local competence on the administrative side even in large urban councils.

Aggregate information across all councils is not available. Anecdotal evidence is that most rural councils spend only on the most vital core functions, such as staff costs, road maintenance, pharmacy, healthcare and education. More complex urban councils are committed to a wider range of services.

10. DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY RESPONSIBILITY

All rural and urban councils have similar responsibilities and powers for service delivery, whilst the sub-divisional urban councils have a modified set of powers. Council responsibility for service delivery often includes:

- Utilities, including water, sewage and waste disposal
- Town planning and urban development
- Municipal roads and public transport
- Registration of births, marriages and deaths
- Community health and safety
- Social services

- Primary education and literacy
- Sport, culture and leisure

In practice, it is likely that smaller and more rural councils will have difficulty fulfilling their statutory duties without a radical increase in their funding, although Law No. 2004/017 on decentralisation specifies that where services have been transferred, any relevant infrastructure and resources should also be transferred. Chronic budgetary shortfalls and dilapidated infrastructure however create situations that are difficult for often poorly staffed local authorities to manage. Major capital expenditure is needed, but this problem has not been fully addressed in the decentralisation legislation so far passed.

References and useful websites

1. National Institute of Statistics, Cameroon www.statistics-cameroon.org
Census 2005 www.statistics-cameroon.org/news.php?id=18
2. UN statistics <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dyb2008/Table03.pdf>
3. IMF statistics www.imf.org/external/data.htm
4. Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization www.minatd.gov.cm
5. Cameroon is only constitutionally bicameral whilst in practice the legislature is unicameral since the upper house, the Senate has not yet been established
6. Government of Cameroon www.spm.gov.cm
7. UNDP Human Development Report 2010 www.hdr.undp.org
8. United Councils and Cities of Cameroon www.cvuc-uccc.org
9. Abangma, J. A. 2009 'Functional autonomy and the performance of communes in Cameroon: local government for local people?' *African Journal of Contemporary Issues*, Volume 9, Number 1 www.tropicalfocus.org/?attachment_id=20
10. Report of the National Council's Forum, Yaoundé, Cameroon, 2010 www.casetra.org/NationalCouncilYaoundeMarch10.pdf
11. Special Council Support Fund for Mutual Assistance www.feicom.cm
12. National Community Driven Development Program www.pndp.gov.cm
13. Kumbo Council www.kumbourbancouncil.org
14. Constitution of Cameroon www.prc.cm/index_en.php?link=h (French) <http://confinder.richmond.edu/admin/docs/Cameroon.pdf> (English)



Annex A. Summary of service provision in different spheres of government

Service	Delivering authority			Remarks
	Central	Provincial	Local Government	
GENERAL ADMINISTRATION				
Police	■			All three levels of government (should) have statistical responsibilities.
Fire protection	■			
Civil protection	■			
Criminal justice	■			
Civil justice	■			
Civil status register			■	
Statistical office	■	■	■	
Electoral register	■		■	
EDUCATION				
Pre-school	■			Communes are to contribute to secondary and vocational educational establishments where possible.
Primary	■			
Secondary	■			
Vocational and technical	■			
Higher education	■			
Adult education	■			
SOCIAL WELFARE				
Kindergarten and nursery				Social welfare coverage is near non-existent.
Family welfare services				
Welfare homes				
Social security				
PUBLIC HEALTH				
Primary care	■	■		Responsibilities are split between national and local government (division yet to be fully defined). Construction of basic facilities is expected to devolve to local authorities.
Hospitals	■	■		
Health Protection	■	■		
HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING				
Housing			■	Responsibilities in this area are currently ill-defined in both legislation and practice.
Town planning			■	
Regional planning				
TRANSPORT				
Roads	■		■	Seaports, railways and airports are the responsibility of stand-alone public and private organisations.
Transport			■	
Urban roads			■	
Urban Rail			■	
Ports			■	
Airports			■	
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SANITATION				
Water and sanitation			■	
Refuse collection and disposal			■	
Cemeteries and crematoria			■	
Slaughterhouse			■	
Environmental protection			■	
Consumer protection			■	
CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORTS				
Theatre and concerts			■	
Museums and libraries			■	
Parks and open spaces			■	
Sports and leisure			■	
Religious facilities				
UTILITIES				
Gas services				Electricity supply has been privatised. Privatisation of water is underway. There is no provision for heating and gas.
District heating				
Water supply				
Electricity				
ECONOMIC				
Agriculture, forests and fisheries	■		■	
Economic promotion	■		■	
Trade and industry	■		■	
Tourism	■		■	

■ = Discretionary service by the local authority. Table reflects the impact of decentralisation legislation of 2004