

Harnessing Collective Action: Assessing the Contribution of CIGs to Socio-Economic Development in Bamenda, Cameroon

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ABSTRACT: *This study assesses the role of Common Initiative Groups (CIGs) in fostering community development in Bamenda City, Cameroon. CIGs, as grassroots organisations, play a pivotal role in addressing local challenges and promoting sustainable development. The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with 200 participants (including representatives from seven CIGs, four Civil Society Organizations, and one NGO) and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Findings reveal that CIGs significantly contribute to social welfare, economic activities, and environmental management. Key social roles include promoting family values, improving state-civil society relations, enhancing healthcare access, empowering women, and fostering gender-sensitive development, with 85% of respondents affirming their importance. However, challenges such as insufficient funding (58% of respondents), lack of member commitment, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms (34.22%) hinder their effectiveness. The study underscores the need for strategic reforms, including diversified funding and robust evaluation systems, to enhance CIGs' contributions to community well-being in Bamenda.*

Keywords: *Common Initiative Groups, Community, Development, Sustainable Development.*

INTRODUCTION

Addressing poverty necessitates a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach that integrates human capital development, social protection, environmental sustainability, and community empowerment. Central to this strategy is investing in human capital, particularly through education and skills training. Vocational training programs, for instance, play a critical role in equipping individuals with practical skills tailored to the demands of local job markets. According to a 2023 study by the International Labour Organization (ILO), vocational training effectively bridges skills gaps and enhances employability, particularly when it includes apprenticeships and entrepreneurship development components. Recent research by Nkengfack and Fotio (2025) further underscores the transformative potential of vocational training in fostering economic resilience, especially in resource-constrained settings. Fonjong (2021) emphasizes that such programs not only prepare individuals for specific industries but also foster innovation and self-reliance, which are essential for sustainable economic growth, particularly in developing regions like Sub-Saharan Africa.

Equally important are adult literacy programs, which serve as a foundation for broader social and economic participation. The International Literacy Association (2023) emphasizes that basic literacy skills are a gateway to employment, improved health outcomes, and enhanced well-being. Research by Coleman et al. (2019) further supports this, demonstrating that adult literacy programs significantly improve income levels, health, and overall quality of life. Recent studies by Tandia and Ndiaye (2025) highlight the role of digital literacy programs in enhancing the effectiveness of traditional adult education, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Fonjong and Ngwa (2020) argue that these programs are particularly effective in rural areas, where literacy rates are often the lowest. However, the effectiveness of these programs depends on addressing barriers to participation, such as childcare needs, transportation costs, and flexible scheduling. Incorporating practical life skills into literacy curricula and offering programs in accessible locations can further enhance their impact (Fonjong, 2021).

Access to affordable and quality healthcare is another cornerstone of human capital development. The World Health Organization (2023) highlights that healthy individuals are more productive and better able to contribute to the economy. Investments in healthcare infrastructure, preventive care, and health education are essential to ensure that communities can thrive. For example, initiatives that provide free or subsidized healthcare services, coupled with health literacy campaigns, can significantly reduce the burden of disease and improve workforce participation. Recent findings by Mbaku and Ngwa (2024) emphasize the importance of integrating community-based healthcare models with digital health technologies to improve access and outcomes in underserved areas. Fonjong *et al.*, (2022) argue that community-based healthcare programs, which involve local stakeholders and traditional health systems, are particularly effective in improving healthcare access and outcomes in underserved areas. A multi-dimensional approach to poverty alleviation must prioritize human capital development through targeted vocational training, adult literacy programs, and accessible healthcare services. These interventions, when implemented effectively, can empower individuals, strengthen communities, and create a foundation for sustainable development. Addressing systemic barriers and tailoring programs to local contexts, as suggested by Fonjong (2021) and others, will be critical to maximizing their impact and ensuring long-term success. Recent studies by Ayuk *et al.*, (2024) further highlight the importance of leveraging public-private partnerships to scale these interventions and ensure their sustainability in the face of evolving socio-economic challenges.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This framework provides a structured approach to evaluate the contributions and recommendations for strengthening Common Initiative Groups (CIGs) in fostering community development. It integrates quantitative and qualitative data to ensure a comprehensive analysis (Figure 1).

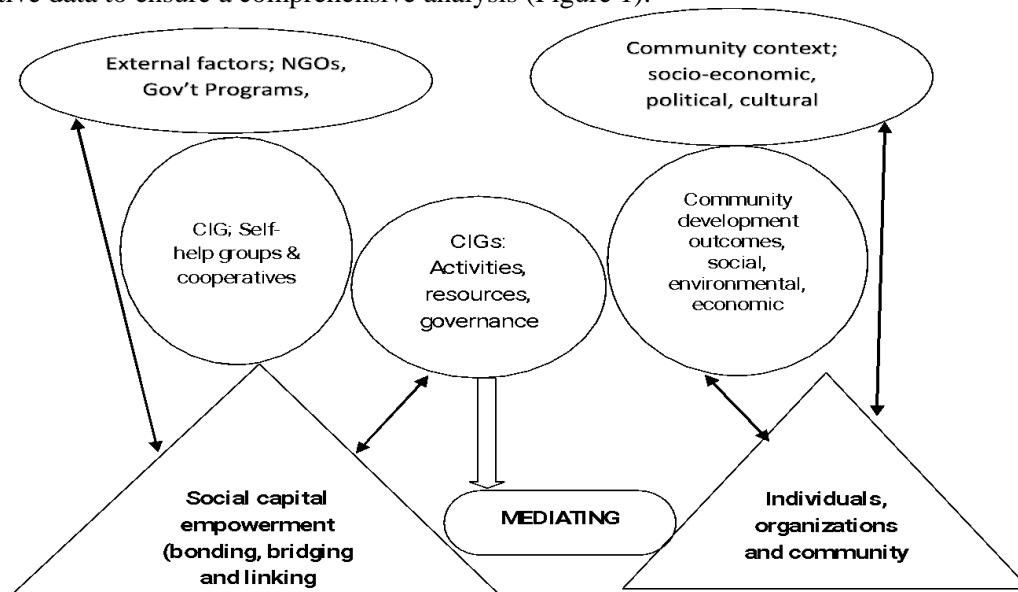


Figure 1: Role of CIGs in Community Development

This study's analytical framework provides a lens through which to not only observe, but understand the complex interplay of factors that enable CIGs to serve as potent engines of sustainable and equitable community development in Bamenda City, going beyond simplistic metrics to reveal the true transformative power of collective action.

Social welfare is through the promotion of family values, improved state-civil society relations, access to healthcare, female empowerment, and gender-sensitive development. This works with economic activities of job creation, income generation, support for small-scale enterprises, and financial inclusion. Again, environmental management includes sustainable resource use, waste management, and food security initiatives.

STUDY AREA AND METHODS

Bamenda City expands over the North-Western Plateau of Cameroon. It serves as the headquarters of the North-West Region and is the socio-economic nerve centre of the area. Bamenda is a primate city, surrounded by satellite towns like Bambui, Bambili, Bafut, Mbengwi, Bali, and Santa. Positioned between longitudes 10°09" and 10°11" East of the Greenwich Meridian and latitudes 5°56"N and 5°58" North of the Equator (Figure 2).

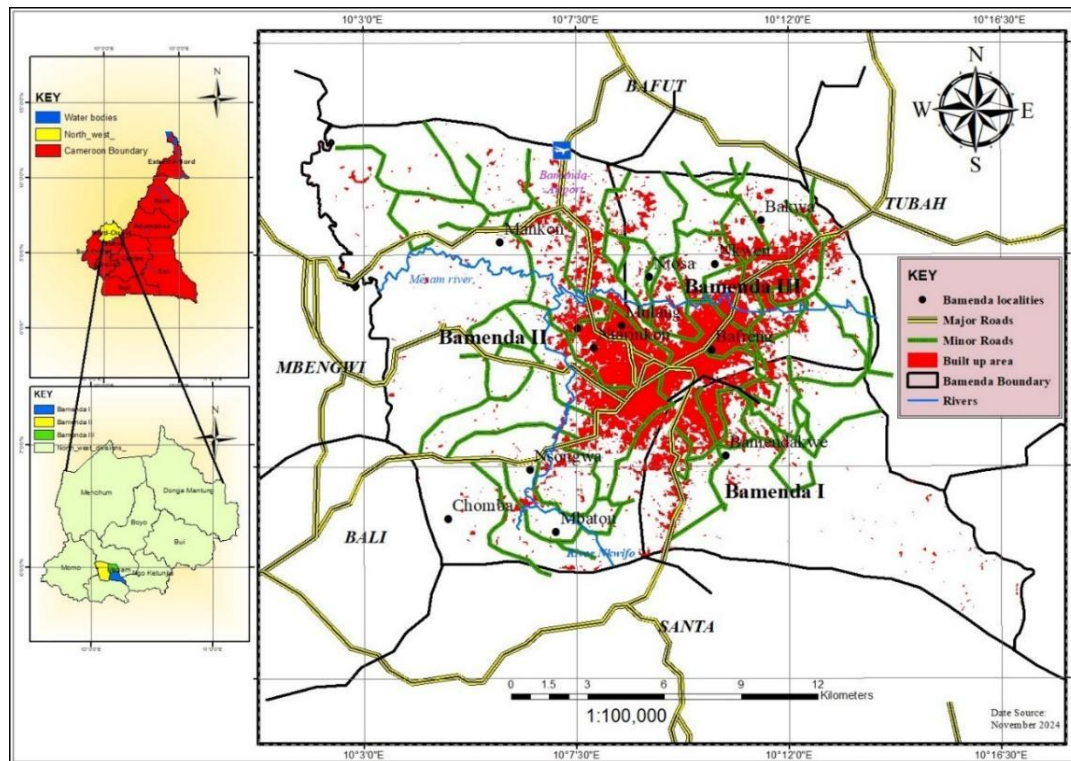


Figure 2: Location of Bamenda

Source: Bamenda City Council Development Plan (2023)

Geographically, Bamenda is bordered to the north by Bafut, northeast by Bambui and Bambili, west and southwest by Mbengwi and Bali respectively, and to the south by Akum. The city comprises three Sub-Divisional Councils (Bamenda I, Bamenda II, and Bamenda III). Evolving from a traditional Mankon monoculture village during the German and British colonial period of the 19th Century, Bamenda has transformed into a diverse city encompassing various communities like Mankon, Mendankwe, Mbatu, Chomba, Nkwen, and Banja. With a population of approximately 2 million people, it is known for its cool climate and hilly terrain, situated 366km from the capital city of Yaoundé. Bamenda City, located in the North-West Region of Cameroon, serves as the region's socio-economic hub. It comprises three sub-divisions (Bamenda I, II, and III) and has a population of approximately 614,809 (2024 estimate). The city is characterized by a tropical monsoon climate, hilly terrain, and diverse economic activities, including agriculture, handicrafts, and tourism.

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods to ensure comprehensive insights. The descriptive survey research design and correlational research design are employed to assess the contributions, challenges, and opportunities of CIGs. The mixed-methods approach compensates for the limitations of individual methods, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings.

Data was collected through primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected via field surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions with 200 participants across Bamenda I, II, and III. The

sample included representatives from CIGs, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and NGOs. Field observations and focus group discussions were conducted to gather firsthand insights into the activities, challenges, and successes of CIGs. Interviews were held with key stakeholders, including CIG leaders, CSOs, and NGOs, to explore their contributions to community development.

The study used simple random sampling and stratified random sampling to ensure representativeness. A sample of 200 participants was selected from the estimated population of 614,809 (UN World Urbanization Prospect, 2024). Due to financial and logistical constraints, 187 questionnaires were retrieved, representing a 93.5% response rate.

Secondary data included published and unpublished materials, including textbooks, journal articles, and institutional records (Bamenda City Council, Regional Delegation of Public Health, and Ministry of Rural Development).

Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 25) was used to process and present data in tables, charts, and graphs. Cronbach's alpha (0.789) was used to test the internal consistency of variables, indicating acceptable reliability.

RESULTS

4.1. Social Interventions of CIGs in Bamenda

On whether CIGs contribute to welfare and gender-based development, 73% population accepted that CIGs promote the development of gender base development, and 27% of the population was against the fact that CIGs do promote welfare and gender development. This stem from several factors. First, the long-term nature of CIG impacts may make their benefits less visible in the short term. Second, poor communication about CIG activities and achievements can lead to misunderstandings. Third, varying effectiveness among CIGs may result in negative experiences for some community members. Additionally, in areas with pressing economic challenges, CIGs may be seen as irrelevant if they do not address immediate needs. Past failures or mismanagement by certain CIGs could also contribute to skepticism. Addressing these issues through better communication, impactful projects, and alignment with community priorities could help improve perceptions of CIGs and their role in development.

(Figure 3). Therefore, CIGs are advanced promoters of welfare and gender-based development.

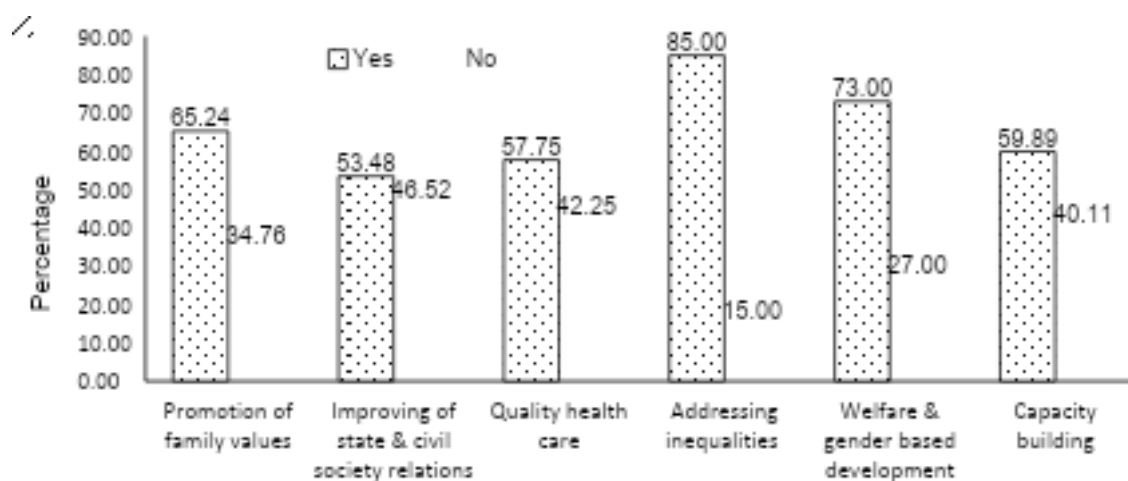


Figure 3: Social activities of CIGs in Bamenda City

Finally, as concerns the role of CIGs in the promotion of family values, 65.24% of the population had indicated that these organizations and groups promote family values while 34.76% of the population were against the fact that CIGs do promote family values in the community of Bamenda. A vivid example of such a CIG in Bamenda is the Ntankah women's CIG, LELIV, Nkwen Elites and AFCIG. Most communities in the Northwest region particularly in Bamenda are more concerned with securing enough food, especially with the social unrest in Bamenda, both communities (municipalities of Bamenda town) have agreed to the fact that CIGs play a vital role in ensuring food security in Bamenda. Bamenda II and Bamenda III have indicated that this particular activity by CIGs is evident in their communities. CIGs are therefore recommended to maintain food security in their various communities.

4.2. Environmental interventions

Environmental interventions by CIGs include watershed protection, waste management, the fight against climate change, potable water provision, tree planting, sustainable agriculture, flood control, and preservation of wetlands (Table 1).

Table 1: CIG Interventions in Environmental Protection in Bamenda

Activities	High concentration		Less concentration		Least concentration	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Watershed protection	110	58.82	77	41.18	0	0.00
Waste management	147	78.61	33	17.65	7	3.74
Fight against climate change	171	91.44	16	8.56	0	0.00
Potable water provision	130	69.52	44	23.53	13	6.95
Tree planting	168	89.84	19	10.16	0	0.00
Sustainable agriculture	174	93.05	13	6.95	0	0.00
Flood control	62	33.16	85	45.45	40	21.39
Preservation of wetlands	82	43.85	84	44.92	21	11.23
Average		69.79		24.80		5.41

Tree planting and sustainable agriculture are the main areas where the population wants CIGs to concentrate with 89.84% and 93.05% respectively. Waste management was rated high at 78.61%, waste management rated high at 68%, fight against climate change was rated high at 65%, portable water provision was high at 69.52% most CIGs in Bamenda are interested in sustainable environmental activities that help to promote development and social wellbeing, Nkwen Elites, Ever Green Farmers and LELIV through their activities have contributed to the above factors for a change in Bamenda.

4.3. Socio-Economic Development

The long-term aim of CIGs and other related organizations is to assist community development through capacity building and self-reliance. Most of the opportunities offered by common initiative groups in the Bamenda municipality include job opportunities, capacity-building skills development, and many more (Table 2). CIGs have significant roles as well as opportunities they offer to most of their community members. These strive to ensure that members of their communities have access to opportunities. The majority of the population 80.75% of the population strongly agreed that CIGs allow learning on municipal solid waste management, 73.26% strongly agreed that CIGs expose them to forest conservation initiatives, 68% agreed that CIGs expose them to peace processes and allow them to participate in peace activities, especially with the social unrest in Bamenda.

Table 2: CIGs and Economic activities in Bamenda

Opportunities	SA		A		SD		D	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Economic development	49	26.20	37	19.79	65	34.76	36	19.25
Forest conservation initiatives	137	73.26	17	9.09	13	6.95	20	10.70
Livelihood activities for internally displaced persons	132	70.59	44	23.53	0	0.00	11	5.88
Municipal solid waste management	151	80.75	23	12.30	0	0.00	13	6.95
Promote peace and social cohesion	107	57.22	68	68.00	0	0.00	12	6.42
Average		61.60		26.54		8.34		9.84

Langaa, AFCIG, Health Education Outreach, LELIV, Nkwen Elites, Ever Green Farmers, and Ntankah Women CIG have played a key role in the community development of Bamenda by providing exploitable opportunities for the population. Agriculture is the primary activity of most communities in the North West particularly in Bamenda. The research also aimed to investigate if CIGs are involved only in agricultural activities. The results indicate that though the primary activity of most communities in Bamenda, Bamenda I have indicated that CIGs are only involved in agriculture by 21%. Bamenda III by 40% and Bamenda III by 39%. This therefore means that as most people believe, CIGs are not involved only in Agricultural activities but are involved in many other developmental activities in Bamenda.

4.4. Impact on Community Empowerment

CIG activities are invisible if the indicators of their developmental activities are not known and assessed (Figure 4).

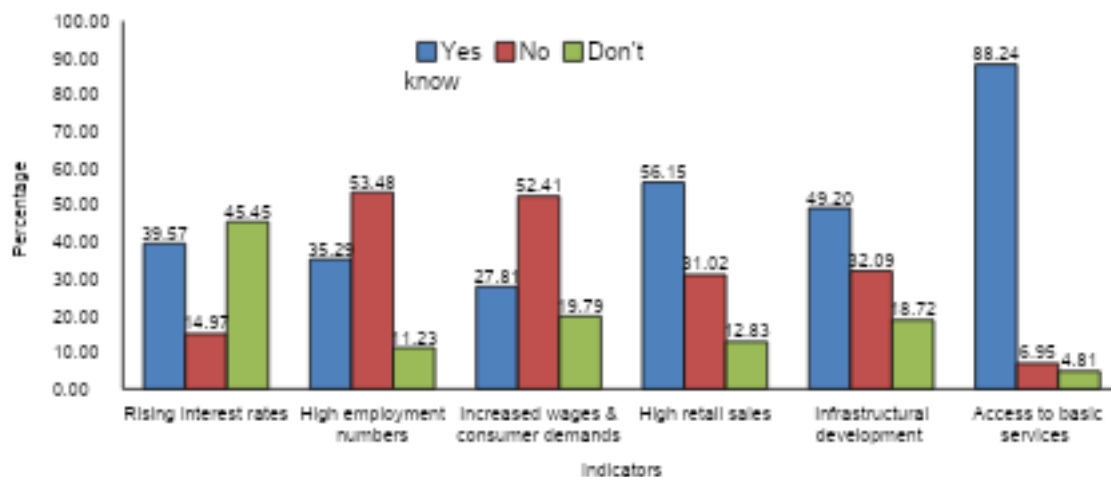


Figure 4: Some indicators of economic development in Bamenda

The overall findings have proven that with the presence of CIGs, there has been access to basic services with 88.24%. LELIV, Ntankah women, and Nken Elites are vivid examples of those CIGs that promote access to basic needs in the community. CIGs are therefore seen as key grassroots actors for sustainable change in Bamenda.

4.5. Improvements in the Quality of Life

Improved quality of life is an indicator that a particular area is developing. This may range from health, education, environment, and other opportunities. CIGs in Bamenda have been playing a vital role in ensuring

improvement in the quality of life of the community members such as the Health Education Rach Out CIG, and Langa CIG (Figure 5).

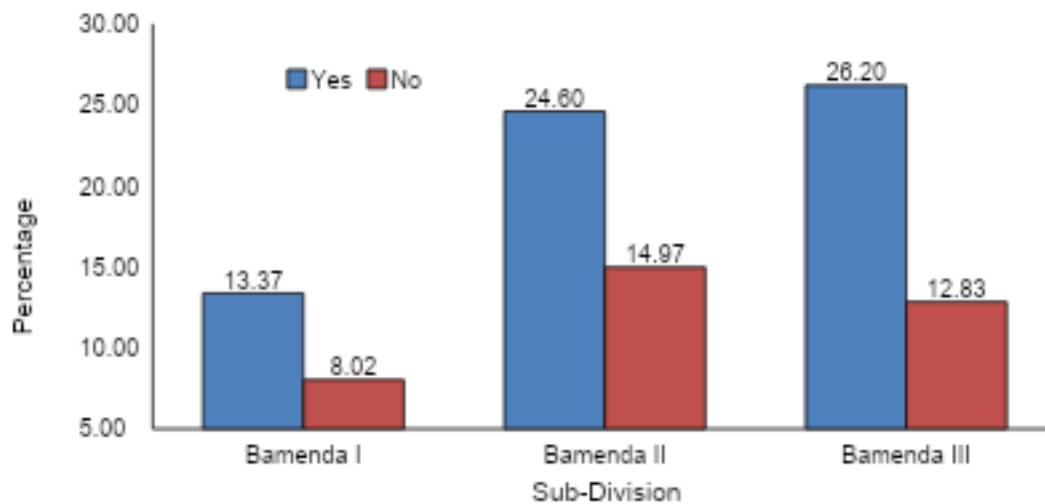


Figure 5: Economic opportunities facilitated by CIGs in Bamenda

Results found that the existence of CIGs in Bamenda has been positive towards their communities. Bamenda I, III, and III have both concord with the fact that the presence of CIGs in their various municipalities has led to improvement in the quality of life of community members. Bamenda I with 13.37%, Bamenda II with 24.60%, and Bamenda III with 26.20%.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the critical role of Common Initiative Groups (CIGs) in driving community development in Bamenda City, Cameroon. As grassroots organizations, CIGs have emerged as vital actors in addressing localized challenges and fostering sustainable development across social, economic, and environmental domains. Their contributions align with recent scholarly discourse on the importance of community-based organizations in promoting inclusive and participatory development (Njoh *et al.*, 2023; Tchamba *et al.*, 2024). However, the study also highlights persistent challenges that limit their effectiveness, necessitating targeted interventions to optimize their impact.

CIGs in Bamenda have demonstrated significant contributions to community development, particularly in social welfare, economic empowerment, and environmental sustainability. For instance, 85% of respondents emphasized the role of CIGs in enhancing family values, improving state-civil society relations, and increasing access to quality healthcare. These findings resonate with recent studies by Fonchingong and Mbah (2023), who highlighted the transformative potential of grassroots organizations in bridging gaps in social services and fostering community cohesion. Moreover, CIGs have been pivotal in advancing gender-sensitive development, with numerous programs focusing on women's empowerment and capacity building. This aligns with the work of Asongu and Nwachukwu (2024), who documented similar initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa, emphasizing the role of community-based organizations in addressing gender disparities.

Economically, CIGs have played a crucial role in supporting small-scale enterprises, job creation, and income generation, particularly through agricultural initiatives. In Bamenda III, CIGs have introduced innovative "Agricpreneurship" programs, teaching community members advanced farming techniques such as mushroom cultivation, rabbit farming, and food processing. These initiatives have not only enhanced food security but also created opportunities for monetizing agricultural products, including powdered spices, cassava flour, and

plantain flour. Recent studies by Nkengfack and Fotio (2025) have similarly highlighted the potential of agricultural entrepreneurship in driving rural economic transformation, particularly in resource-constrained settings.

The study identifies several opportunities to enhance the effectiveness of CIGs, drawing on insights from contemporary research. Capacity-building programs, particularly in financial management and project evaluation, could address operational challenges and improve organizational efficiency. This recommendation is supported by the work of Mbaku and Ngwa (2024), who emphasized the importance of skill development in strengthening the institutional capacity of grassroots organizations. Additionally, fostering partnerships with government agencies, international NGOs, and private sector actors could provide CIGs with the resources and expertise needed to scale their impact. Such collaborations have been shown to enhance the sustainability of community-driven initiatives, as noted by Ayuk *et al.*, (2023).

Diversifying funding sources, both internally and externally, is another critical opportunity for CIGs. Exploring revenue-generating activities, such as the sale of processed agricultural products, could provide a sustainable income stream and reduce reliance on external funding. This approach aligns with the findings of Tandia and Ndiaye (2025), who demonstrated the viability of income-generating activities in enhancing the financial resilience of community-based organizations. Furthermore, leveraging digital technologies for fundraising and resource mobilization could further strengthen CIGs' financial sustainability, as highlighted by recent studies on digital transformation in grassroots development (Efobi *et al.*, 2024). This study reaffirms the transformative potential of CIGs in fostering community development in Bamenda City. By addressing the identified challenges and capitalizing on the outlined opportunities, CIGs can further enhance their contributions to sustainable development. Future research should explore the long-term impacts of these interventions and their scalability across similar contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant role of CIGs in driving community development in Bamenda City. Their contributions to social welfare, economic empowerment, and environmental sustainability demonstrate their potential as agents of change. However, addressing the challenges they face—particularly in funding, monitoring, and capacity building—is crucial for maximizing their impact. By leveraging the opportunities identified in this study, stakeholders can support CIGs in achieving their goals and fostering sustainable development in Bamenda and beyond. Future research could explore specific interventions aimed at strengthening CIG capacity and evaluating the impact of different support mechanisms.

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