



Julius Lambi

# Associations and Pressure for Democracy: The Case of Cameroon

## Background



Democratic change, in the form of multi-party elections swept across the African continent in the 1990s. Arguing that associations promote democracy, many scholars postulated that democratization in Africa will 'deepen' rapidly, as the number of civic associations increase. But despite the association 'boom' that is observable in sub-Saharan African countries like Cameroon, democratic change has been a slow and halting process.

## Research Questions

Using Cameroon as a case, this study re-examines the postulated relationship between associations and democratization. The main research questions addressed are:

\* How much pressure for democracy do civil society organizations (CSOs) in Cameroon exercise?

\* How do institutional factors, namely, norms, values and culture affect the ability of civil society organizations (CSOs) to press for democracy?

\* With what strategies do associations in Cameroon succeed in breaking institutional constraints to democracy?

## Theory

The theoretical focus of the study is the associations-democracy relationship.

Additionally, the research uses institutional theory, as a lens for exploring how contextual (normative, regulatory and cultural) factors influence associations within a given political system.

## Research Methodology

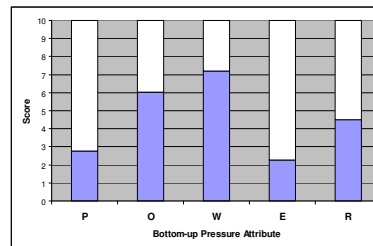
Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews and group discussions. To measure bottom-up pressure for democracy quantitatively, questionnaires were administered to 100 associations in the North West region of Cameroon.

## Findings

For associations to effectively promote democracy, they need five attributes, namely, **POWER**:

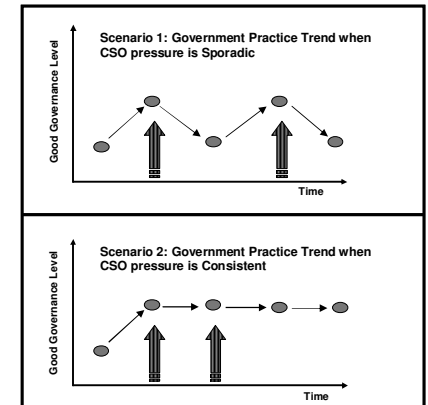
- Policy advocacy
- Organization and networking
- Established links the opposition
- Work closely with the population
- Resources

Survey data shows that associations in Cameroon can play a greater role in promoting democracy by stepping up three of these attributes, namely **P**, **E**, and **R**, in which they currently score below average.



Among other factors, restrictive state regulations and a strong culture of reverence of elites force associations to refrain from building political capital (P and E) which is essential for them to act as agents of democratization.

The research argues that associations are more likely to break institutional constraints to democracy when advocacy efforts are **consistent** or continuous over a period of time, as opposed to when they are **sporadic** or **discontinuous**.



## The Researcher

Julius Lambi holds a first degree in Life Sciences from the University of Buea, Cameroon, and a master's degree in Environmental Management from Aalborg University, Denmark.



Email: julius.lambi@univie.ac.at