Local perceptions of community participation in health in Cameroon

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Cameroon, like many African countries, adopted the district health system in the early 1990s. The main objectives of the district health system were: to strengthen management and financing mechanisms at the local level, to promote community participation and strengthen local management capacities, to strengthen mechanisms for the provision, management and use essential drugs, and finally to ensure permanent sources of funding for the operation of the care units. The implementation of the community participation component in Cameroon resulted in the creation of management committees at the level of all health and social promotion centres. These community structures have the role of organizing and mobilizing the efforts of local populations to support the financing of health and social promotion centers alongside the State and other stakeholders in the health sector. Contributions of the communities are of several kinds: the payment of consultation fees, the purchase of medicines, participation in work (construction of buildings, planting of trees, cleaning of health and social promotion centers, etc.), the in place of the offices of the management committees, the various contributions initiated for the benefit of the health services. According to some health workers, it is more and more difficult to renew the offices of the management committees, because of the low participation of the communities in the general assemblies. The same is true of awareness-raising activities, the holdings of which are still uncertain due to the weak mobilization of the communities. Leadership conflicts, the low level of schooling of members, the weak support of other players in the health system, the resistance to change by certain health workers, the gap between the expectations of the populations and the responses proposed by the decision-makers, the disrespectful behavior of health workers, lack of information are in some cases obstacles to community participation in cameroon.