



Untrained personnel as local government managers, surviving strategies and impact on service delivery in Africa in the early years of independence: A historical appraisal of the state of affairs in West Cameroon.

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Abstract

The development of most African countries has been stifled by the lack of adequate human resources which have remained important ingredients in the advancement of communities. The study, using the example of West Cameroon, argues that it was because of the premature departure of European technocrats from the continent and inability of post colonial governments to invest expediently in human resources that the situation degenerated. As a result of these, local governments had to use none experts and untrained personnel in the management of its affairs and this resulted to poor performance and service delivery. Though some efforts were made by the government in turning the tights, the condition still remained precarious. The study concludes that through the exposition of the pitfalls inherent in the use of untrained personnel in these institutions, policy makers may be encouraged to invest in human resources in their urge for development.

Keywords: Local Government, West Cameroon, managers, staff and Personnel.

1. Introduction

For any effective administration, managers are needed for the management of the affairs of institutions and are very important factors in the socio-economic development process. Where they are lacking, inefficient or inadequately trained, development is stifled no matter how good the policies laid down by the authorities or politicians might be. This therefore means that personnel is inextricably linked to and cannot be disassociated from development. Where there are well trained and qualified public managers, development is rapid and the reverse is true. However, the Report of the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Human Resource Development in the Public Sector (1994; 9) argues that African development has remained diminutive due to the absence of human resources development. Such a view has been supported by Iguisi (2014; 57) as he does not disagree with the opinion of the United Nation Expert Group when he holds that most African Countries have remained relatively poor

and often tagged or condemned to remain so in the foreseeable future as drought, starvation, epidemics, starvation and poor governance has been associated to the continent. These state of affairs has been directed towards the absence of a sufficient or reasonable indigenous managers or personnel in the continent (Iguisi, 2014; 57).

This has been a serious problem to the development of the continent and the root causes can be traced to the colonial period (Wangwe and Rweyemamu, 2001; 5). The departure of the Europeans and the granting of independence without adequate or well trained personnel to manage the transition left a serious vacuum as institutional and human capacities of the newly independent states. Most of the personnel that managed the social and economic development endeavours of the colonial states were withdrawn and a majority of Africans that were untrained and lacked the experience and capacities to animate local developments came into the scene. They

lacked the technological know-how and the necessary skills in management. Things were further compounded by the inability of governments to provide adequate training and education to their peoples in the immediate post independence period. The absence of trained and educated personnel needed for the efficient management of the economy therefore made it impossible for the newly independent states to improve on service delivery or even meet up with the levels and quality of services attained by the colonial authorities. Though efforts were made in investing in human resources or the education of their peoples to meet up with the demand for services, the results were not fast enough to meet up with the requirements of changing socio-economic circumstances. African economies thus moved from progress to crises and improvements obtained started wavering (Wangwe and Rweyemamu, 2001; 5-6).

European colonial mission was for the exploitation of the natural and human resources of the continent. Better still, the colonised nations were to remain producers of raw materials and in this direction, Europeans made sure that they were mostly used as labourers in plantations and construction sites and little or no efforts were made in the development of human resources that would transform the country into a modern and viable economy (Utietiang, 2015: 5; Fall 1993; Northrup, 1998). This was evident in the educational policies that they instituted in their territories. For instance, the British developed a policy whereby education was to be tailored towards the needs of communities. As such, focus was placed on agriculture; native industries, health and the development of capacities that would enable the people manage their affairs easily (Colonial Office, 1925). This therefore made them focus mostly on primary education with little or no attention given to the training of personnel needed in the transformation of these states. Upon graduation from these primary institutions and based on the policy of adaptation to local needs, many went directly into the job market. This therefore worked against the development of a well trained personnel or public service that would manage the colonial states upon independence after the withdrawal of European expatriates (Ojong (2008:59).

Though general to the entire continent, the situation was also true for and faced by the state of West Cameroon immediately after independence. This was more particular to the local government institutions which were the nucleus of colonial development in British colonial Africa. By the policy of Indirect Rule,

Local governments were given authority to manage local affairs and initiate development programs for their communities. They had the right to raise revenue and use them for the development of their communities especially education (Ebune, 2016: 33-38) that was to help in the building of human capacities. Though limited to primary school management, they could send their pupils to post primary schools and these students were expected to return to their local government areas after completion of their studies and help in the development of their respective districts. However, these institutions were not expected to sponsor or trained their students in post secondary institutions of learning as this was preserved for the colonial government.

Though government policy favoured the training of personnel, to be more particularly engineers, as evident in encouragements from the Acting Secretary of the Eastern Province of Nigerian in 1949 when he opined that there was the need to sponsor students in the Higher Institutions of learning as engineers, medical officers and even secretaries that were needed in the development of the territory (File No. Ja/g(1968)1, No. 554, Kom Bum Area Council Executive Comm. Minutes, 98 – 99 National Archives Buea (NAB), 1964), the colonial authorities frowned at local government endeavours in that direction especially in instances where such opportunities were possible only abroad. They were against the fact that these institutions should do so except they could prove that they were economically viable (File No. Sb/g/1953/1, No. 136/3, Scholarships: Government, NA and UNO: 65, NAB). This worked against the effective training of personnel and immediately after independence; the efforts made by these institutions in West Cameroon were not also welcomed by the federal government. It frowned at moves made local governments at training their staff out of the country. It reiterated the fact that the involvement of local governments in education was limited to the elementary and secondary sectors. It was forbidden for any local government to sponsor students out of the country for qualifications that were obtainable in West Cameroon even if their services would be required by the sponsoring local government. Local government officials who engaged in such ventures and approve the disbursement of funds for such a purpose was to be surcharged, they were warned (File No. Ja/g/1968/5, No. CI553, Wum Area Executive Council Committee Minutes 1968, 74-76. NAB).

Such Policies made it difficult for the territory to get qualified or well trained staff or personnel upon

independence when the available European staff had withdrawn. With these states of affairs, the authorities had no choice but to manage with whosoever they could lay hands on. To make up for these deficiencies, some of them were given on the spot or informal training but this never solved the problem of poor performance and this greatly affected the development drives of the country. Though efforts had been made by the government in arresting the situation an empowering these institutions along the years, much is still desired of local government staff as most of them that serve these institutions are not trained and it seem this has remained a colonial legacy. It is because of the absence of trained and qualified staff in most local governments in Cameroon that the study claws back to the immediate postcolonial period to see how these institutions, affected by the same problem, managed the situation and how this affected their development endeavours. For effective demonstration on the situation that affected the entire territory, most examples have been drawn from the Wum Central and Kom Bum Councils which were rural local governments and greatly affected with regard to quality of staff just like other local government areas in West Cameroon. This study may impact not only on local governments but also on central authorities and could caused them to institute policies that will favour capacity building and the hiring or employing qualified personnel in a bid to foster local development in the country.

2. Setting

West Cameroon was the former British Southern Cameroon that was assigned to the British by the League of Nations as a Mandate territory after World War I. Before the outbreak of this war, it was a part of German Kamerun¹ that was colonised in 1884 by the Germans. With the outbreak of the war in Europe in 1914 and its extension to Africa, Britain and France which were part of the Allied forces attacked the territory from their bases in Nigeria and Equatorial Africa respectively. The Anglo-French expedition led to the defeat of the Germans in 1916 and the establishment of a condominium. However, this condominium never lasted long as differences between the two victorious powers, led to the division of the territory into two. The British took one-fifth and the French four-fifth of the territory and this arrangement was confirmed by Article 119 of the Versailles treaty and the two Cameroons (British and French) officially became mandated territories. Due to communication difficulties and disjointed nature of the territory, the

British divided its own sphere into two parts, Northern and Southern Cameroons. This was for easy administrative purposes as they merged into the Northern and Eastern Regions of the Nigerian Protectorate. British Cameroon was therefore ruled as an integral part of Nigeria. These arrangements were further endorsed by the United Nations Organisations after World War II as these territories (British and French Cameroon) became Trusteeships with France and Britain still confirmed as the administering powers. Upon independence, the Northern part of British Cameroons won independence by joining the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Southern part chose to join their brothers, *La République du Cameroun* (French Cameroun) (Colonial Office, 1930; Ealngo, 1997; Ngoh, 2004; Ngoh 1996, Ngoh, 1990, Njeuma, 1989; Fanso, 1989; Mbuagbaw, Brain and Palmer, 1987; Chiabbi, 1989).

The union between these two former mandates and Trust territories of the League of Nations and United Nations gave birth to the Federal Republic of Cameroon with Southern Cameroon taking the appellation West Cameroon and the former French Cameroun becoming, East Cameroon. These two states with different colonial experiences and political backgrounds maintained their administrative organisations and modes of governance bequeathed to them upon independence. It is as a result of these different colonial histories that West Cameroon retained and preserved its local government system and this was equally true for French Cameroon where centralisation was deep rooted. In spite of the retention of the Local government system inherited from the British, major setbacks greatly affected these institutions which were marred by the absence of trained staff in the management of its activities or affairs. However, the situation could only be salvaged by the creation of the Local Government Training Centre in Buea in 1970. Though there was much progress witnessed in local government management after 1971 when the first batch of trainees started leaving the centre, their presence in the field did not solve the problems in its entirety as these problems were still witnessed in the territory after the unification of Cameroon in 1972 (File No. Jb/a/1964/3/P.145, local Government Training Centre Buea, 1964, NAB). It should be noted that the union between British and French Cameroon was dismantled following a referendum in May 1972 and the two federal states were dissolved and the territory became a United Republic. It was only then that attempts were made at harmonising the Local

government systems that were operational in the territory before then.

3. Use of untrained managers and temporary survival strategies

West Cameroon, like other newly independent territories as aforementioned, faced major developmental setbacks caused by the inability of the government in general and local governments to get well or adequately trained staff. It was so difficult to get such personnel that were essential for the efficient management of resources and the development of the nation in general and local government areas in particular. For instance, it was hard to easily come across trained clerks in local government institutions and it was not easy to determine whether this shortage was due to limited financial inducements that could attract them from other public spheres, or urban centres to local authorities (File No. Ci(1956)1, Annual Report, 1956, Wum Division, 3. NAB). That notwithstanding, the absence of training facilities in the territory and the British colonial policy made it impossible to get the required expatriates needed for development. This scenario made it difficult for the implementation of development policies in the early years of independence as these personnel were absent to effectively implement or give leverage to such policies on the ground.

This can be illustrated by the examples of water development schemes that could not be implemented effectively because of the dilemma of getting qualified personnel or experts in that domain to manage them. This was not new as even in the last days of colonialism, the allocation of colonial development and welfare funds for that purpose could not be utilised in some local government areas like the case in Wum Division where £1500 was made available for the construction of rural water supplies in the Local Government. However, this would not see the light of day between 1952 and 1954. The simple reason for the delay was the absence of an expert in the division and for two years it was difficult get one even from other parts of the territory. Besides, there was no trained government inspector in the divisions who would manage the project upon completion immediately. This was not peculiar to the division but a general problem that affected local governments in the colony (File No. Ci(1954)2, No. 5428, Annual Report Wum Division, 1954, 14. NAB).

This situation was not limited to the lack of personnel in the water sector but also extended to the

health sector, for instance, vacancies to the positions of Midwives, Dispensary Attendants, Orderlies and Sanitary Officials as well as Leprosy Inspectors were often launched but most often than not applicants were absent to fill such positions. This greatly disturbed Local Government endeavours in the provision of health facilities to their municipalities. The immediate solution was the training of such experts in specialised institutions that were found in the territory. It was hope that upon completion of their trainings they were to return to the local governments that trained them and make their services available for the area. However, this was not so as they remained the privileged few and their services solicited throughout the territory. Scarcity of these personnel in the territory and high demand for their services made it impossible for some local governments to be able to them as they sought for more lucrative employments elsewhere rather than in the local government areas that trained them. Some of these local governments did not take this lightly and warned that all those trained by them had to take undertakings before engaging in the training exercise. They had to concur that they were ready to serve them for at least two years upon the completion of their training. This became the only strategy through which these institutions could retain trained staffs in their institutions temporary. Another strategy to handle the problem of lack of staff was to make do or manage whosoever they could find interested in a job advertised even if they had little or no knowledge of that particular profession. However, before taking up their duties, they were given informal training (File No. Ja/g/1964/1, No. CI554, Kom-Bum Council, 14. NAB).

These arguments can be substantiated with the experiences of the Kom Bum Local Government between 1965 and 1972. In this direction, a vacancy in the Correspondence department of that Local Government had to be filled by a Customary Court clerk, Daniel N. Chindo in 1965. This was prompted by the fact that it was impossible to find a trained official interested in the position. Even if the reverse was true it was unlikely that he/she would have accepted the job in that local government area or the remunerations offered. Though Chindo had no knowledge about correspondences, he received informal training from the former occupant of that office, Lucas Fultang, the same treatment he received when assuming that office. This is an indication that it was difficult, if not impossible, to find trained personnel in that area and local governments had to grabble with whosoever they could lay hands on. Chindo had to

serve in that office temporary before a suitable replacement or expert in correspondences would be found. The same surviving strategy were also recurrent in the court sector where candidates had to receive informal training before taking up duties as court clerks like in the cases of E. W. Tubuo of the Kom Customary Court and S. K. Manchuo of the Menchum Eastern Court of Appeal in Njinikom, they had to receive informal training for two weeks before taking up their duties as court clerks. This was equally true for L. N. Deh, P. F. Kia, G. N. Mana, C. K. Wallang and A. K. Abang of the Aghem, Zhoa, Abar, Beba-Befang and Esimbi Courts who also received such trainings before assuming their duties as scribes in their various courts in 1970 (File No. Ma/a/1968/1, No. C2/116 Vol. 1/1968/1969/1970/71, Customary Court Statistics, 21. NAB).

4. Service delivery and the enhancement of performance

Though much was done to manage the available staff on the ground even if untrained, efficiency was far from them. Some of these officials were ignorant of their activities and never mastered the procedures and complexities involved and this greatly affected service delivery in West Cameroon. For instance some Court Clerks instead frustrated the course of justice especially when cases were demanded or sent on review. Instead of forwarding them for that purpose, some of them delayed judgement by opening up other cases against the plaintiffs. In extreme cases, they opened up the cases fully again against the defendants in the same lower court that had tried it. Even when such malpractices were reported to the supervisory authorities (District Officers) who immediately ordered for their onward transmission to their offices for review or for immediate implementation of such decisions, some court clerks proved stubborn and refused doing so. They strongly believed that the District Officers were meddling in their activities and only pressure was needed for them to heed or conform to the District Officers' orders. (File No. Md/e/1956/1 No. B Vol. 4, Kom Native Court Area Complaints, 1956, 268-279. NAB). Such attitudes that were common among court clerks in West Cameroon were as a result of ignorance on the governing instruments of Local Government Acts which made them act *ultra varies*.

This was equally true with the rules and regulations governing their functions. Some of them acted arbitrary and assaulted, molested and even handcuffed suspects and innocent citizens. For instance, D. U. Mendi of the Bum court had in 1970

molested and handcuffed a woman in the process of handing over a summons to her husband. This was unacceptable as the woman was not the culprit. His activities were such that he constantly molested individuals and even demanded favour from them. Ignorantly, he believed that his position as court clerk gave him absolute authority over the people under his jurisdiction and he acted with impunity. Such actions against the people he was suppose to serve led to his dismissal as court clerk by his employer, Local Government. Besides, the same court where he served as court clerk slammed him a three month imprisonment/jail sentence and a fine of five pounds (File No. Sb/a/1959/10, No. LG1970, Education and Executive Committee Minutes, 19. NAB).

Furthermore, acting against the norms guiding their professions was mixed with insubordination and disrespect of their superiors. Some of them refused carrying out orders from their authorities. The case of Kantom Venji of the Aghem court is worth mentioning as he refused carrying out orders from his superior, the Aghem court clerk. This insubordination from a messenger was unbelievable as he further entertained complaints from the people directly instead of directing them to the court Clerk. He further received money from plaintiffs secretly and defrauded the local government in that process. Such acts were often frowned upon by the authorities and many of them continued their activities unabated as repeated calls from court clerks and authorities for them to refrain from such activities yielded no fruits. Local governments' Disciplinary Committees was left with little or no choices than to punish them through the suspension and freezing of their increments as was the case of Venji in 1961. Other measures used were punitive transfers. However, because of lack of training and ignorance, many of them did not take these corrective measures seriously and continued with their devilish activities. Some of them even assaulted the dignity of their offices as they were noted for fighting in the streets with their official uniform on and even when on duty. This case of Venji represents such acts in the territory as these activities earned him his dismissal in 1962. He insulted the court clerk publicly and the very court where he was serving found him guilty of misconduct and insubordination and he was dismissed from office (File No. J/g/1962/1, LG2236/S.1, Wum Divisional Council Committee Minutes, 1962, 4. NAB).

While disrespect and insubordination was rife, negligence drew them closer and was a cankerworm

that affected local government managers or staff. Dedication to their service and the spirit of self abnegation associated with local government staff was absent. For instance, Killa Bi Ori, the Cattle Control Assistant for Kom, refused furnishing the local government with information regarding dry season cattle grazing in Kom in 1962. This was necessary for the issuance of licenses through which funds were to be raised by that institutions. Even when the District Officer intervened and ordered that this be done with immediate effect, the order was ignored. This followed a query or warning from his employers and any act of his in that direction was to warrant his dismissal. Besides, his increments were withheld for one year (Ibid., 39). Worthy to note is the fact that many of Local Government staff stayed away from duty without any justification. For instance, N. K. Bame of the Wum local government did not only insubordinate to his superiors but stayed away from work without permission on several occasions and never cared the consequences this had on local government activities. In a similar vein, Boniface Ntam, the court clerk and Minute Secretary for the Kom Clan Council stayed away from Council meetings constantly. P. F. Kiyoo, the road overseer for Kom, was not different as he absented from duty and this led to the suspension of his increments for six months in 1962 (Ibid., 5, 14 and 23). Moses Ayam, a Court Messenger, was also negligent in performing his duties resulting to the escape of forty three detainees from custody in 1967. They had been arrested for tax defaulting and they all escaped without being charged to court nor taxes paid due to the carelessness of Ayam. This act was unpardonable and he was dismissed from his functions on the 27th of April 1967 (File No. Ja/9/1964/6, No. 533, Wum Central Committee Minutes, 1964, NAB). Negligence from personnel was therefore a setback to local government endeavours in the provision of services. This impediment was also associated with the lack of cooperation.

This was common with cattle control Assistants and Court clerks who never cooperated in the resolution of farmer grazier conflicts that fell under local government authority. For example, in Aghem, the absence of cooperation between the two worked against local government endeavours in the management of farmer grazier conflicts. The Cattle Control Assistant was mishandled, assaulted and constantly insulted by women for taking farmer grazier matters to court. Such scenarios were provoked by the court clerk who was impartial when such matters

were brought to him by his colleagues for adjudication. He took sides with the women and never tabled them to court for judgment. Insistence from the Cattle Control Assistants for this to be done fell on deaf ears and this became a characteristic feature of areas where cattle was reared and conflicts intensified. Such acts were frowned upon by local government authorities and when some of these clerks were fired, like the case of the Aghem court clerk in 1969 as he was relieved off his functions in the court and transferred to the central office of the Wum Central Council for other duties (File No. Ma/a/1968/1, No. C2.116 Vol. 1, 1968/69, 70/71, Customary Court, 16. NAB).

The lack of cooperation between staff, couple with negligence and insubordination was not beneficial to the development drives of local governments. It may be argued that the level of training and education was partly responsible for this state of affairs. However, it is doubtful whether if they were qualified individuals, local governments should have been able to pay for these services because most of these institutions were barely surviving financially. It was even difficult for them to procure sufficient revenue for the effective provision of services. Instead of some of these institutions recruiting more qualified staff, they tended to favoured not only less qualified ones but also dropped or retrench some of the existing staff because of difficulties in paying their salaries. This can be illustrated with the case of the Fungom Customary Court where four of its staff (B. Kum, Philip Amuam, Free Boy Kum and Moses Wong) were drooped. This was equally true for the Esimbi and Aghem Courts where similarly, Peter Ayeh and Ben Acha were dropped as Messengers. The reduction in staff had a serious effect on Local Government performance and their output. Fungom area that was so large when compared the other clan courts in West Cameroon had to manage with a few messengers only, seven Messengers down from eleven and other clans even had to manage with one each (File No. Ma/a/1964/3, No. C2/702 Vol. 2, Reorganisation of Customary Courts, 1965, 327. NAB).

Though such acute lack of local government staff after independence, as indicated earlier, was as a result of the sudden withdrawal of the available personnel by the colonial authorities, attempts to seek for immediate solution to the crises by the government of West Cameroon and that of the federation seemed was slow. However, the negative performance of untrained local government staff and expansion of local government services facilitated/necessitated the need

for the institution of a curriculum or institution that had to train the needed human resources and this became of prime importance to the government. Though efforts were made to train some administrative personnel in the newly established School of Administration and Magistracy in Yaounde and overseas, the local government sector was neglected (File No. Jb/a/1964/3/P.145, local Government Training Centre Buea, 1964, 1. NAB). With the absence of local government training facilities, very few staff and authorities especially court clerks in West Cameroon could even boast of having seen the instruments governing their activities like in the case of the Native Court Ordinance and Customary Law Ordinances or laws passed by local government assemblies in the colonial and post colonial periods. Some, like the tax collectors, had never seen the Taxation ordinance nor successive amendments talk less of exploiting them and the resultant effect was the lack of information on the legal and administrative frameworks on which Local Governments operated (Ibid., 18). It was because of these pitfalls in West Cameroon that the Local Government Training Centre was instituted in 1970 in Buea to train local government managers. By 1971, the first batch of admitted students started leaving the institutions and became the first trained Local Government personnel in the country since independence (Ibid. 300-430). This greatly enhanced the performance of Local Staff and efficiency started creeping in.

5. Conclusion

The early years of independence was marked by the absence of qualified adequately trained personnel in Africa especially in the local government sector. It is because of these shortcomings that the paper using the example of the State of West Cameroon argues that the situation was precarious and greatly affected the development drives of these institutions. The use of untrained staff led to the poor delivery of services

as inefficiency became rife among them. Ignorance on their functions and activities did not make things better as the lack of knowledge on the rules and regulations guiding their professions made them act *ultra varies*. This also made them insubordinate to their superiors and cooperation between these employees was farfetched. Negligence too was rife and all these greatly affected the production capacity and performance of local government. Furthermore, where technical services were concerned and non experts or unqualified staff could not be managed, projects had to wait until a period when these experts would be found and this greatly worked against the developmental endeavours of these institutions.

It was because of these pitfalls that efforts were made by these institutions in training their own staff. Upon completion of training, many of them rejected working in the local government areas that trained them and preferred taking up more lucrative jobs in other institutions. However, the creation of the Local Government Training Centre in Buea in 1970 by the federal government of Cameroon to train local government staff came as a welcome relief to these institutions and after 1971, when the first batch of students were leaving the centre, there was the hope that local government performance and service delivery would improve. Though progress has been made in this direction since 1970, much is still desired as some of these institutions still use untrained staff in most of their operations. It is hoped that policy makers and local government authorities, by accessing this paper will be informed on the troubles inherent in the use of untrained personnel and the negative influences this might have on the performance of these institutions. In this way, they may double their efforts in the training and improving of the capacities of their workers or better still employ and make use of mostly qualified and trained personnel in local government services.

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Footnotes

- ¹ The name of the territory has three different spelling indicating the three colonial experiences of the country. This is the German appellation. Meanwhile the British spell it as Cameroon and the French Cameroun. For the purpose of this paper, the British appellation is used because the area under focus was colonised by the British.

