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**Central authority Agents and Personnel Management in Local Governments, Anglophone (West Cameroon, 1961-1966: a Source of Conflict and Setback to Performance**

by

**Protus Mbeum Tem**

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Increased interests in decentralisation and devolution of power to local authorities has been marred by the absence or inability of these institutions to recruit well qualified and trained staffs in Africa and the only solution has been the use of central governments' employee in the management of technical services. Though necessary in the development drive of these institutions, the study holds that the dual role played by these officials especially in the fields of agriculture, health, veterinary, finance, forestry and public works instead rolled back local government performance in West Cameroon. It further argues that it was impossible to control them when they flawed, defaulted on failed in exercising their duties properly. This was equally true for supervisory authorities who were federal government officials and above the authority of local governments. These stalled local government performance and engraved conflicts with the federal authorities and some state departments in West Cameroon.

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**Introduction**

Decentralisation has been on the increase around the world in general and developing countries in particular since 1990. This urge for decentralisation is because; local governments have remained one of the best means for the effective provision of local services and to the satisfaction of the local populations. With these positive characteristics of decentralisation, it was hoped that development will be accelerated in developing countries but most of the governments never took into consideration the necessity of training or recruiting staffs or experts that were needed to facilitate the advancement of local government areas. This explains why, most local governments do not have the qualified staff.<sup>1</sup> Besides, Gaudez describes the existing administrative personnel as uneducated, lethargic and imbued with little mobility.<sup>2</sup> As such these personnel are/were not prepared or had the ability to effectively implement laws and this resulted to the inability of these newly created institutions to effectively perform their duties as providers of social and economic services to their people. Hence, one of the greatest set back to the performance of local governments was/is the absence of a well trained personnel to manage the affairs of these institutions.

The immediate solution to the crises has often been the duplication of the functions of central government personnel both at the states and federal governments' levels as they are also charged with the responsibility of managing local government affairs or coordinating activities of its untrained employees in related departments. Most often than not, this innovation has often led to conflict between local governments officials or managers and central authority agents. This is because; it has become difficult for local governments to manage these officials who are responsible to the central authorities and not to the latter. This state of affairs have greatly affected development as disagreements and conflict have often led to the unsuccessful implementation of local government policy or poor provision of services to their people. This has been caused by unnecessary delay and the struggle for dominance between the two levels of government. Things are further compounded by the use of the regional or state, divisional and sub divisional administrations (supervisory authorities) that represents not only the presidents of the republic but also the central governments in general. These arrangements have made things difficult for local governments to effectively manage their affairs without interference which have often been unbeneficial to their performance.

For Instance, though the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon sets out a decentralised unitary state with the regional and local councils given some autonomy in the management of local affairs, the supervisory role of state officials still remains intact. Section 3 of Article 55 indicates that “The state shall exercise supervisory powers over regional and local authorities ....”<sup>3</sup> This prescription has been expanded and elaborated upon by the 2004 law on the Orientation of Decentralisation in Cameroon. As per section 66(1) and (2) of the Bill on the Orientation of Decentralisation in Cameroon, central authority officials (the president, Ministry of Regional and Local Authorities (for now, Territorial Administration and Decentralisation), the Regional and Local Authorities are the supervisory authorities of local governments. Section 67 spells out the roles of Regional and Divisional Authorities in decentralised institutions as presented in the except that follows;

- (1) The Governor shall be the delegate of the State in the Region. In this capacity, he shall safeguard national interests; ensure administrative control, respect of rules and regulations in force and order. He shall supervise and coordinate, under the authority of the government, the running of the State Civilian administrative services in the Regions.
- (2) The Senior Divisional Officer shall exercise supervisory authority of the State over Councils.
- (3) The Governor and Senior Divisional Officer shall represent the President of the Republic in their administrative units.
- (4) They shall also represent the government and each minister and shall have authority over deconcentrated government services in their administrative units exemptions set out by the decree of the President of the Republic.<sup>4</sup>

From these four subsections of section 66 of the Bill, it is crystal clear that central authority agents have important roles to play in decentralised local authorities in Cameroon. Since these officials represent the president and acts as chiefs or coordinators of all government services as well as personnel in their jurisdictions, it is indubitable that they can influence the activities of local governments directly or indirectly through departmental heads who coordinate the activities of local government staff and services. The influence of these officials in local government is further compounded by section 68 of the Bill which stipulates that all instruments issued by local authorities

must be forwarded to them for approval or deferment of the enforcement of such decisions. This also has to do with individual and statutory decisions taken by the presidents of the regional councils and mayors of local governments which are to be forwarded to these officials.<sup>5</sup>

Besides, budget (initial and annex) below-the-line account and the authorisation of special expenditure must be approved by the supervisory authority. Loans and loan guarantees, agreements with institutions, organisations and individuals abroad, decisions on land related matters and the issuance and execution of contracts, securities and shares and recruitment of some staff among others needs the approval of the governors and senior divisional officers.<sup>6</sup> It therefore becomes clear that these officials, especially the senior divisional officers with regard to local authorities, are executive agents of local governments as they implement the decisions of these elected local authorities.<sup>7</sup>

It does not mean that local authorities have solely been placed on the beg and call of central authorities as sections 71–77 of the Bill provides remedies for the overzealousness of supervisory authorities.<sup>8</sup> Hence, the deliberative role of local government Assemblies have remained intact.<sup>9</sup> This is equally true with the independence enjoyed by the mayor or local government chairman who manages the affairs of the Council.<sup>10</sup> However, from the provisions of Sections 66–70 on the Bill on the Orientation of Decentralisation in Cameroon, it is comprehensible that the central government through the ministry (Territorial Administration and Decentralisation) controls the regional councils and local governments. This is an apparent indication that they can relatively influence their performance, as discussed earlier, as management tasks are shared between central government agencies and local government authorities through the de-concentration, delegation and devolving of public services.

With the implementation of legal frameworks on the decentralisation process in Cameroon, it is normal that a write-up of this nature be evoked in order to examine previous attempts at devolving power and the use of central authorities in affairs that falls within the jurisdiction of central authorities and results recorded in relation to the performance of these institutions especially in a multi-party political system just like the case today. This is because the situation is not new in Cameroon, especially in Anglophone Cameroon<sup>11</sup> where local governments enjoyed some amount of autonomy in the management of local affairs. Before the reunification of Cameroon and immediate post colonial period (before the disbanding of all political parties and the institution of mono-

partism), local government played important roles in the management of local affairs and the use of senior divisional officers and central authority agents in local government affairs greatly affected the performance of the former.

In this direction, local government shared staff with the federal government in technical services especially in agriculture, health, finance, forestry, veterinary and public works sectors. Since local governments not in possession of trained experts or technicians, divisional heads of their departments controlled the activities of local government in their areas of concern. However, these departmental heads were neither responsible to the local government officials where they served nor the ministry of local government that had authority over local government employee. As a result, problems loomed since they could not be brought to order by local governments or the ministry in charge of these institutions if they failed in their responsibilities, flawed local government orders, acted against regulations or policies. This ignited conflicts between these officials and local government authorities. Such outbreak of conflicts had a negative impact on local government performance as tasks were either left not properly done, uncompleted or not carried out. These states of affairs were compounded by supervisory authorities that constantly interfered and obstructed local government activities.

Just like the case of technical services, supervisory authorities were answerable to the federal government and took orders not from the Ministry of Local Government on issues that dealt with local government. Instead of acting like supervisors or better still advisers, they behaved as overlords and suppressed local government officials and their representatives. Even when they acted ultra vires, they could not be sanctioned even by the Prime Minister of West Cameroon and only the intervention of the Inspector of Administration for West Cameroon (representative of the federal government in the States) who had direct control over them could the Ministry of Local Government take solace which was seldom so. In this way, their activities greatly stalled local government performance.

It is because of these problems faced between local governments and agents of the central authority between 1961 and 1966 in West Cameroon that the study revisits the crises in a bid to make the Cameroonian authorities tap from its shortcomings in order to avoid such occurrences in its implementation of the current decentralisation regulations in Cameroon which still provides for the

joint use of services/staff between local governments and departmental technical services of the ministries or central authority agents and the use of supervisory authorities in the management of local affairs. Worthy to note is the fact that the practice of the joint use of staff between the central and local authorities was a colonial legacy in West Cameroon. Before 1961, the absence of trained personnel at the local level had made the British colonial authorities to use technical staffs in local affairs especially in the agriculture, health, education, veterinary, finance, and forestry and public works departments. After the departure of the British, laws governing local government affairs in the territory never changed as they were carried over to the post colonial state and the state of affairs continued unabated between 1961 and 1966.

### **Redeployment and Assignment of Staff and Service Delivery**

Local government staff in agriculture, health, veterinary, finance, forestry and public works sectors was jointly controlled by their employee (local government) and the divisional heads of these departments in the areas where they served. Though they managed local government staff, these departmental heads were neither responsible to local governments nor the ministry of local government that had authority over local government employee. This never went down well as instructions from the local government ministry's offices contradicted with those that came from the divisional and provisional technical heads. Though not voluntary, it was not surprising as this was common with the administration and management of local government employees.

Technical service heads had no control over the movement and transfer of local government staff but needed the approval of their employers to redeploy them when the need arose. For instance, the outbreak of diseases or the entry of new cattle from and into the divisions of the territory needed temporary displacement of local government staff from one location or post to another. This was often difficult as local government authorities clashed with technical service heads over redeployment to areas of need and this had a negative effect on service delivery. It was difficult to solve these problems and arrest the outbreak of diseases outpaced the speed of officials due to administrative bottlenecks. Instances were common where local government staffs were granted leave without the knowledge of the heads of technical departments that used their services. This made the work of departmental technical service heads very difficult. At times, they only discovered on the sport when responding to an emergency situation that these staffs were nowhere to be found in their duty posts.<sup>12</sup>

This was very common with the cattle and veterinary assistants employed by local governments. The fact that technical departments could not transfer them without the approval of local government authorities made things worse as new ideas and efficiency in their performance was nil. Their continuous stay in an area for a very long time was a negative factor to their performance. Some had fallen out with the administration and their legislators and as a result, many of them were victimised and could not carry out their duties well. They found it difficult in initiating projects that may benefit their local government areas for fear of stepping on the toes of an administrator, influential councillor or parliamentarian. Even assignments from technical heads were seldom carried out by local government officials if this could produce similar effects. They openly went against the decisions of technical heads for the fear of igniting public criticism and this greatly tarnished the good works and image of technical departmental heads.<sup>13</sup>

Disagreement over staff management greatly affected output as departmental heads disagreed with local government officials over the use and redeployment of staff. For instance, the Kom-Bum-Council had trained four sanitary officers in the Wum Divisional Hospital but refused releasing them to the divisional medical officer who had requested their services. He wanted them to remain under his direct control and felt that their services were not only needed by the Kom-Bum local government but also by the entire division. Kom-Bum rejected this outrightly as it argued that they were trained not for the division but to serve in their local government area. This not only affected the entire division that lacked such personnel but brought unhealthy relations with the medical department.<sup>14</sup> Such disagreement over staff issues was also recorded in the forestry sector as local governments quarrelled over the use of staff with the forestry department.

In order to solve these problems, moves were made in amalgamating these services. The West Cameroon government decided to follow the precedence set by the British colonial authorities in 1959 when the forestry sector of local governments were merged with departmental services. For instance, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 1963, the veterinary sector was merged. J. Thrup, Permanent, Secretary in the Ministry of Local Government, empowered the technical heads of these services in West Cameroon to lord over local government staff in those departments. However, this could not be extended to other departments. This can be substantiated with the agricultural sector, where it was impossible to merge local government and central authorities' activities as separate staffs were needed to enforce local

government legislature on agriculture. This would have been undesirable for the onus of responsibility to have fallen on the departments.<sup>15</sup>

### **Appointments of Financial Officials and Revenue Collection**

With the dwindling relations between technical departments and local governments, the government of West Cameroon, through the Ministry of local government, continued to maintain salient relations between them. This was to arrest such disagreements between them and ensure that they were more performing through the joint implementation of rules and regulations that were in force. However, this firm grip instead resulted to problems between the Ministry and Local Governments. A good example is the case of Fulani leaders and tax collectors (Alhahidi, Assan and Bongoji). These leaders were not popular among their people and also not performing well in the collection of taxes. As such, they were dismissed by their local governments.

The immediate reason for the dismissal of Assan was that his people refused paying taxes to him and preferred the local government treasury. On the case of alhahidi, he had refused presenting his cattle for assessment on several occasions in the 1964/1965 finance year. Besides, he had been incapacitated for many years due to ill health and could not carry out his functions as tax collector. With his poor performance and insubordination to the Kom-Bum local government, there was the fear that if he was not replaced as tax collector, finances from his area of jurisdiction would not have been collected. Though assisted by an aid in the collection of jangali<sup>16</sup> before 1964, the assistant had disappeared and was no where to be found. Added to this, Bongoji refused collecting taxes and even defaulted paying his own taxes. Though he was arrested several times in the 1961/1962 finance year, for the above reasons, his attitude continued unabated.<sup>17</sup> In spite of the show of bad faith and poor performance, the local government could not dismiss them because they needed the authority of the central authorities to do so. However, their uncontrolled behaviour and disrespect for their local government led to their dismissal by the Kom-Bum which called on the central authorities to confirm their decision.

Because of the important role played by central authorities or divisional heads of other units in local government affairs in West Cameroon, the Ministry rejected their dismissals. It argued that, it was the responsibility of the Cattle Control Assistants through the district officers to demand for the dismissal



and appointment of jangali tax collectors and not local governments. With this empowerment given to District Officers in the management of local government affairs in West Cameroon, these institutions were powerless and could not discipline their staff directly and this greatly affected the performance of local government staff. The situation was so deplorable that the central authorities remained intransigent to the plight of local governments in relation to staff who were not performing well and all attempt at bringing them to order without the blessing of technical or divisional heads that represented the central authorities proved futile. Even when strong appeals were made to bring order, the Ministry of local government stood firm on this decision and could not bulge.

For instance, as aforementioned, Bongoji's suspension and the appointment of Gariga were rejected out rightly by the Ministry of Local Government. Even the strongly warded claims against him in 1965 by the Kom Bum local government yielded no fruits and here is an except;

Ardo Bangoji does not cooperate with his people. Bangoji had had jangali cases outstanding in the customary court. Bangoji had had reports from his people refusing him to be their Ardo and report also came to the hearing of the authorities who have decided to have a close eye on Bangoji. Bangoji has not completed paying his jangali for the year 1962/63 and is again sued in court.<sup>18</sup>

Such attitude from an Ardo who represented not only the Fulani but also acted as arm of the administration was unhealthy for the development of the local government area. He was also a bad example not only to the Fulani in Ndawara but also to all jangali tax payers in West Cameroon. Such attitudes had negative effects on tax revenue and development drives of local governments in West Cameroon. Faced with these problems, local governments in West Cameroon had to collect taxes directly from tax payers without using these agents, local tax collectors, as was the case of Ndawara and Bum. What is clear is that the dismissal of the Ardoen was quashed by the Ministry of Local Government and when such dismissals came up, local governments were queried or accused of taking matters into their hands assuming that every decision they took needed to be acknowledged by the central authorities or their representatives, technical heads.

The involvement of central authority agents slowed down local government activities. For instance, even when tax collectors were appointed and handed over to the tax Inspectors for onward

transmission and approval by the West Cameroon's Ministry of Local Government authorities, the list was either ignored or tempered with and this brought tensions and frustrations not only between local governments and the Central authority agents but also with the Ministry of Local Government. This can be illustrated with the appointment of jangali tax collectors in 1965 by the Kom-Bum Local government. According to the regulation in force, it was the Inspector to transmit the list of tax collectors appointed by local governments to the Ministry of Local Government for approval. As aforementioned, Inspectors tempered with these lists by deleting or adding names without the knowledge of local governments that appointed these officials or appointed them. As in the case mentioned above, when the list of approved tax collectors was received by the Kom-Bum Local Government, some names had been replaced. The Tax Inspector for the Wum Division had skilfully inserted some names and at the same time removed others. In this exercise, the name of Gariga who replaced Bangoji was missing.

Though such malpractices from technocrats of technical departments were not welcomed by local governments, they were powerless since they had no authority over the Inspectors who were neither employees of the Ministry of Local Government in Buea nor that of local governments. These activities of central agents brought tensions between them (Local governments and Inspectors) in the one hand and with the Ministry of Local Government on the other hand. In spite of these misgivings from local governments, nothing could be done as the Ministry had the final say.<sup>19</sup>

### **Supervisory Authorities' Interference and Local Government Performance**

The Senior Divisional Officers and District Officers were the supervisory authorities of local government. In federal matters, they were answerable to the Federal Inspector of administration for West Cameroon or better still the Ministry of Interior. Concerning local government affairs, they were to take orders from the Ministry of Local Government. It therefore means that, they supervised all government staff in their areas of command.<sup>20</sup> What should be understood is that they were to act as advisers or supervisors to local governments and not to take direct control of services provided by these institutions. However, their role as supervisor of technical services gave them indirect power over local government activities. Instead of taking orders from the Local Government Ministry in Buea on matters related to local government, they acted as overlords and suppress local government officials and their representatives. Though resisted by local government officials in West Cameroon,

the Ministry of Interior constantly reminded them of the dominant role senior divisional officers and district officers played in local government activities. This can be illustrated with the 1965 District Officers' Conference where they were reminded of their duties in local government affairs. It was incumbent on them to attend all general and committee meetings organised by local governments. Their advisory role was not only reiterated, but it was also made succinctly clear that they had to supervise local government staff, prepare general assemblies and committees' agendas, endorsed and process minutes of these bodies before transmitting them to the Ministry of Interior and local government among others.<sup>21</sup>

All these responsibilities imbued on them gave the supervisory authorities supreme power over local government administrators for they could not be controlled or brought to order neither by local governments' officials in areas where they were serving or the Ministry of Local Government when they acted *ultra vires*. This had a serious setback to local government performance since they could not be disciplined even by the West Cameroon Local Government Service Commission when at fault when discharging their duties. This explains why they could embezzle or mismanage local government funds but could not be surcharged by the Director of West Cameroon Audit who did so in the case of local government employee. Even the Prime Minister of West Cameroon could not bring them to order for they were responsible to the federal and not the state government. The only solution to the problem was local government reliance on the Inspector of Administration of West Cameroon who had direct control over them whenever they were at fault.<sup>22</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The process of decentralisation has won favour in Africa over the years but the performance of decentralised units or local governments has been a cause for concern. This had been caused by the continuous interference of central governments' agents in the affairs of these institutions and the resultant effect has not only been conflicts between officials of these two levels of government but also poor performance in the delivery of services by local governments. The study drawing from the experiences in West Cameroon in the Federal Republic Cameroon argues that the absence of trained personnel was one of the reasons that facilitated the use of central authority agents in local affairs especially in the management and coordination of the technical activities of local government. It holds that the overlapping functions of technical departmental heads led to conflicts with local authorities

in the redeployment and assignment of staff. In this direction, technical service heads could use local government staff but could not redeploy or assign them without the authority of local governments when their services were needed elsewhere, outside their posts. They needed the authority of local government authorities before they could do so. Where they objected conflict ensued and this affected not only relations between them but also impacted negatively on service delivery. This was equally true for the appointments and dismissal of staff. At times, technical heads disregarded local government appointments or dismissals that needed their endorsements before being approved by the Ministry of Local Government. Conflicts were further facilitated by the frequent tampering on lists of appointees and dismissals by the technical heads. This was often directed through them for onward transmission to the Ministry of Local Government but they deleted and inserted new names without the knowledge local governments. Such activities never augured well for the development efforts of local governments and things were further made worse by the supervisory powers enjoyed by senior divisional officers in their capacities as representatives of the president or federal government in their areas of jurisdictions. They could not be controlled or brought to order by the government of West Cameroon when they acted out of the norms governing their responsibilities.

Though the use of central authority agents and supervisory authorities in the Cameroon federation was problematic, the government of the United Republic and successive government did not disband the use of these officials in the management of local government affairs. The study thus concludes that to offset constant conflicts between local and central government officials, there is the need for the present government of Cameroon and other African countries to revisit these problems faced in West Cameroon and search for a harmonious wellbeing between these officials. This can best be done by reducing the powers enjoyed by the central authorities and their agents and local governments given more autonomy in the management of their own affairs. Moreover, improvements in staff capacities and human resources of local governments in order for them to effectively manage local affairs and fit into the shoes of the central authorities' agents will be a welcome relief.

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<sup>1</sup> Kange Elizabeth, *The Control and Management of Local Government Finances: the Case of Buea Municipality*, Unpublished Research Project Submitted to the Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Buea, Cameroon, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> P. Gaudez, *La Reforme de Collectivités Locales*, Paris Colin, 1975, 68.

<sup>3</sup> Article 55 (3) of the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon.

<sup>4</sup> Bill No. 762/PJL/AN on the Orientation of Decentralisation, No. 51/AN, Republic of Cameroon, Section 66 (1), (2), (3) and (4).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Section 69.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Section 70.

<sup>7</sup> P. Ouston, *France in the Twentieth Century*, London, Kegan Paul International, 1972, p.180.

<sup>8</sup> See Section 71-77 of Bill No. 762/PJL/AN on the Orientation of Decentralisation, No. 51/AN, Republic of Cameroon for details.

<sup>9</sup> Law No. 2004/018 of 22 July, 2004 to lay down Rules Applicable to Council in Cameroon; Section 26.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Section 58.

<sup>11</sup> This area is the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon that became part of the British Mandate of the League of Nations after the ousting of the Germans that had colonised the territory in 1884. In 1946, it became a trust territory of the United Nations Organisation. Upon independence in 1961, it reunited with French Cameroon which was a mandate and trusteeship territory of the French. In the same manner like the former it belonged to the British. Better still, the departure of the Germans after World War I had caused the division of the territory between the French and the British (who had driven them out of the territory in 1916) and upon independence, the two territories reunited to form the Cameroon Federation with British Cameroon becoming West Cameroon and the former French territory taking the appellation, East Cameroon. For detailson the political evolution and organisation of the territory se the works of T. E. Mbuagbaw, R. Brian and R. Palmer (1987). *A History of the Cameroon*, New Edition. Essex: Longman; V. J. Ngoh (Ed.) (2004) *Cameroon from a Federation to a Unitary State, 1961-1972, A critical Study*. Limbe: Design House; V. J. Ngoh (1990) *Constitutional Developments in Southern Cameroons*. Yaounde: CEPER; V. J. Ngoh (1996) *History of Cameroon Since 1800*. Limbe: Pressbook; M. Njeuma (1989) *Introduction to the History of Cameroon*. London: Macmillan Publishers, V. G. Fanso (1989) *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges, Vol. 2. The Colonial and Post*

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<sup>12</sup> NAB (National Archive Buea), Ja/a(1959)1, No. LG1890, Amalgamation of NA and Government Services, 1959, p.2.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> NAB, Ja/g/1964/1, No. 554, Kom-Bum Council Committee Minutes, 1964, p.160.

<sup>15</sup> NAB, Ja/a(1959)1, No. LG1890, Amalgamation, p.42.

<sup>16</sup> Tax Paid on cattle.

<sup>17</sup> NAB, Ja/g/1964/1, No. 554, Kom-Bum Council, pp.1-3.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, 221

<sup>21</sup> Protus Mbeum Tem, The Federal Administration Permeating the West Cameroon (Southern Cameroons) Local Government System in a Reunited Cameroon 1961-1972, *Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research*; Vol:8 No:1:January- March:2017.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

**Author Bio:** Protus Mbeum Tem holds a PhD in Economic and Social History and also a Diplôme D'études Approfondies and Maitrise in the History of International Relations from the University of Yaounde I as well as a Bachelor of Arts Degree in History from the University of Buea. He lectures History at the Catholic University of Cameroon, Bamenda and the Bamenda University of Science and Technology, Cameroon and also serves as part time lecturer in Peace, Conflict and International Relations at the Pan African Institute for Development, West Africa, Bamenda Centre. He has published several articles in international peer review journals and his research interests include but not limited to; conflicts, colonialism, culture, politics of integration, local government studies and governance.

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