

FLAWS IN THE NATIVE ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM IN SOUTHERN CAMEROONS: A FACTOR FOR THE 1949 CREATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS

Tem Protus Mbeum

Lectures History at the Catholic University of Cameroon, Bamenda and at the Bamenda University of Science and Technology, Cameroon

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the factors that necessitated the creation of local government units in Southern Cameroons in 1949. It contends that inefficiency of the native administration system, improper financial management and administrative delay were factors that contributed to these reforms. These involved the federation of native authorities into financially viable local government entities that were granted some autonomy in the management of local affairs. To make them more effective, the educated elite that were hitherto excluded from the native administration were included in the system and the elections principle was introduced. For this study, data was drawn from secondary sources and archival materials and the thematic technique or approach was adopted in presenting the rationales for the institution of these reforms in British Southern Cameroons.

Introduction

The creation of local government (LG) units has been the concern of most governments in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular since the 1990s. Flaws in the existing systems have often been advanced as one of the reasons for the proliferation of these units. In spite of this argument, problems have continued to perturb these structures and the genuineness of the process has remained questionable. It is because the constant quest for the creation of these units in

Cameroon that the paper highlights reasons that accounted for their inception in British Southern Cameroon (institutions inherited by the post colonial administration of West Cameroon) in order for governments and pundits who propagate this proliferation to learn from previous experiences and make valuable and time honoured decisions on such issues.

The genesis of the native administration system in Southern Cameroons can be traced to the departure of the Germans from Cameroon in 1916. This led to the division of the territory between the English and French who had to initiate policies that would ensure efficiency in the administration of their dominions. In order to achieve this, the British divided their territory into two parts, Northern and Southern Cameroons, and incorporated them into the Nigerian protectorate. This arrangement was borne by communication difficulties as it would have been difficult and expensive to coordinate affairs between the North and South of the territory because of a seventy kilometres narrow strip of land that separated them.¹

The Northern part that was regarded as a natural continuation of the Hausa and Fulani regions of Nigeria was administered as part of the Northern Province while the south was merged with the Eastern Province. From 1916 to 1921, no official administrative British policy had been instituted. It was only in 1923 that the British colonial policy was officially adopted and in accordance with the 1923 Order in Council for the Cameroons, the Nigerian laws became applicable in Southern Cameroon.² In this direction, the British introduced the Native Administration System that was styled Indirect Rule (IR). This entailed the use of indigenous African chiefs and traditional institutions in the administration of the colonial states.

In spite of this attempt at using indigenous chiefs and institutions to effectively administer the territory and ensure efficiency, problems still persisted. Though some effort had been made in addressing the administrative problems faced in the 1920s and 1930s through the creation of more Native Authorities (NA), much was still desired. Problems were further enraged by the outbreak of the Second World War and the quest of educated or Western Elite who were disregarded and excluded from the administration as chiefs remained the local administering authorities. Besides, the return of the soldiers from the war aggravated the situation as the

demand for reforms intensified. Such agitations were also engendered by the poor performance of the NAs in the provision of the socio-economic needs of their people. All these grievances led to the initiation of reforms by the colonial authorities resulting to the administrative organisation of the territory.

These included the creation of new administrative Divisions that became local government (LG) units eventually. For this purpose, the Bamenda Division was upgraded into a Province and subdivided into the Bamenda, Wum and Nkambe Divisions that became (LG) districts in their own right. In the Southern part of the territory, Mamfe Division was created and with Kumba and Victoria became the Cameroons Province. These LG units were mergers of NAs that had existed as independent political units. With these developments in 1949, they became federations of the newly created LG units. The amalgamation of the NAs into LGs led to the development of a two-tier system of administration, that is, the Divisional LG units on the one hand and the Subordinate NAs or Village Councils on the other.³

While Divisional LG Assemblies deliberated and legislated for their Divisions, the authorities of Subordinate NAs were limited to the clan. Though they had legislative and deliberative powers, resolutions and decisions arrived at were subject to the approval of the Divisional LG Assemblies before they could take effect.⁴ They formed electoral colleges to the Divisional LGs as their representatives that were elected by universal suffrage in turn chose members who represented the Clan in the Divisional Assembly.⁵ In spite of the merging of these NAs into LGs, they were still granted autonomy in deliberating and taking decisions on local matters concerning their areas.

They collected taxes on behalf of the Divisional Council and enforced LG legislation but they could equally reject any law or regulations that they deemed not in the interest of their people. Villages were electoral units of the Clan Councils and special interest groups deemed underprivileged were granted special representation to ensure that all groups were equally represented and their voices were heard in matters affecting them.

The British colonial authorities believed that creating these units would not only facilitate development but promote efficiency in the administration of the territory. As a result of this design, the Colonial Secretary, Oliver Stanley, opined in 1947 that “Without an efficient system of ... government, the great mass of the African population will derive only partial benefits from the monies for development by the colonial legislature.”⁶ An efficient system of administration of the territory was needed if these development objectives were to be achieved. This required instituting reforms that would bring the administration closer to the people through the creation of Divisional LG units and ensure that local people were part and parcel of the decision making process.

Before 1949, the colonial authorities were aware of the inefficiency of the native administration system. Southern Cameroonians and other colonial people had called for reforms in the entire system especially between 1939 and 1945, and during the Second World War.⁷ It is because of these demands and shortcomings of the system that the Permanent Secretary for local government in West Cameroon in 1967 stated that, “If the war had not come in 1939, measures would have been taken then to reform the system”.⁸

Though one school of thought argues that the Second World War and the United Nations’ desire to prepare all Trust Territories for immediate independence were responsible⁹, this paper argues that the poor management system greatly catalysed these changes. Before moving into the crux of the matter, it is useful to present the native administration system in Southern Cameroons before 1949.

British Policy of Indirect Rule and its Implementation before 1949

Much literature has been written on the IR as an official colonial policy of the British since its inception.¹⁰ This system has been described by Padmore as “... the system of governing Blacks through their own Chiefs and political institutions under the control of European officials with the minimum of interference ...”.¹¹ According to Halerch, the institution of the IR policy came into force in tropical Africa after the First World War. Before this time, to him, there was no native policy that was instituted by the British colonial authorities as each dependency was to

develop a policy that was to facilitate the administration on the spot. Hence, there was no higher direction, philosophy or any uniform method of administration envisaged by Downing Street.¹²

This administrative arrangement that developed was turned into a strategy by Lord Lugard, who published his *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* in 1922. With a lot of experience gathered along the years as High Commissioner (1900-1906) and Governor-general (1912-1919) in Nigeria, he systematized IR into a coherent administrative ideology. Its adoption by Lord Lugard in Northern Nigeria was not deliberate but was a response to local necessities on the ground.¹³ Lugard had suddenly taken over control of the well organised Emirates of Northern Nigeria with only a small handful of European administrators. Faced with the heavy task of ending slavery and slave trade which was the bases for the power of these Emirates and with a population of about eight million with only few Europeans, he either had to use force in instituting direct rule or continue using the authorities of the Emirs in administering the people.¹⁴ Even if he had opted for direct rule, it would have been impracticable and too expensive to maintain. He therefore had no choice but to use the administering authorities he met in the administrative machinery.¹⁵

He justified the policy when he stated: “ [...] that the political staff available for the administration of so vast a country inhabited by many millions must always be inadequate in the proper sense of the word, and that it was, therefore imperative to utilise and improve on the existing machinery”.¹⁶ With this, Lugard had no choice but to use natural rulers if he had to occupy the area effectively. There was even no prospect that he would ever get enough British administrators if the direct rule policy was adopted.¹⁷ This policy therefore worked to offset the acute lack of British personnel that were to effectively administer their vast colonial empire.¹⁸

This view has been supported by Richen when he posits that Europeans only used very small amounts of resources in their colonial enterprises. He goes further to argue that even by the 1930s when colonialism was at its peak, there were only 3000 European administrators that were charged with the responsibility of directing and administering the African population of about ninety million. This therefore forced them to rule indirectly through the traditional institutions

they met.¹⁹ It therefore implied that the British colonial authorities were not able and willing to use resources from home in administering the protectorate and the only solution was their reliance on traditional rulers and their institutions.

This choice was motivated by the fact that traditional rulers were the centres of economic resources and it was cheap and more pragmatic in ruling the colonial peoples through their own leaders.²⁰ It also made it possible for British colonial policies to be implemented through indigenous leaders, who enjoyed enormous loyalty from their people. Furthermore, the absence of proper communication between the British and indigenes forced them to adopt this policy giving them very little or no alternative than to rule through the chiefs especially in areas where they enjoyed strong ethnic loyalties.²¹ The recognition of chiefs meant that they were to act as mediators between government and the people.²² Although Sir Donald Cameron (the co-initiator of IR along with Lugard) do not deny this view and holds that administrative and financial expediency were factors that necessitated the adoption of the policy of IR, he adds that the policy took cognisance of the fact that the will of the people through the natural authority of chiefs and the established customs of the people was also important.²³

This policy was outlined in Frederick Lugard's political memoranda that contained ordinances and regulations that touched on all aspects of the colonial administration. The memoranda contained directives and the views he had on the system and these were his suggestions and directives to all staff and those concerned with the colonial administrative set up.²⁴ Through these, the British envisaged a policy whereby the Africans would continue to be ruled by their chiefs and elders under British administrators so as to encourage political and economic development without leading to detribalisation or nationalist politics.²⁵ Lord Lugard went further to argue that the authority of the chief must first be legitimised by the Governor which according to him:

The de facto rulers who after the British conquest of Northern Nigeria had been reinstated or appointed to the various Emirates and all other de facto chiefs who had been recognised by Government were to be supported in any way and their authority upheld [...] and the duties of

a resident to rule through the chiefs and to seek their co-operation and to maintain their prestige.²⁶

These recognised African chiefs were not to be seen as independent rulers but were the delegates of the Governor whose representative was the resident.²⁷

The acquisition of more territories necessitated the preference of chiefs in the administration rather than the educated elite. The natural rulers had resented this group. They mounted hostility on them as they regarded them as “low born, up-start, and foreign”.²⁸ More territories meant moving into the interior and the educated elite were urban and coastal in nature. They no longer represented the people in the new dispensation. Lugard insinuated that it was a fundamental principle of the British colonial policy “... that the interest of a large native population shall not be subject to the will ... of a small minority of educated or Europeanised Natives who had nothing in common with them and whose interests are often opposed to theirs”.²⁹

The British believed that through the chiefs, the local administration will be developed into an efficient organ of modern government.³⁰ The NAs were to be the embryo of LG and through this a post colonial system would eventually emerge. The British also thought that natural feelings would be raised through the NAs and chiefs and Councils were to learn from these institutions the techniques in the running and management of regional affairs. With this experience, products from these NAs would be able to serve in the executive and legislature.³¹ In order to make this dream a reality, the British worked hard to maintain the political organisations they met in centralised societies.³² In segmented societies, like those of Southern Nigeria and parts of the Cameroons Province, warrant chiefs were appointed to make sure that administrative organisations were in line with the IR theory.

The British also wanted a situation where the powers of NAs would not conflict or overlap with the British officers. In this regard, they spelt out the functions of the NAs and made sure that the prestige of the natural rulers was not destroyed vis-à-vis their subjects. They wanted a situation whereby:

The prestige and influence of the chiefs can best be upheld by letting the peasantry see that the Government itself treats them as an integral part of the machinery of the administration. That there are no two set of rulers - British - and Native - working either separately or in co-operation, but a single Government in which the Native chiefs have well defined duties and acknowledged status equally with the British officers. Their duties should never conflict and should overlap as little as possible; they should be complementary to each other and the chief must render his proper service to the state. [...] It is obviously desirable that the Government should be called upon to intervene between the chiefs and people. If a native chief has lost prestige and influence to such a degree that he has to appeal to government to enforce his orders, he becomes not merely useless but a source of weakness.³³

In this circumstance, the British thought that the policy will reach its end smoothly. However, equality between the British and natural rulers was farfetched.

Their duties and obligations were guided by three cardinal principles, the Native Authority, Court and Revenue Ordinances. The Native Courts were a component of the Native Administration.³⁴ Such courts were directed by the 1914 Native Court Ordinance. This went operational in Nigeria in 1914 and was transferred to the Cameroons in 1916.³⁵ The Native Court ordinance safeguarded the chiefs' positions as judges and by so doing Native law and customs were enhanced. These native tribunals had the powers of arrest and their duties extended to the maintenance of order.³⁶

The 1914 Native Court Ordinance stipulated that the chiefs were to enforce Native Law and customs as well as law and order in Native tribunals. As such, they could arrest, imprison and impose fines on defaulters.³⁷

The 1916 Ordinance defines the Native Tribunal as "...a judicial Council or Native Courts established under the Native Court Ordinance, 1914".³⁸ Section V of the 1916 law stated clearly that all NAs were to maintain order in their respective areas of appointments and each had to exercise the powers of this Ordinance on their areas of jurisdiction.³⁹ In centralised communities, it provided for judicial Councils where the paramount chief was president and could be vested or

delegated with large powers by the Governor. Less centralised societies saw the local chief assisted by village heads and he acted as president.⁴⁰

The NAs could appoint and dismiss subordinate chiefs and officials but such moves could only be sanctioned by the Governor. They could appoint a native police force to help in the executions of their orders. Though the British interfered in the activities of the courts, effort was made at preventing administrators from taking over the roles of traditional rulers as judges. For example, Assistant Secretary for Native Affairs, Mr. Grier, in the Eastern Province of the Nigerian Protectorate, called on the DOs to take over the running of the courts in 1923 in order to bring efficiency in the functioning of these tribunals. This was categorically rejected by the Governor General of Nigeria when he stated that he:

... do not consider the proposal that the District Officers should sit as Court members of Native Courts should be approved, but, on the other hand I think political officers, whenever, the opportunity offers, would do well to sit in Native Courts to observe their members concerning the methods which they should adopt. The work of scrutinizing the decision of the Native Courts appears already to be regularly and carefully performed and it is perhaps hardly necessary to emphasise the great importance which I attach to this part of a District Officer's duty.⁴¹

These courts were graded into four categories, A, B, C, and D.⁴²

NAs obligations also extended to the collection of taxes as per the Native Revenue Ordinance.⁴³ This recognised the chiefs as the principal tax collectors. Part of this money was put in the Divisional Treasury and the rest went into local projects. Though the chiefs seemed to have been vested with so much power, their actions were subject to the control of the colonial administrators. Wherever a decision taken by an NA was judged not necessary, the British administrator in the area simply annulled. In this way, the colonial officials could easily interfere with the day to day activities of the NAs and a refusal to abide to the administrator's orders was not welcome. Such insubordination was punishable by a fine of twenty pounds or imprisonment for two months.⁴⁴

Whatever limited resources, communication difficulties necessitated the adoption of the IR system, African political institutions were transformed. The NAs were supervised by the British officials who advised African chiefs especially in matters of finance and legal procedures. The chieftaincy institution was retained and continued to be a legitimate means of governance and served as a link between Africans and the British.⁴⁵ After instituting the policy in 1914 (Lord Lugard) and continued by his successor Sir Hugh Clifford, the structure and practice of IR which had evolved in Northern Nigeria was also exported to the Yoruba Chieftainships of South Eastern Nigeria and the cephalous village communities of South Eastern Nigeria by the establishment of Native Courts that had to carry out judicial work, and minor NA administrative functions over their areas of jurisdictions that was made up of a number of villages. When the British took over the administration of the Southern Cameroons, the same arrangements were also introduced and it became part and parcel of the Nigerian protectorate.⁴⁶

It therefore implied that the British policy of IR was officially introduced into the territory and chiefs were used in the administrative set up and acted as local authorities. They thus became NAs in themselves or chiefs in council. Where a paramount chief was found and ruled over a larger area, he was appointed an NA. This was more practicable in centralised polities like those of the Western Grassfields where the Fons of Kom, Bum and Nso wielded much power over their subjects. Where centralised polities did not exist, composite NAs that were made up of chiefs wielding power together as court judges and councillors, were appointed and one of the chiefs acted as president. But in segmented societies like those of the Forest Zone, chiefs were appointed to exercise authority over these units.

However, they were granted limited autonomy in the management of affairs and the educated elite were excluded from these arrangements which were reserved only for the chiefs. That notwithstanding, they became embryos of LG units that were created and went functional in 1949. Though much change was witnessed in the territory between 1916 and 1949, very little effort was made to change the composition and organisation of these units and this resulted to administrative inefficiency.

Deficiency of the Native Authority System

The ineffectiveness of the NA system was a setback for the proper administration of the territory. Illiteracy and lack of qualified staff and inadequate supervision by the colonial administration necessitated the initiation of the 1949 changes. This is evident in the words of the DO, F. R. Kay, when he noted in 1948:

The burden of administration falls too heavily on the native authorities. ... and the staff of the native authorities is inefficient almost beyond belief. It is not extremely beyond their fault (sic). Half of them have less than a completely elementary education. Many work in areas where they cannot speak the local dialect. They have little or no training and the most complete absence of supervision, the inability to conduct surprise surveys of their records and accounts breeds' irresponsibility. Civility to the public cannot be enforced and complaints against them can seldom be moved. ... and normal efficiency in 1947 has not been achieved.⁴⁷

This is a synopsis of the administrative problems that were faced by the NA system since its adoption and it indicates that the lack of qualified staff was worsened by inadequate supervision and frequent visits to the field by DOs.

Besides the reduction of administrative (colonial) staff during the Second World War (as many had to be drawn into the war efforts) led to the neglect of NAs and retrogression on their output set in. As such, there was slow pace of progress as people not concerned with the welfare of their people found their way into the NAs and this had a negative repercussion on the efficiency of these institutions.⁴⁸

Though the NAs had worked hard in enhancing the socio-economic developments of their respective areas of jurisdiction, much was still expected of them. Their achievements were below expectation as these institutions were mostly under men who were conservatives. Hence, it was necessary to institute changes by regrouping these units into administrative districts that could be managed efficiently. This was to be followed by the inclusion of enlightened elements, that is, educated men, who would initiate the desired progress.⁴⁹

This does not mean that chiefs and their councils were not working for the progress of their respective NAs. They needed guidance that could only be gotten with the increased supervision and frequent visits of DOs or colonial authorities to their areas of command and the inclusion of educated elements in the administration. Increasing the departmental staff was therefore prerequisite but this could only come with the creation of more administrative Divisions, the merging of NAs into Divisional Councils and bringing the administration closer to the population.⁵⁰

The inclusion of the educated elite and effective presence, supervision and collaboration of DOs was needed to improve the performance of the NA system that was left entirely in the hands of chiefs and according to H. N. Harcourt, assistant DO for Bamenda Division:

[...] So much of the government of the country has been taken off their hands [the tendency is] to abdicate their functions and leave the chiefs to execute a policy independent of their advice else (sic) on the advice of persons who in native custom have neither the position nor authority to offer it. These chiefs then are liable to become within their own limited spheres more autocratic.⁵¹

The absence of DOs in the field and supervision of the activities of NAs was therefore a hindrance to the efficient administration of the territory. Even where chiefs were not autocratic and used their councils in administrating their areas of jurisdiction, such NAs only existed in theory. Meetings were never held. Some only met when the DO visited and when it was time for them to collect their remunerations or salaries, an exercise that came up every after four months. It was not uncommon for them to disperse or return without any deliberations on issues that affected their NAs before retiring to their various villages. Their authority was only felt when they collected taxes because they were sure of retaining ten percent of the total amount collected. As if that was not bad enough, records were never kept. Even when these were available, the real subject matters that were discussed was never reported or documented correctly.⁵²

The performance of NA staff was not satisfactory. They constantly stayed away from duty and rendered the smooth functioning of these institutions impossible. For instance, the scribe of Aghem court that was found in the Bamenda Division absented for ten days in 1932 and cases

could not be heard. Furthermore messengers never carried on their duties correctly leading to unjustifiable arrests and time wastage. A case in point is Tangwa from the court of Kom who had to carry out an arrest in Mayo Daga in the Adamawa region of Nigeria in 1934. Maidella left with a woman from Kom to Nigeria without paying bride wealth. With the aid of the DO for the Adamawa Division, the culprit was arrested but escaped after bribing Tangwa with five shillings (s). He made Tangwa to understand that he wanted to look for someone who could take care of his cattle in his absence and he disappeared. For two days he could not be found.

As inefficient as he was, he went further to arrest Tangwa's wife who was pregnant in the place of the husband. Maidella's father had to intervene to take the place of Maidella's wife. The DO for Adamawa Division was so outraged by this and ordered for the release of Maidella's father while a man hunt for the culprit took effect. This delayed the course of justice for ten days before the arrest was re-orchestrated. Besides taking bribe, he flawed the rules guiding his profession as he appeared there with a Dane gun. Something he ought not to as messengers were supposed to be unarmed. A sealed letter had been sent to the Kom NA by the DO for Adamawa Division explaining what transpired. With this, Tangwa was fined five shilling for carrying arms and receiving bribe by the Kom Native Court.⁵³ Such acts were common as messengers acted with impunity and molested people for no good cause.

Inefficiency in administration was also catalysed by the use of secret Societies like the *Kwifon* and *Nwerong* that were found in the Bamenda Division. The preference and use of these institutions were challenged by the young who were mostly the educated, traders, those who had travelled out of their communities and Christians, as the power of these institutions were gradually but constantly weaning or fading away.⁵⁴ This was facilitated by the government's reluctance to officially recognise it. Besides, in a memorandum to the DOs in the Cameroon Province, the Resident categorically stated that such societies were not needed in the administrative machinery of the territory. This created a vacuum that was filled by the NA police in the 1930s and 1940s but their limited numbers could hardly carry on their duties smoothly. Besides, chiefs who were the custodians of these institutions and members of the NA found it difficult in abandoning them and this led to conflicts with some of their educated subjects and

Christians. These shortcomings therefore necessitated change in the organisation and of these institutions and led to the 1949 reforms.

Administrative Delay and Improper Financial Management in Native Administration

Administrative efficiency was also marred by delay in addressing problems faced by NAs and the implementation and follow-up of government decisions due to inadequate or limited numbers of colonial administrators on the ground. This was owing to their regular absence from headquarters as they were constantly on tour. This usual absence resulted in the incompletion of tasks that were started and this led to the lack of continuity in the Divisional headquarters.⁵⁵ At times they spent most of their time at the Divisional headquarters than in the field because leaving the headquarters would have been too embarrassing as there would have been no one to take care of prisoners and receiving people from the various NA. If they remained in the headquarters, problems that needed to be solved in the NAs areas would linger. Caught in this web because of the unavailability of administrators and prompt intervention on matters that needed their attention, inefficiency loomed as problems faced by NAs were neglected and hardly solved on time.

The creation of more Divisions and merging of NAs into LG units was to bring the administration closer to the people and groups and districts neglected for long were to be taken care of. For example, the case of Esimbi NA in Wum District was unique as the people were the most backward in the Nigerian protectorate and the Cameroons.⁵⁶ Cadman, assistant DO for Bamenda Division, noted: “I cannot remember ever having seen less signs of antagonism and suspicions of the intention of Europeans than in these Esimbi villages”.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, the DO for Bamenda Division in 1920 describes them as treacherous and savage in nature.⁵⁸

This was because the people hardly respected administrative authorities and were hostile to strangers. An environment of this nature needed to be opened up as it was of great importance to the economy of the Cameroons and Nigeria. This was the main route for the cattle trade with Nigeria. Cattle traders and their cattle passed through this area to markets in Nigeria and to other parts of the Cameroons. As an area where many cattle dealers or traders had lost their lives in

encounters with the people, it was necessary to create not only a Division but also a LG unit that would bring the administration closer to the people in order to ensure effective presence and control by administrators and check their excesses. Again amalgamating the people of this area with those from different ethnic backgrounds into a LG Assembly would encourage the inculcation of new ideas and the spirit of embracing strangers by constantly meeting and deliberating on issues that concerned not only themselves but the entire Division.⁵⁹

Furthermore, the absence of administrators in some NAs areas brought disorder, insecurity and lack of respect for authority. For instance, a murderer could not be apprehended by the police in the Essimbi area in 1922 as it was difficult to arrest him.⁶⁰ In 1948, the wife of the Esimbi court clerk of the Wum NA was murdered and this caused a sensation in Benakuma as no reason could be advanced for her killing. A young man who had lost the sister was aggrieved and in such remorse situation just wanted to vent his frustration by killing anyone within his reach. Because of the remoteness of the area and the unavailability or absence of administrators and any form of authority in Essimbi, it took time before the DO and the authorities of the Wum NA could intervene and arrest the culprit, an attempt that proved very difficult. With the help of the NA, the DO had to employ forty young men to conduct a search for the perpetrator of the act. This took one full week as the people were not corporative and escaped into the bush when the DO, police and search teams approached their villages. Without that, financial management also retarded the effectiveness of the native administration in Southern Cameroons.

Improper organisation of the finance sector and management of finances were also responsible for the 1949 changes in the territory. NA funds were administered from the Divisional Treasuries. The areas covered by these Treasuries were too large and it was difficult to manage them efficiently as consultation on particular problems and solving them became impossible.⁶¹ It was therefore necessary to reorganise the territory so that frequent consultation on financial matters would be facilitated. The financial situation of the NA was further compounded by ignorance on the part of councillors. Their ignorance on Budget management was so great that nothing was known of the expenditures of these institutions by them. For instance, some did not know how much was spent by their Councils on the salaries of court staffs. This problem could

only be minimised through education and best achieved through the creation of political units where techniques in Budget management could be taught. Faced with these problems, it was not surprising that the Colonial Office favoured the initiation of reforms as the British Secretary for colonies argued that this was necessary for the better management of financial resources.

The Reforms Agenda

It was because of the above factors that the DOs in their Annual Meeting in Enugu on 4 September 1947 took cognisance of these administrative problems and argued that, progress could only come with an efficient system of administration. To them, it was impossible that the indigenes would cooperate in the realisation of this initiative and the inducement would only be through reforming the native administration. Efficiency was to be measured in socio-economic developments or advancement and this could only be achieved if the people had confidence in the native administration system. Hence, they called for the inclusion of the educated elite in the NA set up. However, some amount of consideration was still to be given to chiefs. The DOs strongly supported the course of the educated elite when they noted:

It must be remembered that the educated and progressive elements regards the existing NA with scorn and large as something in which they could have no part. They have seen its slow development and have regarded the elders and or family heads as endeavouring to operate a form of administration suitable possibly to primitive and backward, but unsuitable for the urgent needs of the region for both political and material progress. Yet, they must certainly desire progress and anxious to play their part.⁶²

The DOs' meeting in 1947 was not indifferent to this problem. They called for the creation of new administrative units and the devolving of more authority to the NAs. It was also their wish that the NAs be federated into larger LG units which would also become Divisions.⁶³

To initiate the much needed changes, the Eastern Regional House of Assembly instituted a Select Committee to review the system of administration and propose how these administrative units would become more efficient. This was under the guidance of Brigadier Gibbon, the first

Commissioner for Southern Cameroons (after this task) until 1956. It had to circulate its recommendations to all the NAs, improvement and tribal unions and any other associations which submitted constructive criticisms. The Residents had to compile all comments, explanations, criticisms and discussions concerning the project and these were forwarded to the Commissioner for the necessary reorganisation of the administration.⁶⁴ These proposals called for the creation viable economic LG units and the initiation of reforms that would facilitate the development of the respective administrative jurisdictions. Of interest was also the introduction of elections as method for selecting councillors or members of the LG legislature and the elimination of the philosophy of appointing traditional rulers as members of these institutions

Naturally, the chiefs did not welcome this because the introduction of the elective principle undermined their status as the reforms worked to the advantage of the educated elite. Though favoured in this dispensation, the educated elite never welcome it wholeheartedly. To them, these reforms never empowered or gave the newly created institutions enough autonomy in the management of local affairs. They preferred its gradual implementation throughout the territory. They thus called on the authorities to postpone it until a new constitution that would ensured the financial autonomy of Southern Cameroons was adopted. Financial and administrative autonomy for the NAs was also what they demanded before the reforms could be implemented.⁶⁵

In spite of these reservations, the chiefs and educated elite saw a need for the federation of the NAs into viable financial units of administration.⁶⁶ With this state of affairs, they called for a delay in the process but according to Brayne Baker, Resident for Southern Cameroons, it was impossible for these reforms to be postponed for he was not too sure that a new constitution that would guarantee their demands would be introduced soon.⁶⁷ In this regard, they were carried out piecemeal as in 1948; six LG units (Bamenda, Mamfe, Kumba, Nkambe, Victoria and Wum) were instituted in the Southern Cameroons and granted some amount of financial and administrative autonomy. In 1949, these LG units became administrative Divisions and went operational on the 1st of April that year.⁶⁸

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion argued that flaws in the native administration system in Southern Cameroons was a catalyst for the 1949 merging of NAs into larger local government units. Focusing on native administration defects, it holds that the absence of educated class from the system and inadequacy of administrators that led to proximity problems as well as ineffective supervision by DOs was a hindrance to the performance of NAs. The management of the finances of the NAs from Divisional Treasuries also hindered the efficient functioning of these institutions. It is because of these factors that the paper contends that, initiatives taken by the colonial authorities to create more autonomous LG units was a response to administrative inefficiency that plagued the system.

¹ E. T. Mbuagbaw, R. Brian and R., Palmer, *A History of the Cameroon*, New Edition, Essex Longman, 1987, p.78; V. G. Fanco, *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges*, Vol. 2, *The Colonial and Post Colonial Periods*, Limbe, Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1989, p.56 and V. J. Ngoh, *Southern Cameroons, 1922 – 1961: A Constitutional History*, Hampshire, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2001, p.2.

² E. Chiabi, “British Administration and Nationalism in the Southern Cameroons, 1914-1954”, in M. Z. Njeuma (ed), *Introduction to the History of Cameroon in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*, London, Macmillan Publishers, 1989. p.179.

³ Jb/a (1967)2, No. CI.1088, Review of the Development of Local Government, in West Cameroon, 1948-1967, 1967, p.3.

⁴ Ja/g(1964)3, No. P1458, Local Government Training Centre Buea, 1964, p.3.

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²³ T. Spear, ‘Neo-traditionalism and the limits of invention in British Colonial Africa’, *Journal of African History*, 44: 1(2003), p.8.

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