

LEADERSHIP BRAWL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS IN BU (CAMEROON), 1942-2003

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the leadership feud in Bu fondom of the North West Region of Cameroon and the ramifications on socio-economic development in the fondom. The leadership history of Bu from 1942, when Fon Chu Mbonghekang ascended the throne to 2003, several years after his demise, was a history of a tussle for leadership, considering the circumstances under which he became fon and the tussle that followed his death on September 9, 1981. Throughout his reign and after, Bu was thrown into a leadership imbroglio with severe socio-economic consequences hitherto unknown in the fondom. Rival groups fought against each other and this truncated development. The fondom, once the pride of self-reliant development comparable to a few other fondoms in Menchum Division of the North West Region of Cameroon, became a laughing stock in the domains of social and economic development. Speeches, letters, petitions, archival data and other secondary works were consulted for this paper. From an analysis of the evidence obtained, we conclude that the leadership crunch in Bu between 1942 and 2002 affected the social and economic development of the fondom. There is need for the crisis to be resolved amicably. This is possible with recourse to history to correct the leadership misnomer. In this way, the population will be mobilised towards the hitherto path of meaningful development without rancour as is the case today.

Introduction

Leadership in many communities has a direct relationship with socio-economic development at both micro and macro levels. The chiefs who govern their people do not only command respect amongst them but also have access to considerable resources like their labour services, land, livestock, minerals, water and trees of economic value (Tonah, 2012). In fact, traditional authority incarnates a reassuring institutional stability and certainty to the masses (Cheka, 2008), although the colonial rule made chiefs to look up to the colonial administrators than to their own people for policy making processes (Nyamnjoh, 2014). In ethnic groups, like among the Bakundu of the South West Region of Cameroon, the appointment of chiefs to replace village heads often led to divided loyalties which affected traditional authority and, by extension, socio-

economic development of the village (Ebune, 2015). A crisis ridden leadership negatively impact development (human or physical) and often leads to undesirable consequences (Tem, 2016). History teaches that conflict ridden countries or communities usually waste resources in petitions, bribing of corrupt officials among other vices. The contestation in the leadership of the Ivory Coast, Guinea, Libya, Egypt, Tunisia and the on-going war in Syria with rebel forces bent on ousting Bashar Al Assad have had untold consequences on the infrastructural development of these countries. The crisis of leadership in these and other countries of the world have resulted in street protests, destruction of houses, schools, public buildings and roads that took years and much money to construct. Many of these countries have spent many years rebuilding what they destroyed.

African leadership, for the most part, is problematic and has contributed to underdevelopment since many of the continent's leaders have plunged their countries into economic, political and social quagmire (Afegbua, 2012; Mbah, 2013; Jallow, 2014; Poncian&Mgaya, 2015). Within some countries, inter-ethnic conflicts have led to the loss of many lives and destruction of property that took long to acquire. The North-West Region of Cameroon is known for recurrent inter-ethnic crises and their negative impact on sustainable development. Intra-ethnic conflicts have, among other things, resulted in a leadership or chieftaincy crisis in several of its fondoms (this is same as kingdom and a fon means chief), including Bu. Disagreement between different factions have often led to crises and ramifications on the people and their institutions. In the fondom of KedjomKeku in Mezam Division of the North West Region, for instance, the chieftaincy crisis led to the roasting of the fon by the population in fury against his high-handed administration. In other fondoms, like Bamali in the Ndop area, their fon was exiled and another one enthroned in his place while in Ashong there is a long standing chieftaincy crisis which has virtually divided the fondom. Most recently, that is 2016, the population of Bangolan dethroned their fon and crowned another one who died under controversial circumstances. The administration brought in the military to quell the uprising against the fon and today the people are engaged in fratricidal fighting at the cost of development.

In a leadership crisis situation, human resources are wasted and dubious administrative officers are enriched as they fan the flames of hatred to feed fat from it. Rivals consult magicians and pay huge sums of money for charms to destroy their opponents. They also shun communal labour

and oppose monetary contributions for projects like the provision of water. Schools become derelict, few teachers commit themselves to work and children are demotivated from attending classes to acquire knowledge and build society. Some people specialise in petition writing to destroy rivals. In doingso, socio-economic development is retarded. However, this does not mean that during crisis situations socio-economic development comes to a standstill but it cannot be compared to peace time. Such is the situation in the Bu fondom, in Wum Central subdivision of the North West Region of Cameroon. A leadership rumpus in the fondom during the past seventy five years has led to a dismal performance in socio-economic development (Kah, 2015). This was compounded by the death of Fon Chu Mbonghekang in 1981. Since his demise, the village has become embroiled in a leadership tussle that has not abated thirty seven years after.

Throughout the period from 1942 to 2001, the socio-economic progress of Bu has not been very remarkable. The major problem centres on legitimacy in the initiation and supervision of development projects. From the death of Fon Chu Mbonghekang on September 9,1981, several claimants to the throne, leadership and development emerged. The *Kuifuai* regulatory society's role and legitimacy was challenged on several instances and attempts were made to outlaw it completely. These attempts failed and in the face of this, the Wum administration has adopted a consistentlyinconsistent position.¹These have been at the foundation of the retarded socio-economic progress in Bu for close to sixty years.

The concertation meeting that took place at Government School Bu on April 28,2001 with the Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) for Menchum, Enow Abrams Egbe, assisted by the Divisional Officer (DO) for Wum Centralrecognised the socio-economic plight of the Bu people. During the meeting, the Bu Village Development Council (BVDC) was borne with the main aim to spearhead socio-economic development in the fondom. Following its first executivemeeting, which had representatives from all the lineages of the fondom, it was conceded that the physical infrastructure of Bu had dilapidated and needed urgent repairs through contributions from the people. The executive was also unanimous thatBu was experiencing social disintegration and retardation in development. For this reason, the secretary of the association spoke of the urgent need to embark on socio-economic development to transform the fondom and make it great

¹ When one reads through the communications of the District Officers to different factions of the chieftaincy row, it is evident that the administration has on several occasions acted either in ignorance or out of influence.

again. He prayed that, for this to happen, there was need for a united front, determination and foresight. This would make Bu people to reassert themselves and provide education to their children, invest in economic development and participate in national politics.² Prior to BVDC's first concertation meeting, the Bu Cultural and Development Association (BUCADA) introduced an annual cultural festival, the *beletebouh*. One of its terms of reference was to rally Bu people to discuss development issues.³ Prior to this, no such forum existed but for the early efforts of the Bu Development Committee (BDC) in the 1970s. It also explains why, for several decades, development was retarded in Bu. These two episodes were an open recognition of the problems that bedevilled socio-economic development of the Bu fendom and needed urgent attention.

The Social Domain

The leadership scuffle in Bu from 1942, when Chu Mbonghekan ascended the throne,⁴ to the formation of the BVDC, impacted negatively the educational development in Bu. For example, in the 1960s, there was confusion in the fendom concerning the establishment of schools. On April 5, 1962, for instance, Fon Chu Mbonghekan petitioned the D.O. against elder Wangwo Wei Tam, a prominent village figure, elucidating that the later was spreading rumour that he had sent away the Basel Mission from establishing a school in Bu. This notwithstanding, the D.O. later observed that the fon and other people were not working to patronise education. The D.O. intimated that:

Chief [Chu] did write a letter in which he stated that if there was not going to be a Roman Catholic School in Bu, there should be no Basel Mission in Bu as well. This letter was signed by some persons who were said to be quarterheads. Afterwards another letter was received from the same Bu against the requisition for a Roman Catholic School refuting the fact that those who signed the other letter were quarterheads.⁵

² Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of the Bu Village Development Council held in Bu on Wednesday, 16 May 2001.

³ Circular of the Second Bu Cultural Festival, 26-30 December 2002.

⁴ Henry Kam Kah, "Leadership Fuss in Bu Fendom, North West Province, Cameroon, 1942-2001," *Epasa Moto: A Bilingual Journal of Letters and the Humanities* 3, 2 (2008): 161-186.

⁵ File No. Md/a (1959)1, National Archives Buea, NAB.

The inconsistency in the demand for a school from either the Roman Catholic Mission or the Basel Mission was certainly a result of the rumpus in the headship of the fondom. Quarterheads seemed to have pulled the rock under the fon, so to speak. The greater consequence of this bickering was that many youths from Bu, who could not afford their education elsewhere, ever went to school, let alone a mission school where there was emphasis on education and moral uprightness.

The epoch between 1981 and 2002 witnessed an appalling drop in the enrolment of pupils in school and this was due to a number of variables. Some parents were unenthusiastic about the education of their children on the premise that they would turn around to insult and oppose them. They behaved this way because they correlated this to the leadership brawl in the fondom between a father and his first son.⁶ Some of them contended that if they educated their children, the children will turn around in the future to torment or fight against them. While not everyone bought this argument, a good number of the fathers supported it. This argument was generated by the leadership brawl in the village and in a way affected the education of the future leadership of the fondom.

Besides, the Bu Students Association (BUSA), once an association of reference in Menchum Division because of the activities it used to carry out in the village (like the award of scholarships to school children), became moribund. Its demise was partly explained by the toning up of the leadership squabble in the fondom after the passing on of Fon Chu Mbonghekan. The sixty four million dollar question is how could a student association be made subservient to the *Kuifuai* regulatory society or to either of the claimants to the throne? Here was the imbroglio which weakened the BUSA from carrying out projects in the fondom during the holidays as before the leadership feud. In the midst of the declining student enrolment, some mothers took up the challenge to educate their children arguing that, after all, succession in Bu, Aghem and Kom was matrilineal. The education of their children was, therefore, to benefit the matrilineage more than the patrilineage.

⁶ The general feeling among fathers in Bu is not to educate their children. They either support the education of their nephews or squander the little money they work indrinking. A few of them are beginning to understand the importance of educating their children.

Other education related problems in Bu were influenced directly and/or indirectly by the leadership row that stunned Bu. For several years, very few pupils sat the Government Common Entrance examination into secondary schools in Bu. In 2001, for example, in spite of the recruitment of four teachers by some elite to teach in Government School Bu and Mujang, only two pupils registered for the examination.⁷ Many of them would not write the public exams because of financial constraints and for others this was their journey's end. The means to further their formal education beyond the elementary level was not there. For the 2003 school year, the Presbyterian School (P.S.) Bu only registered nine pupils for the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) with just five of them writing the common entrance examination.⁸ For many years, this was the first time that very few pupils turned up for public exams and the root cause of this was the contestation for the chieftaincy of Bu. It had polarised the village and many people felt that there was no need to register children for exams.

In 2001, BVDC resolved to prioritise the education of children by recruiting teachers and encouraging villagers to contribute an education levy;⁹ this remained wishful thinking. Non-conformists rejected the BVDC. To complicate matters further, the *Kuiifuaimale* regulatory society petitioned the Wum administration dissociating itself from this association. The reason for this 'volte face' was a vote of no confidence that passed on some chairpersons and members of committees of BVDC. *Kuiifuair* threw its weight behind the Bu Cultural and Development Association (BUCADA), formed earlier, contending that the association was transparent and accountable.¹⁰ Although the ideas of BVDC on paper clearly articulated the socio-economic challenges of the people, these remained in theory and were hardly actualised. This was because of a confidence crisis in many of the leaders and other people questioned the very *point d'appui* of the association. The open rejection of BVDC by *Kuiifuai* could also be due to the fact that it was pro Emmanuel Bong Muam, one of the claimants to the throne, a person *Kuiifuai* did not recognise as a fon. It was also true that some executive members of the BVDC did not inspire confidence among the population. The existence of two rival development

⁷ Minutes of the Bu Village Development Council, Saturday 16 June 2001.

⁸ Interview with Kah Elvis Kom, Headmaster P.S. Bu, 20 December 2003.

⁹ Minutes of the Bu Village Development Council, Saturday 16 June 2001.

¹⁰ Protest Letter by *Kuiifuai* against the Formation of the Bu Village Development Council, 30 May 2001.

associations divided the population and neutral persons decided not to contribute to any of the associations for the development of Bu fondom.

Another problem that hindered development was the collection and management of funds of the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) of G.S. Bu. Many parents accused the school authorities for doing too little or nothing to improve the condition of the school although they were paying the PTA levy. They were accused of not being transparent and accountable in the management of the funds collected from parents.¹¹ Due to the leadership row in Bu and opposition to *Kuiifuai's* scrutinising role, there was no constituted authority to question and get explanation on how the funds were collected and used. Many PTA meetings either flopped or were reduced to a few gullible individuals who were remote controlled by some influential persons. The same weather-beaten structures erected in the late 1970s and early 1980s were still being used in 2003. After 2003, the schools in Bu have witnessed great transformation of infrastructure, although a lot is still to be done.

In the face of the persistent quandary in education, BUCADA, formed in July 1992, came up with a development memorandum for 2001-2005. In the forte of education, the association underscored the need for better standards through the recruitment of teachers for the schools and introduction of sports to replace the habitual festive nights which negatively affected students output. The association also vouched for compulsory education for all, including the Mbororos or cattle herders in the fondom. It was hoped that this would curb teenage pregnancy and the ravaging HIV/AIDS pandemic although, several years later, this remains a problem. An annual prize giving ceremony was also made current in primary schools and scholarships for pupils who were curious to enrol in technical and or vocational schools.¹² These noble projects have, however, appreciably remained wild elephant due to the leadership squabble that had factionalised the fondom.

Besides this, the health sector was affected by the leadership virus in Bu, so to speak. During the construction of the Bu community health centre between the 1970s and 1980s, there were accusations and counter accusations concerning the management of funds provided by Bread for

¹¹ This was an open secret which seemed to have fallen on deaf ears.

¹² Development Programme of the Bu Cultural and Development Association 2001-2005.

the World, an international religious Non-Governmental Organisation, for the project. There were scathing attacks from some elite on Revs Thomas Ngong Amaazee and Elias Ngum Gbai Cheng, President General and Financial Secretary/Treasurer of the Bu Cultural and Development Committee (BCDC), respectively. The newly formed BUCADA argued that funds meant for the construction of the community health centre were mismanaged by Revs. Amaazee and Cheng.¹³ It further intimated that it was abnormal for Rev Cheng to have been both the Financial Secretary and Treasurer. The hotly debated issue of the mismanagement of funds for the construction of the health centre was also echoed by the quarter heads of Bu in a letter written to the Wum administration in February 1997.¹⁴

All efforts by *Kuifuai* to have Rev. Cheng present the financial statement of the project to the people flopped. This was because Rev. Cheng did not recognise this regulatory society as having the competence to probe into his management of the funds of the BCDC and also because he was a staunch supporter of one of the claimants to the leadership stool in Bu. Some people faulted him for being accountable to himself than to the people who had contributed materials for the construction of the health centre. Others were crestfallen with the way the project was managed. It is worth noting that, apart from the financial largesse of the charitable organisation 'Bread for the World' based in Switzerland, indigenes of Bu at home and abroad had also massively contributed towards the completion of this project in cash and in kind.

In addition, the delay in the completion of the health centre was also due to the mistrust among a segment of the population on the leadership of the project. Not very mirthful with the leadership, many Bu people were not averse to complete the structure. By February 1997, this health centre laid fallow in the bush because of disagreement between the newly formed BUCADA and former members and sympathisers of the BCDC.¹⁵ Prior to 1997, the local population had contributed materially by way of human investment to ensure the completion of the health centre.¹⁶ When work came to a standstill, one of the illustrious sons of Bu, Justice Nyo Wakai, intimated in a letter to the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, manager of the

¹³ Petition from BUCADA to the D.O. Wum Sub Division on Development Projects in Bu Village, 10 February 1993; Petition from BUCADA to D.O. Wum Sub Division on Developments in Bu, 23 December 1993.

¹⁴ A Letter from Quarter Heads of Bu to the D.O. Wum Central, 10 February 1997.

¹⁵ Members of the inactive BCDC were opposed to the development proposals of BUCADA.

¹⁶ This writer carried timber and stones as a young boy for the construction of the Bu Health Centre.

project, “that few persons should not be allowed to cause the population to suffer”.¹⁷ This few people he referred to were certainly Revs. Amaazee and Cheng, leaders of the BCDC who had been accused of mismanagement of funds meant for the health centre. Many people believed this because they did not present a statement of account to the population. Had there been an uncontested leader, these two people would have been forced to present a statement of account, justifying their expenditure. Construction work had slackened because people were now questioning those who were the linch-pin in the management of the project for the people of Bu.

One other factor than impinged on the construction of the community health centre for Bu was the conflict with the authorities of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon. Bonghezee II, who had succeeded his uncle Chu Mbonghekang in 1986, five years after his death, accused the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, Rt. Rev. Henry AnyeAwasom, for handing over the health centre to Justice NyoWakai and BUCADA, an association he described as illegal and unrecognised by him.¹⁸ In response to this accusation, the clergyman argued that if there was fuddling in this matter, the fon was responsible because he caused the church to ignore the health centre project. The Moderator enumerated reasons for the decision of the church to hand back the project to the community instead of managing it as elsewhere. Among the reasons for the church’s decision to withdraw were miscalculations and blatant mismanagement. The clergyman also frowned at the exploitation of the people in the name of voluntary community labour which was eventually shamelessly transformed to cash by managers of the project. For these reasons, the Rt. Rev. Henry AnyeAwasom explained that it became difficult for the church builder, the Development Secretary and Rev. David Tende, to enlist the cooperation of the people anymore towards construction work in the health centre. Rev Cheng was faulted by the Moderator for his blunder with the project of the construction of the health centre for the Bu people.¹⁹

The greater ramification of the struggle over the erection of the health centre was that many people refused to contribute further. Dr Christin Gagel of the ‘Bread for the World’ was unhappy with the slow pace of construction work at the centre. The house had been roofed and during the

¹⁷ Letter from Justice NyoWakai to the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon on the Bu Health Centre, 1 June 1997.

¹⁸ Letter from FonBonghezee II of Bu to the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon Concerning the Bu Health Centre, 27 January 1995.

¹⁹ Reply of the Moderator, Rt. Rev. Henry AnyeAwasom to Chief Bonghezee II of Bu, 9 February 1995.

early rains of 1986, six months after roofing, nothing was being done. Some workers were laid off but not paid their due. The scarcity of funds pre-occupied Rev Amaazee to the extent that he asked the people the question “When shall we pay them and where shall the money come [sic] if we do not approach the Donors for money?”.²⁰ In the midst of this dilemma, Rev. Amaazee proposed that Rev. Cheng should write to Bu people out of the village for donations to complete the house.²¹ Things had turned sour and the many Bu people resident out of the village were as divided as those at home because of the leadership brawl in the village. Bonghezee II spent time accusing the church instead of mobilising his supporters to complete the health centre. It was clear that even his very dependable supporters, like Revs Amaazee and Cheng, had lost the confidence of many people who were no longer willing to contribute with labour and money to the project.

In spite of the proposal of Rev. Amaazee for people to contribute towards the completion of the health centre, many people were very sad with the way the project had been managed. The same 1986 when the project came to a standstill, Bonghezee II was gazetted fon of Bu amidst stiff opposition to his assuming the throne. Seven years later, the project was still not progressing the way the population had wanted and this made BUCADA, that was formed to replace the moribund BCDC, to be concerned about its slow pace. Four years later, the quarter heads shared similar fears. It was on the basis of this logjam that in 1997, Justice NyoWakai proposed to the authorities of the Presbyterian Church to put in place a standing committee under the supervision of the Synod Office so that the project could recommence and be completed.²²

Besides, the growth of the Christian church in Bu witnessed a decline during the years of petition and counter petition writing and arrests and detention of elders of the fondom. The number and commitment of Christians to church work was dismal since the church itself was divided. The hitherto collaboration between *Kuiifuai* and the church to develop the fondom was no longer there since local church leaders were supporting Bonghezee II as against Andrew NdoMuam, the other claimant to the throne and biological father of Bonghezee II. There developed a war of nerves

²⁰File No. 3456, Matters Relating to the various Congregations in the Wum District, Presbyterian Church in Cameroon Central Archives and Library (PCCCCAL), Buea.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Letter from Justice NyoWakai to the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon on the Bu Health Centre, 1 June 1997.

between elders of the village and the church authorities with each claiming to be supreme over the management of village affairs. Within the church, there existed a fracas between the Christians who supported different camps in the chieftaincy row.²³ The most visible sign of the decline of the church was the collapse of parts of the church house of the Presbyterian Church Bu. Appeals for money to put up a new house felt on deaf ears. The state of affairs had had a heavy toll on the fonom because many young people shunned the church preferring to be initiated into the *Kuifuai* regulatory society. The leadership rumpus did not only affect the social, but also the economic sector in Bu.

Economic Sector

Several economic or socio-economic projects were either mismanaged or abandoned because of a leadership brawl in Bu. The Scanwater project, which was provided by the government of Cameroon with support from partners abroad, was not well managed because of friction between rival factions. When the plant that generated water got broken down, people were reluctant to contribute money for its refurbishing. Some parts of the plant were even carted away by unknown persons. When the government of Cameroon made available the sum of one million francs for its reactivation, the Divisional Delegate of Mines for Menchum decided to keep 900,000 francs for no just cause.²⁴ In the midst of a chaotic leadership, the excuse of the delegate was that there was no urgency to hand over the balance. Determined to bring about development in the fonom of Bu, BUCADA petitioned the D.O. Wum Central about the nonchalant attitude of the Divisional Delegate.²⁵ Had there been an uncontested fon for the village, pressure would have been brought to bear on the Divisional Delegate of Mines for Menchum to hand over the money to the population to re-establish their water supply.

Besides, from the birth of BUCADA in 1992, it set out to awaken development in Bu village which had been stalled by the inactivity of the BCDC. The Scanwater plant was side-lined because of the high cost of maintenance. The association began another water project with assistance from the Swiss Association for Technical Development (HELVETAS). The objective was to develop a durable water catchment that would provide water for the whole community at

²³ Discussion with Barrister Anthony Amah Amaazee, BomakaBuea, 26 August 2004.

²⁴ Petition from BUCADA to D.O. Wum Central on Development Projects in Bu Village, 23 December 1993.

²⁵ Ibid.

least cost.²⁶ The pro-Bonghezee faction opposed this on the premise that it was an indirect way to unseat Bonghezee II as the fon of Bu. In a terse tone, Dr Victor Bong Amaazee, lecturer at the Higher Teachers Training College Bambili and subsequently its director, contended that the “ultimate objective of BUCADA is hegemony in Bu and ... development is only a bridge.” He lambasted BUCADA for the non-recognition of “constituted authority”. By this, he was referring to Bonghezee II. Amaazee also admonished the Chief of Section for Community Development in Wum to blot out the concordat failing which he would “thereby only be helping to build a water system to which only segments of the community shall have access”.²⁷ To say that BUCADA was to build a water system to which only segments of the community shall have access was false but it was an expression of his opposition to BUCADA because he saw in it a hidden agenda to undermine the authority of Bonghezee II. This was, however, not strange because many people were opposed to his leadership of the village just as others opposed Andrew NdoMuam.

From the reaction of Dr. Amaazee, it was evident that the issue of authority was a great bone of contention in Bu and affected economic development. Authority or the absence of it was at the basis of the fracas in Bu especially after 1981 following the death of Fon Chu Mbonghekang. To the pro-Bonghezee II supporters, sympathisers and his council, Bonghezee II was and remained the undisputed fon of Bu. The *Kuiifuai* that vehemently opposed the fonship of Bonghezee II commanded a following of its own. Another rival to the throne, Andrew NdoMuam, also constituted an authority in his own right. The authority of *Kuiifuai* was based on the fact that whoever was fon, according to tradition, was amendable to it. It also happened that this regulatory society was thoroughly in support of the water project which was opposed by supporters of Bonghezee II. The regulatory society was at the fulcrum of the organisation and supervision of community work during the construction of the water project. If *Kuiifuai* that opposed Bonghezee II supported community work for the water project initiated by BUCADA, pro-Bonghezee II supporters might have had a case in arguing that BUCADA was a smokescreen in the struggle for hegemony in Bu. On the other hand however, the provision of water should

²⁶ Letter from Bu Co-signed by President BUCADA, Women Elderly and *Kuiifuai* Representatives to the D.O. Wum Central, 5 February 1996.

²⁷ Letter from Victor Bong Amaazee to the Divisional Chief of Section Community Development Wum Menchum Division, 27 January 1996.

not be politicised because it is a basic need of the population. Differences would have been kept aside for a durable water project to be completed for all and sundry.

The counter attack on the execution of the water project led to the breaking in of the Sub D.O. for Wum. The Regent, the quarter heads and members of the traditional council were asked to answer the call of duty by participating in the community work meant for the water project. The administrator admonished them to sensitise the population, family and meeting groups on the need to contribute towards the realisation of the water project.²⁸ The people of Bu had secured 300.000 francs and 940.000 francs were pending to facilitate the completion of the water project.²⁹ A lot can be deduced or read into the letter of the D.O. There was, at the time, intransigence of the pro-Bonghezee II councillors to joinforces for the development of Bu. How could Bu village have developed a sustainable source of drinking water without the councillors showing the light for others to follow? This intransigence was probably because the water project was initiated by opponents of Bonghezee II and, moreso, by an association considered by them to be illegal, although this had been recognised by the Wum administration. Some of them, in 1993, opposed to the purchase of parts of the Scanwater plant that needed to be replaced to have water flow again. They contended that money was being illegally collected to repair the plant.³⁰ On these and other counts, supporters and sympathisers of Bonghezee II opposed and boycotted development projects initiated by BUCADA.

Nevertheless, the D.O.'s intervention for all to put hands on deck to develop the water scheme was unheeded to by some people. The penmanship for failure was already almost on the wall but BUCADA, *Kuifuai* and the elderly women reacted in disgust. They challenged the action of the pro-Bonghezee group in a petition to the D.O., dated 5 February 1996. In the petition, Dr. Amaazee and the Chairman of the traditional council, John Bong Ngum, were faulted for obstructing the execution of the water project because they petitioned Helvetas to write off assistance towards the realisation of the project.³¹ Similarly, the quarter heads admonished the D.O. to come to their support and put to order some individuals who were uncooperative towards

²⁸Memorandum from Sub Prefect Wum Central to the Regent and Quarter Heads Bu Village.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Petition from BUCADA to the D.O. Wum Sub Division on Development Projects in Bu Village, 10 February 1993.

³¹Letter from Bu Co-Signed by President BUCADA, Women Elderly and *Kuifuai* Representatives.

creating a more perfect state. In the petition dated 10 February 1997, they felt frustrated by the fact that some recalcitrant fellows had returned from the D.O. boasting and determined never to avail themselves for the water project. They argued that if something was not done to nib this in the bud, those who had all along committed themselves to work would relax. The consequence would be that attempts to have clean and portable water would be dashed to the rocks.³²

Besides, the Bu-Mbengkas Rice Cooperative Society (BMRCS) remained a centre of quandary since its establishment in the late 1970s through the collective efforts of the population. The society was managed as if it were private property. Over the years, there was a general feeling among the farmers and rightly so, that the funds of this society were messed up by successive governments. These governments hardly gave an account of their stewardship to the rice farmers. The need for vote-casting was not usually valued. To provide an illustration, in 1993, it was observed that balloting had not taken place since 1989.³³ In 1997, the quarter heads called on the D.O. to ensure fresh ticketing since the executive then was made up of dubious individuals.³⁴ Five years after, the Wum administration suspended the executive and a caretaker government was put in place to manage the society for four months. After this period, a general election was conducted.

The problems of the BMRCS mounted and exploded because of the absence of a leader who commanded the respect and support of all and who could bring to book those who had made the society a private enterprise. Non-registered and non-farmers either borrowed money or influenced policy when in principle they were not supposed to. Some debtors of the cooperative society swore that they would only pay their debts in their graves. They were scornful of anyone who confronted them to make clear their financial commitment with the society. This resulted in anger and the bitter war of words between individuals and families. It was further compounded by the fact that these individuals and families supported different camps in the chieftaincy wrangle and party politics. It is worth noting that the two main parties in the fendom were the Social Democratic Front (SDF) and the Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement (CPDM).

³²Letter from the Quarter Heads of Bu to the D.O. Wum Central.

³³ Petition from BUCADA to the D.O. Wum Sub Division, 23 December 1993.

³⁴Letter from the Quarter Heads of Bu to the D.O. Wum Central.

Some of these dilemmas greatly jeopardised the mission of the BMRCS which was to source for better market outlets for farmers and to carry out other development projects in Bu and Mbengkas. Since its establishment, there was never a moment that proceeds of the society were shared among shareholders as bonus for the year. Besides, the cooperative that should find a market for the rice harvested by farmers or buy it at an affordable price was unable to do so. This was because the money received from the hulling and sale of rice and brand was not properly accounted for. Whenever one executive managed to save a little bit of money for the future, the one that succeeded it emptied the coffers. This attitude is so disgusting that it came to be described as “chop broke pot” in pidgin. This meant that the cooperative generated money but its leaders squandered it without accountability and without reserving anything for future maintenance and investment in other projects. People plundered the wealth of the cooperative with so much alacrity that development was held hostage in Bu.

Other obstacles militating against the success of the BMRCS included the state of the lone hulling mill which was very old and could break down completely anytime. Even the quantity of diesel bought at any one time was a mockery for a big cooperative like the one in Bu with prospects of further growth because of the increasing acreage of rice cultivation. The bickering between cooperative workers and farmers only enriched the State Counsel, police and gendarme officers in Wum, by way of bribe, to escape imprisonment. In short, the cooperative society that should have generated much income and be a pace-setter in the socio-economic development of Bu and by extension Wum Central Subdivision was not only being mismanaged with impunity by a select few with a questionable mandate, but also served as a death trap for those who wanted to put things straight, so to speak.

In other respects, the Bu-Wum road constructed through community labour in the early 1950s and encouraged by the government because of the need for timbering in the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve,³⁵ left much to be desired. Internal bickering made maintenance work through community solidarity hard to come by. The bridge over the Metsche stream at Nyatschuu quarter was left desolate for some years. Although repair work was carried out on the hill leading to the bridge, it was not durable because heavy rains soon washed down the loose soil leaving

³⁵ File No. 106, Ci (1950)1, Annual Reports (Report of 1952 enclosed). Also, 1951, 1953 and 1954, Wum Division, NAB.

bare a rough terrain. This section of the road remained an incubus to users of vehicles. This pathetic situation made the BVDC to buckle to carry out urgent maintenance work on the bridge. The Council contended that this would be easy considering that the casket on the bridge was still intact.³⁶ Several years after nothing fundamentally changed. The only visible sign to change were stones and sand left around the site and which was done by BUCADA. It was the same BUCADA that eventually spearheaded the construction of the collapsed bridge.

In juxtaposition, all ventures to construct a farm to market road, especially to the River Meteh plain, was not very successful. Many people were no longer willing to contribute money that could be used to hire a caterpillar to grade the road dug over thirty years ago. Even community labour to maintain bad spots on the road was more of a thing of the past. The one that was organised by BUCADA during its annual cultural week of December 2002 was one of the rarest in the recent history of the Bu fendom.³⁷ This came at the behest of the need to construct a bridge linking Bu and Mbengkas with material assistance from the North West Development Authority (MIDENO). The consequence of the poor state of the farm to market road was the difficulty in head loading cash crops from the valley to the market. A lot of what was cultivated get rotten in the farms.

It is worth noting that, in December 1993, BUCADA found at fault the Wum administration for its non-assistance during the construction of the farm to market road which was “started some fifteen years ago”.³⁸ Other road projects that would have been developed included the Fungom-Bafren, Fungom-Munjang, Kasa-Nduneei, Nduneei-Aguli and Kumfutu-Nyatschuuh roads. These would remain wild elephant projects due to internal dissension in Bu. The people could only succeed to do this if there was one central authority which had unfortunately been up for grab since 1981 with the death of Chu Mbonghekan.

All these notwithstanding, the greatest indication of a clash in supreme authority were between BUCADA and BVDC. The former was formed in July 1992 in replacement of the defunct

³⁶ Minutes of Bu Village Development Council, 16 June 2001.

³⁷ There was urgent need to facilitate the transportation of bags of cement donated by MIDENO, following the intervention of BUCADA, towards the construction of a bridge linking Bu in Menchum Division and Mbengkas in Boyo Division.

³⁸ Petition from BUCADA to the D.O. Wum Sub Division on Development Projects in Bu Village, 10 February 1993.

BCDC formed fifteen years earlier.³⁹ The birth of BUCADA was occasioned by the inactivity of the BCDC. From 1979 to 1992, it was contended that the BCDC had at no time held a meeting and that the treasurer was not ready to submit a financial balance sheet. Through the advice of *Kuiifuai*, some Bu elite initiated and inaugurated BUCADA with the purpose of reactivating socio-economic development.⁴⁰

This new association set to work immediately as the torchbearer of development in Bu but saw its activities partly torpedoed by supporters and sympathisers of Bonghezee II. This was expected because the association was borne into a turbulent leadership fuss in the fendom. Its detractors dishearteningly referred to it as “Bu Scatter”. Among the activities of BUCADA were the development of a durable water project, the completion of the community health centre, assistance to the primary schools in Bu, maintenance of the farm to market roads and the organisation of a yearly cultural festival or *beletebouh*. Barely seven months into its existence, BUCADA called on the D.O. for Wum Central Sub Division to do his “very best to assist us restore in Bu all the desirable values and above all, the development aspirations of the people both of which have greatly declined during the past decade”.⁴¹

The association was supported by *Kuiifuai* that stood by it from its infancy. Barely one month after the formation of BVDC, that is on 30 May 2001, *Kuiifuai* petitioned the S.D.O. distancing itself from this new born baby association. Among other reasons, this regulatory society maintained that:

We support BUCADA morally, physically and financially because of its openness, transparency and accountability and effectiveness. Hence, the BVDC that is very unpopular in Bu ought not to be popular at the divisional etc. level with debtors and some criminals at its leaders.⁴²

³⁹Letter from Rev. T.N. Amazee to the Elite of Bu Village and the Traditional Council, 9 October 1982; Letter from BUCADA to the D.O. Wum Central.

⁴⁰ Interview with Joseph Tshi Koi, Bamenda, 22 August 2003. He worked hard towards the inception of BUCADA and has continued to fight for the alleviation of the socio-economic plight of Bu people. He works with the North West Development Authority (MIDENO).

⁴¹ Petition from BUCADA to the D.O. Wum Sub Division on Development Projects in Bu Village, 10 February 1993.

⁴² Protest Letter by *Kuiifuai* against the Formation of the Bu Village Development Council, 30 May 2001.

The support of *Kuiifuai* for BUCADA was understandable. The association had relaunched development which had been stalled due to an attack on the management style of the BCDC. In addition, the association was not in opposition to the *Kuiifuai* society. Rather, it recognised and worked with *Kuiifuai* in the socio-economic development of Bu. Some of those who were opposed to *Kuiifuai* were leaders of the newly formed BVDC and *Kuiifuai* held back its blessings to it through its letter to the S.D.O.

In the midst of support for the association, there was opposition on several counts. The forces against BUCADA were Bonghezee II and his supporters and the D.O. for Wum. The D.O. argued that the association had been banned and represented a particular family. This was in apparent reference to the Eselemei family which was in contention and rightly too for the fonship of Bu. In 1994, Bonghezee II quipped that an association that had been outlawed could not be tolerated to collect funds. He was opposed to the idea of BUCADA having a bank account intimating that:

The idea of BUCADA having a bank account is disturbing because at a time when foreign powers interfere in the affairs of Cameroon, an intransigent body like BUCADA can be used to channel subversive funds into the country.^{43\}

This statement came at the height of multiparty politics in Cameroon and Bonghezee II was in support of the ruling CPDM party. This alarmist insinuation did not have any basis and was only meant to give a dog a bad name and hang it. The idea of the account was a way to prevent people from keeping and then embezzling money meant for community development. Such a good idea was hated by those who did not want the development of Bu.

Meanwhile, early in 1994, the D.O. for Wum Central, Yegu James, questioned the authority of BUCADA by arguing that it was “unilaterally formed by a faction of the populace” without due respect for the institution of Bu. He also bluntly said that “Information worthy of trust have [sic] also revealed that ... BUCADA does not receive the support of the entire populace” which made it illegal apart from making it difficult for development to take place. It was true that BUCADA did not receive the support of the entire population so too was BVDC. Based on this premise, it

⁴³ Petition from Chief Emmanuel Bonghezee II of Bu to D.O. Wum Central against BUCADA, 24 September 1994.

was not right for the D.O to argue that because of this, the association was illegal. However, it was not true that BUCADA was formed by a faction of the population because invitation to the formation of BUCADA did not exclude any son and daughter of the fondom but, since the initiative came from some people, others did not support it and decided to paint it black from the very first day. The formation of BVDC was to neutralise BUCADA and bring everyone together but this flopped because *Kuiifuai* and other people soon described it as an association of criminals and debtors. Its detractors even referred to it damagingly as “Bong Victor’s Destructive Council”. This was in reference to Dr. Victor Bong Amaazee, a staunch supporter of Bonghezee II whom *Kuiifuai* rejected. The bickering between BUCADA and BVDC made it difficult to mobilise human and natural resources towards a common development project.

Conclusion

In this paper we have explained the hullabaloo that gripped the socio-economic milieu of Bu especially from the early 1980s, when Chu Mbonghekang passed away, to 2003. In this year, enrolment for official exams in Bu was dismal and hitherto unknown. This was a fall-out of the rumpus in leadership of the fondom. The history of socio-economic development was a mutilated one. The basis of the polarisation of the socio-economic terrain was the leadership squabble that rocked the very foundation of Bu society. This leadership wrangle started in 1925 when Bonghezee I was made to succeed his father instead of the nephew. It took a different turn in 1942 when Chu Mbonghekang succeeded Bonghezee I as a friend and not father or brother or uncle. Were the leadership problem which started long ago resolved, there would have been a recognised and an empowered leadership capable of ‘sweeping clean the house full of dirt.’ Recourse to the very foundation of the fondom would help solve a problem that has spilled into other sectors thereby setting the hand of the clock of development in Bu backwards. Social development especially in the domains of education and health suffered considerably because of a leadership rumpus that never lessened. The economic sector in terms of roads and other projects and the cooperative society which would have been an engine of development was also seriously affected because of a contested leadership of the fondom. As long as the leadership row is not traced from its roots and addressed, socio-economic development will hardly be adequately handled and the population will be the one that will suffer while dubious administrators benefit.

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