

**COLONIAL LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN THE PROVISIONS OF HYGIENIC AND  
SANITARY SERVICES: A HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE SITUATION IN  
BRITISH SOUTHERN CAMEROONS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The British policy of indirect rule devolved power to local authorities which became veritable instruments for the provision of social services to their peoples or areas of jurisdiction. It is as a result of this that local governments became involved in the sanitation and hygiene sector of the territory and constructed structures that were geared towards the improvement of the health conditions of their people. They also trained staff or sanitation officials that were recruited to serve local government areas, introduced legislation that guided the sector and defaulters against set rules were prosecuted. Through these endeavours, they greatly contributed to the amelioration of the sanitation and hygiene conditions of their municipalities. It is because of these successes that the study concludes that these institutions in developing countries in general and Cameroon in particular should borrow from the methods that were employed by the colonial in achieving their objectives in this direction.*

**Keywords: Local Government, Sanitation, Hygiene, Southern Cameroons and West Cameroon**

**Introduction**

Inadequate sanitation and hygiene facilities have often resulted to health problems in developing countries in general and Cameroon in particular. According to the World Bank (1993) improper sanitation and hygienic practices are responsible for about 30% of diseases in developing countries. The World Health Organisation (2012) on its part further postulates that, 80% of infectious diseases in these countries are attributed to hygiene and sanitation inadequacies. Even

though the situation and hygiene conditions remain precarious in Africa, some governments have not given these services the due attention it deserves. Instead of intensifying investments in this sector and prevent the outbreak of related diseases, governments often wait for epidemics to occur before directing more attention to this sector. When these occur, huge sums of money which could have been directed to other social services are spent in immunizations and treatments of causalities. It is because of the failure of central governments to effectively provide social services in general and the increasing menace of diseases and epidemics related to sanitation and hygiene that power has been devolved to local authorities in the management of affairs over the years.

This process began in 1980s and intensified in the 1990s and was aimed at improving service delivery in most developing countries. The functions transferred also took cognisance of sanitation and hygiene and legislations have been passed to that effect in most of these countries. For instance, the law on the decentralisation of power in Cameroon (2004) confers the following functions among others to these institutions. The provision of; “Drinking water supply; cleaning of streets, roads and public parks; monitoring and management of industrial waste; ... combating insanitation, pollution ...; protection of underground and safe water resources ... local management of household waste” (9). This is because Local Governments have remained veritable instruments in the provision of social services to local communities (Ejue and Madubueze, 2014) and the essence is to increase accountability and responsiveness of service delivery. Furthermore these institutions know the needs of local communities and can take rapid decisions on issues affecting them than the central authorities and services provided often reflect the preference of the communities concern.

Even though they are imbued with such attributes, their performance has remained insignificant. This is especially true in Cameroon where local governments’ involvement in sanitation and hygiene in rural areas has been a cause for concern when compared to what held in Southern (West) Cameroon.<sup>1</sup> Through the British policy of Indirect Rule, Local governments were given

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<sup>1</sup> The Territory was part of German Kamerun that was overrun by the French and the British during World War I. After a failed condominium, the two countries divided the territory into two, British and French Cameroons. Because of communication difficulties, the British decided to divide their territory further into two parts, Northern

complete responsibilities over local affairs among which was the management of the sanitation and health sectors of their communities.<sup>2</sup> It is in this light that they constructed sanitary structures like water points, slabs, latrines, incinerators, meat stalls, dry sheds and urinals (Ci(1957)3, No. 195; Ja/g(1958)1). Added to this, they trained personnel and recruited them to serve in their areas of jurisdiction. They further passed Sanitation and hygiene legislations and defaulters were prosecuted in courts. Though they had minimal human, material and financial resources, their achievements were great and many Anglophone Cameroonians who lived through this period are nostalgic of the role played by these institutions. The respect for sanitation and hygiene rules was so great that cleanliness became a culture especially in public places. Sanitation structures were seen as communal asserts and everyone in society became the other's keeper and disrespect of rules were frowned upon by all.

It is because of the disappearance of these good practices and culture among Cameroonians and the negligence of some Local Governments in this respect after independence and especially after the unification of Cameroon that this paper revisits the activities in Southern Cameroons and highlights methods and techniques that were used in amelioration of the health conditions of the people. Though this was common in all Local Government units in the territory, most of the examples are drawn from former Wum Division that is made up of Menchum and Boyo Divisions of the North West Region of Cameroon today. This is because almost all the problems faced and activities carried out by other Divisional Local Governments in the territory were the same.

It is worthy to mention that Southern Cameroons is the present North West and South Regions of Cameroon. The area was annexed by the British in 1916 after the Germans that had colonised the

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and Southern Cameroons, for easy administrative purposes. The Northern part, styled Northern Cameroons was attached to Northern Nigeria and the Southern part where the area of study is found was named Southern Cameroons. This was attached to the Eastern Region of Nigeria and in 1954, the territory gained semi autonomy or quasi regional status from the British Protectorate of Nigeria and upon independence, in 1961, it reunified with the French Cameroon that had gained independence in 1960 and the Cameroon Federation was born. Southern Cameroon became West Cameroon and French Cameroon was renamed East Cameroon.

<sup>2</sup> See Protus Mbeum Tem .2016. Flaws in the Native Administration System in Southern Cameroons: A Factor for the 1949 Creation of Local Government Units, *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, Volume VII, No I, Quarter I, 1 – 24, for the British Policy of Indirect Rule and implementation British Southern Cameroons; See also Protus Mbeum Tem, the Devolution of Power to British Colonial Authorities in Southern Cameroons: Intentions and Reality, 1916 – 1961, forthcoming, for the administrative organisation of Cameroon and changes witnessed.

area in 1884 were ousted by the combined forces of the British and the French. With the success recorded by the allied forces, the territory was divided between these two victorious powers and the French took French Cameroon (the French Speaking part of Cameroon) and the British Southern Cameroons as earlier mentioned. For effective administration purposes caused by communication difficulties in the British sphere, their territory was further divided into two, Northern and Southern Cameroons and attached to the Northern and Eastern Regions of the Nigerian Protectorate respectively. They were thus ruled as an integral part of Nigeria and upon independence through a United Nations plebiscite organised in 1961, Northern Cameroons voted to achieve independence by joining Nigeria and Southern Cameroons chose French Cameroon. Southern Cameroon thus united with French Cameroon and together formed the Federal Republic of Cameroon in 1961. This federation was made up of two states; West Cameroon (former British Colony) and East Cameroon (former French colony) and each of these states had to maintain the system of administration bequeathed to them by colonialism. It was only after the 1972 referendum that the two Cameroons decided to form a reunited Republic and in this new dispensation, the federal structure was dismantled and in its state Provinces were created. Thus, in 1973, the North West and South West Provinces were born out of the West Cameroon and in 1996 following the institution of a new constitution in Cameroon, where Provinces were transformed into Regions; the two Provinces took the appellation North West and South West Regions.<sup>3</sup>

Suffice to note that sanitation and hygienic conditions in the territory were appalling before the creation and engagement of Local Governments in Southern Cameroons. For instance, latrines were absent and in some communities, particular spots that were earmarked by the indigenes

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the political and administrative organisation of Cameroon see; Chiabbi, E. 1989. "British Administration and Nationalism in Southern Cameroons, 1914-1954" in Njeuma, M. 1989. *Introduction to the History of Cameroon*. London: Macmillan Publishers, pp.171-197; Elango, L. Z. 1997. *The Anglo-French Condominium in Cameroon, 1914-1916: A History of Misunderstanding*. Limbe: Navi-group Publication; Mbuagbaw, T. E., Brian R. and Palmer, R. 1987. *A History of the Cameroon*, New Edition. Essex: Longman; Ngoh, V. J. (Ed.) 2004. *Cameroon from a Federation to a Unitary State, 1961-1972, A critical Study*. Limbe: Design House; Ngoh V. J. 1990. *Constitutional Developments in Southern Cameroons*. Yaounde: CEPER; Ngoh, V. J. 1996. *History of Cameroon Since 1800*. Limbe: Pressbook; Njeuma, M. 1989. *Introduction to the History of Cameroon*. London: Macmillan Publishers.

were used for defecating.<sup>4</sup> These were un-dug sites with horizontal poles on two forked sticks. Stench or smells from such sites was a nuisance, especially during the rainy season and were burnt up during the dry season. Others empty their bowels into the pig fences and their faeces served as food for these animals while stray animals (pigs, goats, sheep and dogs) were scavengers. They were never constrained as they moved around freely and their dung was littered everywhere and drinking water sources or spots that were mostly streams were constantly polluted by these animals.<sup>5</sup> Animals for consumption were slaughtered haphazardly in poor hygienic conditions. Besides, dirt or refuse were littered everywhere and little or nothing was done in keeping the environment clean. It was based on these problems faced by the people of Southern Cameroons that Local governments direct their attention and resources towards this sector and did much in improving the situations through the training and recruitment of staff to manage the sector, instituted legislation, prosecuted defaulter and constructed sanitary structures as fore mentioned.

### **Provision of Sanitary Structures**

Because of the fear of the recurrence of health hazards in the territory, Local Governments constructed sanitary structures in order to pre-empt such occurrences and arrest the situation. These structures included water points, latrines, urinals, incinerators, meat stalls and dry sheds among others while existing facilities were repaired and maintained. Provisions were made in the annual budgets of these Local Governments by 1956, these structures were visible in all the municipalities of the territory. Table 1 below indicates some structures built and repaired by one of the Local Governments in the territory.

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Unguru Zacheus Kuum, 70 years, Retired Local Government Messenger, Befang, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Ignatius Kendong, 82 Years, Retired Native Authority Sanitary Officer (Overseer), Weh, 19 January 2008.

**Table 1: Sanitary Structures Constructed and Repaired by the Wum Local Government, 1956**

Clan Area	Water Points		Salga Latrines		Incinerators		Urinals
	New	Repaired	New	Repaired	New	Repaired	Repaired
Wum	1	6	3	12	-	2	7
Esimbi/Beba Befang	1	-	4	2	-	1	-

Source: Ci(1957)3, No. 195. Annual Report Wum Division, 1955, 1956, 1957, 237. National Archives Buea.

As seen table 1, this Local Government had constructed two new water points, one in Wum and the other in Esimbi and Beba Befang and seven salga latrines with three in Wum and four in Beba Befang. Meanwhile, repairs were carried out on old sanitary structures; six water points, fourteen salga latrines, three incinerators and seven urinals in the 1955/56 finance years.

This exploit was continued by this Local Governments of the area and in the 1956/1957 finance, their activities extended to meat stalls, dry sheds and slabs. Its activities were not limited to Wum, Beba Befang and Esimbi but this time around extended to the Njinikom. The number of newly constructed structures and those repaired have been indicated on Table II.

**Table II: Sanitary Structures Constructed and Repaired 1957**

Clan Area	Water Points		Salga Latrines		Incinerators		Dry Sheds	Meat Stall	Slabs
	New	Repaired	New	Repaired	New	Repaired	New	New	Repaired
Wum	-	6	6	12	-	3	3	1	1
Esimbi/Beba Befang	-	4	4	12	-	2	2	1	1
Njinikom	3	1	-	3	-	1	1	2	2

Source: Ci(1957)3, No. 195. Annual Report Wum Division, 1955, 1956, 1957, 237. National Archives Buea.

Local Government expenditures on sanitary and hygiene structures became an important element in their annual budgets as indicated before and took a heavy chunk of Local Governments finances. For instance, in 1958, one thousand pounds was used in the provision of these structures and on personnel recruited by these institutions by the Wum Local Government alone. Table III illustrates the various projects carried out and expenditures incurred in 1958.

**Table III: Sanitation Projects in the Wum Local Government Area, 1958**

Area	Project	Cost
Aghem Town	Incinerator	£80
Aghem Court Premises	Urinary	£8.6
Agehm Market	Extension of Cement Table	£50
Aghem	Incinerator Roof Repairs	£36.13
Aghem Court Yard and Station	three Salga Latrines	£24
Befang Market	Urinary	£3
Befang Market	Pit Latrine	£8
Befang Market	Outpit for Slaughter Slab	£7
Belo Market	Incinerator Roofing	£12
Bum	Four pit latrines	£32
Fuanantui	Water Point	£108
Fundong	Incinerator	££29:17:6d
Mme Market	Incinerator	£55
Modele Court	Pit Latrine	£8
Njinikom and Belo	Four Public Latrines	£40
Njinikom and Belo	Two Out way pits	£8:16:0d
Weh Market	Slaughter Slab	£88

Source: Ja/g(1958)1. Native Authority Meetings, Wum Division, 19. National Archives Buea.

To effectively manage these structures and make sure that they impacted on the area, Local Governments had to employ manpower to take care of these structures and guide the people on how to keep their environments clean and respect basic rules.

### **Training and Employment of Sanitation and Hygiene Officials**

The absence of trained staff was a serious problem that affected Local Government services in the health sector in general and sanitation and hygiene in particular. For instance, the purchase of Microscope that was needed in the Aghem Dispensary had to be suspended because there was no staff in the entire Wum Local government area who could use it by 1957. According to the Medical Officer for Wum Division, this could only be purchased when trained staffs were available. This advice was taken seriously by the Local Government authorities and immediately the interest in training their own staff arose (Ja/g(1957)1). The precarious situation of staff in the territory can further be illustrated with the case of Kom whereby attempts by the Kom Bum Council on recruiting a Midwife was fruitless and for two years, no qualified staff showed up for the position (Ja/a(1968)1, No. 554).

It was due to the absence of these officials that Local Governments in Southern Cameroons took upon themselves in training personnel that were to serve their areas. Upon the completion of studies, those who benefited were employed and charged with the responsibilities of implementing the sanitation and hygiene policies of their Local Governments. In this direction the Wum Local Governments as early as 1953 trained Isabella Meyer in Victoria and Benedict Neng and Beatrice Ngam at the Shisong Training School for Health Personnel. Two health officials were also trained at Shsong in 1969 by the Kom Bum Council at Shisong, C. Nkuo and Ngong. In 1970, one sanitary inspector also benefited from this scheme (Ibid). The Wum Central Council also trained Moses Wong and Asanji Kechawah as Health Overseers in 1969 and in 1970, three sanitary inspectors, Aloysius A. Ntam, Patrick Kum and Nyang E. Were trained.

While these personnel were undergoing training, these institutions made use of the available manpower that could manage the situation. For instance, some health attendants were recruited and served in Mme, Esu, Esimbi, Abar, Fundong and Mbam. Some of them were to serve temporary pending the availability of suitable or qualified candidates. For instance, Agha Gabriel was employed to serve temporary in the Abar Health area. Health maidservants were also employed to aid health officials working in the Wum Central Council area. Leprosy inspectors were also engaged or recruited and found Esu, Weh, Fonfukka, Belo and Wum.

The need for Health Inspectors was so urgent that by 1957, some had been employed and charged with the responsibility of teaching the people basic hygiene and sanitation roles (Ja/g(1957)1a). They were aided by health overseers that were also recruited by Local Governments (Gc/h(1966)1, No. E. 776). This therefore means that, labourers were also recruited by these institutions to take care of public structures. This is evident in the recruitment of these groups of workers in 1958 by the Wum Local Government as presented on Table IV.

**Table IV: Number of Labourers and Amount Spent in Remunerations, 1958**

<b>Clan Area</b>	<b>Number of Labourer</b>	<b>Amount to be Spent for the Year</b>
Aghem	3	£68
Beba Befang	2	£33
Fungom	2	£67

Source: Ja/g(1958)1. Native Authority Meetings, Wum Division, 19. National Archives Buea.



Orderlies were also recruited by Local Governments as these were important components of the health sector in the territory. They took care of rural health through the maintenance of sanitation and hygiene. They moved round villages to make sure that sanitation and hygiene roles were respected by the people (Ibid). They could also serve as dispensers under the strict control of dispensary attendants.

To manage the outbreak of diseases and epidemics especially skin, yaws, small and chicken pox, Scouts were recruited. Better known in the territory as Yaw Scouts, they had to report the outbreak of diseases to Medical Officers that were found in their Local Government areas as well as Local Government authorities. They were also used as vaccination officers during the outbreak of epidemics and even acted as dispensary attendants and assisted health overseers. Since they assisted health overseers whose duties also extended to sanitation and hygiene, it therefore means that they also acted as sanitary and hygiene officials. (Ja/g(1968)5, CI. 553). These officials had to strictly follow rules set down by these institutions.

### **Local Governments' Legislation on Sanitation and Hygiene**

In order to improve on the sanitary and hygienic conditions of the people, Local Governments adopted rules that had to be put into practice by their constituents. For instance, in Wum Division, the Wum Divisional Native Authority Health Rules were adopted. These rules guided the people on general cleanliness both at home and in public. It also encouraged the construction of toilets and the protection and preservation of water points and called for the control and constrained of animals among other things and all were expected to respect them.

To make sure these rules were understood and respected by the people, sensitisation campaigns were carried out and training seminars organised not only by the Wum Local Government but other local governments in the territory. Through this seminar, people were schooled into the basic roles governing hygiene and sanitation. Health Committees were set up after such seminars in all the villages of the territory and they were oblige to make sure that people lived within the prescribed rules through the imparting of knowledge on their areas of control or jurisdictions. They were placed under the supervision of Sanitary Officers. Inhabitants that defaulted were arraigned to courts and prosecuted (Ja/g(1964)2). The pressures on the people to respect these

rules were so great that by 1956 many had been prosecuted and fines paid. Table demonstrates the intensity or seriousness of Local Governments as it presents the numbers prosecuted in some parts of the territory and fines paid.

**Table V: Prosecutions for the Disrespect of Health (Sanitation) Rules, 1956**

<b>Clan Area</b>	<b>Notices Served</b>	<b>Prosecutions</b>	<b>Prosecuted</b>	<b>Total Fines Collected</b>
Wum	144	34	34	£42:51:0d
Fungom	124	58	58	£86:51:0d
Beba Befang and Esimbi	93	45	45	£51:51:0d

Source: National Archives Buea, Ci(1957)3, No. 195. Annual Report Wum Division, 1955, 1956, 1957, 289.

These maiden convictions served as deterrence to others as this worked so well that by 1957, the numbers of defaulters had reduced considerably in these areas as seen on Table VI.

**Table VI: Prosecutions for the Disrespect of Health (Sanitation) Rules, 1957**

<b>Clan Area</b>	<b>Notices Served</b>	<b>Prosecutions</b>	<b>Prosecuted</b>	<b>Total Fines Collected</b>
Wum	51	34	34	£22:51:0d
Fungom	44	44	42	£30:51:2d
Beba Befang and Esimbi	114	25	25	£51:51:0d

Source: Ci(1957)3, No. 195. Annual Report Wum Division, 1955, 1956, 1957, 345. National Archives Buea.

As seen on table VI, many appeared in Court for breaking rules. These prosecutions were disavowed by some Divisional Officers who advised that intensifying such punitive measures vigorously was only to make the sanitary officers unpopular in their areas as they would be viewed as enemies and cooperation from them would be absent. Hence, persuasion and hard work on the education of the people were to be the guiding principles and the only way forward. The fears of the District Officers can be illustrated with that of Wum Division who intimated that, every case could be put on review by defaulters leaving the judiciary system overburdened with such cases. He therefore believed that with hard work, patience and education, things could turn around in future (Ja/g(1957)1a).

This does not mean that Local Governments were silent on any threats that could be hazardous to the health of the people. Decisions were taken whenever flagrant violations of these rules appeared. (Ja/a(1968)1, No. 554). Added to this, all animals had to be slaughtered in the slabs constructed by Local Governments and sanitary rules had to be respected and it was a must that

these slaughtered animals had to be inspected by the sanitary overseer and declared fit for consumption before it could be marketed (Ja/g(1968)5, CI. 553). In order to put an end to littering by stray animals, some Local Governments passed laws. For instance, in 1961, the Wum Central Council passed the Animal Adoptive Rules Order and by this, Local Government could impound stray animals. It is in relation to this that animal pounds were constructed in Weh, Esu, Aghem, Befang and Mme and stray animals were impounded and kept in this structures and owners or defaulters of this rule were charged to court and fines imposed on them (Ja/g(1968)5, CI. 551; Ja/a(1966)1, AG. 21; Ja/b(1964)5).

### **Conclusion**

The study examined the contributions of local governments in the amelioration of the sanitation and hygiene conditions of their municipalities. It holds that the British policy of Indirect Rule, whereby power was devolved to local communities, laid the bases for the involvement of these institutions in the sector. In this direction Local Governments constructed sanitation and hygiene structures which included latrines, dry sheds, water points, incinerators, slaughter slabs, meat stalls and urinals. For the effective management of this sector and the education of the people on the methods and techniques that could be used in improving their plight, officials were recruited by these institutions among which were; sanitary and hygiene inspectors, orderlies, scouts that were very active during epidemics and health overseers. Where it was difficult to get qualified staff, these institutions trained some individuals from their municipalities and upon the completion of studies they were employed.

Besides, local governments had to teach by example and in so doing, they recruited labourers who were responsible for the cleanliness of public structures. Added to these, rules were passed by local governments and all living within their jurisdictions were obliged to respect them. Those who defaulted or abrogated these rules had to pay fines. With these, local governments greatly contributed to the enhancement of the sanitation and hygiene conditions of their communities. It is because of the successes recorded by these institutions between 1952 and 1961 that the study, using the experiences of Southern Cameroons, advises that governments around the world in general and developing countries in particular should give Local Government institutions more

authority in the provision or delivery of this service if they want to eradicate diseases and epidemics related to the non implementation of sanitation and health rules. Through this way they will save a lot of finances that is often deployed when these health hazards occur.

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