

**BAD GOVERNANCE AS BASIS FOR CHIEFTAINCY CONFLICT AND THE
TRANSPPOSITION OF CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS GOVERNING CHIEFTAINCY
SUCCESSION IN BAMESSING, SOUTHERN CAMEROONS, 1953 – 1961**

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ABSTRACT

Chieftaincy institutions have remained important governing institutions in Africa but have been plagued by conflicts due to bad governance. This has ignited the wrath of the people and governments leading to their depositions. Though necessary for development, the process and the choices of their replacements often contradicts or ignores customs and traditions governing chieftaincy succession. It is because of these reoccurrences that the paper, in discussing the Bamessing Chieftaincy conflict, contends that while local authority upheld the customs and traditions governing succession in resolving the conflict, they ignored the principles of good governance and supported the reigning tenant against the wishes of a majority of his subjects. This decision was quashed by the administration as it deposed Lufong, in favour of his grand uncle, Fontong. However, such a decision was reversed by the Southern Cameroons Chiefs' Advisory Council which argued that the verdict of the administration was contrary to native law, customs and traditions as two crowned chiefs in the same stool could not be alive. This was also true with the choice of his replacement as succession moves from father to son. It called regency that had to manage the affairs of the village until Lufong's son became of age to mount the stool. In this way they averted attempts to transpose the customs and traditions governing Chieftaincy succession.

Keywords: *Chieftaincy, Conflict, Governance, Southern Cameroons, Bamessing and Customs and Traditions*

Introduction

The chieftaincy institution has remained a genuine institution of governance in African communities. It has become a revered and respectable institution and a colonial legacy in the

power structure of the African state. As opposed to modern political institutions in Africa, they are not a colonial creation but survived the colonial and post colonial dispensations and retained its authority and respect among Africans (Mohammed, 2005; Geschiere, 1993 and Cook, 2005). Before the coming of colonialism to the Africa, the chiefs were divine in nature and combined both the legislative, executive, religious, military and judiciary functions. They were/are the custodians/guardians of fundamental or customary values and these customary values or laws regulated civil behaviour in traditional governance. It therefore means that, these institutions were repositories of traditions and history of their societies, custodians of customs and traditions, arbitration of justice and enforcement of customary law. Their authority also extended to the allocation of land, promotion of peace and culture and the protection of African Kingdoms/communities from external threats or danger. They also acted as mediators between the people and spiritual forces, and were embodiments of development (Mensah, 2014; Mawere, 2004; Dapilah, Bonye and Dawda, 2013). Hence, it was their duty to ensure excellent links between the people and ancestors, safeguarded existing beliefs, respect for the gods, elders and authorities, ensure the fertility of the land and their peoples and protected the people from taboos. In short, they were to ensure the safety of their community, invigorate material progress and ensure peace and unity (Cook, 2005).

During the colonial period, the important role played by these institutions was not proscribed though they became subsidiaries to the colonial administrators. Their inclusion in governance was to reduce the cost of governance by the colonial authorities, condense discontents and facilitate control of African territories. However, indigenous chiefs who went against the laws governing the office of chieftaincy in connection with colonial legislation were either deposed or deported (Tem, 2016; Mensah, 2014 and Keese, 2010). This precedence set by the colonial authorities was carried forward to the post colonial period as legislation still maintained the office of chieftainship as auxiliaries of the administration and charged with the responsibility of implementing government policies at the grassroots. That notwithstanding, their authority has been eclipsed. Though they govern according to the dictates of the customs and traditions of their peoples, many of them abuse their powers and the resultant effect has been agitations from some sectors of society and the outbreak of chieftaincy conflict. This further aggravates the place of traditional rulers in governance and most often than not some post colonial administrators are

called upon to adjudicate and in this direction, they ignore the traditional methods of conflict resolutions, aggravating the feuds (Tem, 2013; Aganah, 2008). Though general in Africa, the situation of Cameroon is glaring especially in the North West Region where they are bound and some conspicuous examples are the cases of Kedjum Keku, Oshie, Bamali, Bu, Bambui, Santa-Akum, Ashone, Zhoa, Missong, Bangolang among others.¹

These conflicts have been perpetuated by disputed claims to the stool by individuals and families quarrelling over the right of succession. Other causes include; corruption propagated by some wealthy individuals who use money in buying their way to the throne or their clients, politicisation and the enthroning of some individuals by political authorities. Most strikingly, the dethroning of some chiefs by the authorities has been one of the greatest factors that have facilitated Chieftaincy conflicts (Agyeman-Duah, 1997). Most often than not, this is done in contravention of the rules guiding succession and inheritance of communities by the kingmakers or government officials. It should be noted that the office of chieftainship can only be occupied by someone from the royal family and must be chosen by a majority of kingmakers a number of candidates and endorsed by the government. The candidate must not be an ex-convicted in crimes related to high treason and offences dealing with the security of his people. He must not have been involved in fraud, dishonesty and moral turpitude (Owus- Mensah, 2014). Once enthroned as Chief, the individual can only be dethroned on the premise that, he had breached the oath of office (factors outlined above), a process that is often difficult to prove and may be challenged by his adherents (Cook, 2005). It therefore means that negligence in governance or

¹ For details see H. K. Kam, “Leadership Fuss in Bu Chiefdom, North West Province, Cameroon 1942 – 2001”, Epasa Moto, *A bilingual Journal of Arts, Letters and the Humanities*, University of Buea; S. Ewi, “Chieftaincy Dispute in Bu, Laimbwe Clan 1942-2001”, M.A. Dissertation in History, University of Yaounde I, 2008; E. M. Shaibu, “Chieftaincy Succession in Ashong 1870-1999: A History of Turbulence”, DIPES II in History, ENS Yaounde, 2000. See also North West Regional Archives (NWRA) File No. W/HA1976/1, Chieftaincy Matters 1976-1986; NWRA, File No. W/Hb, 1964/1, Chieftaincy Dispute, Bambui, Bamenda Division, 1964; NWRA, File No. NW/Hb, 1971/1, Chieftaincy Dispute, Santa-Akum, 1971. See also Protus Mbeum Tem, Chieftaincy Crisis in the North West Region of Cameroon: the Case of Zhoa 1910-2008, *SEPHIS E Magazine*, Vol. 9, January 2013, pp. 25 – 36; Protus Mbeum Tem, Administrative Handling of the Zhoa Chieftaincy Crisis, North West Region, Cameroon 1994-2008, *Journal of Research in Peace, Gender and Development*, Vol. 3(1), January 2013, pp. 9-17; Protus Mbeum Tem, Administrative Obduracy in Implementing Judgments Crystallising Conflicts in West Cameroon: An Insight into the Missong Chieftaincy Crisis 1967 – 1971, *International Journal Advances in Social Science and Humanities*, Vol.4, Issue 12, December 2016, PP. 08-14; See also The Guardian Post, No.0950, Bangolang Goes up in Flames as Impostor Fon Drops Dead Thursday 16, 2016, Michael Ndi; for analyses on some of the Chieftaincy conflicts in the Region.

bad governance is the only ground for dethronement. For instance, Article 29 of the 1977 Decree on Chieftaincy in Cameroon denounces any attempt by traditional rulers to extort from their subjects and if they act *ultra vires*; they are dismissed summarily if proven. As aforementioned when this happens, disagreement occurs and there is often the occurrence or outbreak of feuds, chaos, violence and disorder.

To bring such situations or occurrences under control, traditional methods of conflict resolutions which were based on the customs and traditions of societies are often employed and this is usually through mediation, negotiations and reconciliations which are guided by the knowledge on, customs and traditions as well as history of the chiefs of the community concerned. This usually takes the form of rituals, prayers and sacrifices to the gods and ancestors, the payment of fines or wealth exchange by conflicting parties. The process of solving chieftaincy conflicts was therefore based on consensus and in this way peace, justice, order, unity and the reintegration of conflicting parties into society were achieved. This is often done with the help of elders, other chiefs in their areas or neighbours, priests, and under their guidance, merrymaking usually crowns this incidences of reconciliations (Bukari, 2013). Post colonial authorities followed the example of colonial masters in dethroning chiefs without following the customs and traditions of communities and in some cases they either dethroned chiefs unlawfully or willingly refused to do so even if they were sanctioned by their people for bad governance. They did so under the pretext that once a chief, always a chief forever and argued that they were respecting the customs and traditions of these institutions. It therefore means that, in line with the laws of the North West Region of Cameroon and other African communities, there can be no two reigning chiefs living at the same time and he (the chief) can only be succeeded on the demise of the reigning tenant. This argument seems to have delayed government's involvement and the speedy taking of decisions on chieftaincy conflicts that are associated with bad governance, especially in stances where reigning tenants are not favoured by a majority of the people to remain on the stool while economic and social progress deteriorates.

It is because of the existence of these scenarios in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular and its negative consequences and the authorities' inability to promptly react to bad governance perpetuated by traditional rulers that the study revisits the strides taken by the administration of

Southern Cameroons in handling inappropriate governance related cases involving the chieftaincy institution while at the same time preserving the customs and traditions of the people, something that has been difficult to replicate in this part of the country since independence.² Before settling down on the nitty-gritty of the subject under focus, it is necessary to conceptualise governance and its components in order to properly understand the efforts of the government of Southern Cameroon in handling the matter.

Governance and its Components

The notion or term ‘governance’ has won currency and preoccupied all development agencies and governments around the world since 1990. It won more recognition in 2000 as it became one of the Millennium Development Goals that was initiated by the United Nations’ Millennium Goals that held in September of that year and today is seen as the most singular embraceable factor in eradicating poverty, enhancing development and social wellbeing (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, www.unescap.org.pdd., Frechette, 1999; Simonis, 2004; Anan, www.unu/p&g/wgs/; Essien, 2014 and Wani, 2014). In spite of the increased interest in governance, there has been no consensus on its meaning or concept by the academic and donor communities.

The former (donor community) hints it as the way power and authority are structured in different context and methods used in ensuring accountability and safeguarding the process of law. In other words, it is the way society is managed in so far as management is concerned. (Simonis, 2004). Again, its concern is focus on the role state structures play in instituting equity through an open policy process in the economic and social spheres of state management (Chazan, 1992 and Report on the Commission on Global Governance, <http://www.itcilo.it/English/actrav/telearn/global/ilo/globe/gov.htm>). Added to these, it is the process of making and implementing decisions (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), www.unescap.org.pdd). While the donor community looks at it from the economic and social point of view, the academic community posits that it is the structuring of power and authority or the techniques in which power relations

² Few cases have been recorded in the North West Region of Cameroon like the case of Missong where the reigning tenant was replaced after ruling for more than a decade.

are arranged in a society. Furthermore, the capacity to promote collective goals through the institution and sustenance of working relations between individual actors is also one of their concerns (Albritton and Bureekul , 2009 and Chazan, 1992). In spite of these different outlooks, most authors have struggled to blend the two and focus on the commonalities of ideologies between the two schools of thought when addressing issues of governance.

In this direction, Frechette (1999) does not disagree with the two schools of thought but attempts at bringing their ideas together and argues that it is the ability of guiding or steering societies and organisations together. He explores further on this and posits that it is the interactions between the various forces of communities; structures, processes and traditions and the outcome of these factors in determining how power is exercised, decisions taken or made as well as the role of citizens and other stakeholders in the process. He does not end here but in a lighter mode, articulates that the various groups in society, businesses, institutions and citizens must be able to protect their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences. Just like Frechette, Graham, Amos and Plumptre (2003) belabours on the interaction of forces in society and the role played by citizens or their reactions in making decisions. In this direction, the principle of decision making and responsibilities on those concerned in rendering accounts and power politics are all essential to the understanding of governance. Meanwhile, Grindle (2001) in trying to bring out the commonalities of the academic and donor schools of thoughts insinuates that it deals with the institutional processes and rule of the game for authoritative decision making.

Another view has been propagated by the Report on Global Governance, (<http://www.itcilo.it/English/actrav/telearn/global/ilo/globe/gov.htm>) when it opines that governance is;

The sum of the ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting diverse interests may be accommodated and co-operative action may be taken. It includes formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed to or perceive to be in their interests” (p.3).

As seen on the various views above, this study will perceive governance simply as the structuring of society in such a way that, decisions are made and implemented by all in such a way that conflicts are minimised, interests of all groups taken care of and accountability rendered by those in authority in a bid to ensure the social and economic development of societies. A better understanding of the notion of governance and better still, inappropriate, negligence in or bad governance can best be understood by the dimensions or principles of good governance which serves as indicators in measuring governance.

Some aspects of good governance will include participation in the decision making process by all members of a society. This may be directly or indirectly through instituted institutions acting as intermediaries to represent their interests. Furthermore, it must be consensus oriented as it embraces all shades of opinions to reach a broader and acceptable consensus with regard to policies and procedures in the best interest of society. Transparency is another dimension which is essential to good governance. There must be transparency in governance and every citizen must be informed of how their societies are governed. Hence, the free flow of information becomes an essentiality in governance. Institutions are also expected to be informed or be responsive to the needs of their communities. Past, present and future exigencies must be taken into consideration and decisions and results tailored towards societal needs. In the provision of the needs of their societies, efficiency and effectiveness must be the watchword and through this can good governance be measured. Where services are provided efficiently, these must be done equitably and fairly among citizens for them to have a sense of common belonging (Albritton and Bureekul, 2009. Frechette, 1999; Graham, Amos and Plumtre, 2003); UNESCAP, www.unescap.org.pdd; International Fund for Agricultural Development, Executive Board, (1999); United Nations Development Programme, 1997 and Gaventa and Valderrama, 1997).

This therefore means that fair play and equity cannot be overemphasized as components of good governance especially in heterogeneous societies in the building or enshrining a sense of common belonging. This consequently makes inclusiveness a common acceptable principle of good governance as this instils a sense of ownership and dedication to the institution as well a spirit of patriotism and garners support to the socioeconomic endeavours of society. Furthermore, accountability to the public is a major factor for good governance for this is

necessary to imbibe confidence in citizens. Again, those in power must be visionary in their approach to governance. They must have a prospective view of what the society needs in future. This vision must be related or embedded in the historical, cultural and social complexities of societies. Last but not the least; the above principles can best be enforced where the rule of law is effective. In this direction, a legal framework must exist in order to bring delinquents to order and also enforce these principles (Ibid). In a nutshell, good governance addresses issues of non discrimination, protection of human rights, impartiality and fairness of the judiciary, transparency and accountability on the part of public officials, devolution of decision making to lower tiers of government and the participation of citizens in determining public policies and choices of their communities (Wyman, http://www.education.gov.mt/youth/pdf_cyf/CYF_theme_concept_papers/cg_governance_papers/pdf). In spite of these excellent principles of governance, some institutions have failed in exercising them leading to bad, inappropriate or delinquency in governance in the society. It is therefore important to highlight the components of bad or inappropriate governance in the international, national and local perspective for a better understanding of these activities in institutions especially chieftainship in Africa in general and southern Cameroons in particular.

According to the World Bank (1998), bad governance is concerned with issues like dictatorship, the absence of human rights, corruption and the predominance of unaccountable government. Kawela (...) does not disagree with the World Bank but goes further to argue that bad governance is characterised by the lack of the rule of law, mismanagement, the prevalence of conflict, absence of equality and effective civil society as well as political participation. He goes further to add that the absence of consensus orientation, freedom of speech and association and the inability to access information, no responsiveness to the needs of communities, lack of equity, effectiveness and efficiency as bases or foundations of bad governance. While concurring with Kawela on these factors as aspects of bad governance, Aly (2013) goes further to opine that lack of transparency cannot be undermined as it remains a veritable factor of bad governance. Not diverting from the direction of the above authors, Coker (2013) also highlights the exclusion of citizens and elite as a component of bad governance. He gives a comprehensive and vivid view of bad governance when he confirms, that the inability to manage public affairs and resources and also provide for the needs of citizens are indicators of bad governance. Just like

the other authors and in different words, he cites dictatorship, absence of free media among others as symptoms of bad governance. That notwithstanding, the effects of bad or inappropriate governance which are also impediments to good governance are wide and varied and include; corruption, conflicts, rivalry and absence of peace, crimes, poor performance of the authorities and weakening legitimacy as well as the recurrence of human rights abuses (Aly, 2013; Coker, 2014 and Suleiman and Karim, 2015). Most of these factors outlined above are inherent in traditional political institutions in Africa in general and the Southern Cameroons in particular as demonstrated with the Bamessing Chieftainship.

Historical Antecedent and Setting

Bamessing is found in Ndop Central Subdivision of Ngoketunja Division in the North-West Region of Cameroon. It is bounded to the North, East, South and West by Babungo, Bamunka and Babanki respectively. When the Germans annexed Cameroon in 1884 and subsequently moved into the Western Grassfields, they established their headquarters in Bali and the Western Grassfields was administered from this administrative headquarters. However, the headquarters was later transferred to the Bamenda with a Military Station. With the demise of the Germans in Kamerun during World War I, the British and French who expelled them from the territory in 1916 established a condominium which lasted up to 1918. Due a failure in the joint administration of the territory by the two powers the territory was divided into two with the British taking one fifth and the French four Fifth of the territory. The British territory was attached to the Nigerian Protectorate and ruled as part of that colonial territory. Due to communication difficulties between the northern and southern parts of British Cameroon, the territory was divided into two Northern and Southern Cameroons and administered as parts of the Northern and Eastern Regions of Nigerian (Mbuagbaw, Brian and Palmer, 1987; Fanso, 1989; Ngoh, 1996; Ngoh, 2001 and Elango, 1996).

Southern Cameroons which became a Province (Cameroons) in the Eastern Region of Nigeria was further divided into four administrative divisions, Bamenda, Kumba, Mamfe and Victoria. The area under focus was administered as part of the Bamenda Divisions from 1916 to 1948. In 1948, the territory was reorganised and the Bamenda Division was upgraded into a Province (Bamenda) with three new divisions created (Wum, Nkambe and Bamenda). The other three

divisions were conglomerated into the Cameroons Province. Bamessing fell under Bamenda Divisions and was part of the Ndop Native Authority. The British policy of Indirect Rule has made it possible for the creation of Native Authorities (Council of Chiefs and elders in or Chiefs in Council) in order to effectively manage their territory. It was as a result of this that Chiefs were used in the day to day administration of their chiefdoms or polities. They thus became auxiliaries of the administration and had to collect taxes for the British, administered justice and animate local development (Ngoh, 199; Fanso, 1989). This therefore made the institution of chieftain very important instruments of administration and efforts were put in place to preserve and protect them by the colonial authorities. However, they were to operate within colonial policies and also the dictates of their customs and traditions which were guiding principles to good governance. However, many of them acted contrary and had to face the wrath of the colonial authorities or their people as in the case in Bamessing.

The people of Bamesing are Tikars and originated from Ndobu under a single leadership. On arrival in the Ndop plain, the outbreak of a chieftaincy feud between ten brothers led to divisions between them as they parted ways and created the ten villages that are found in Ndop today. The brothers were Fanji, Nsei, Munkar, Ngolan, Bessi, Baba, Bungo, Munkum, Mali, and Mbalang. They founded the villages of Bafanji, Bamessing, Bamunka, Bangolan, Babessi, Baba, Babungo, Bamunkumbit, Bamali, and Bambalang respectively. Concerning Bamessing that was founded by Nsei, the most prominent leaders that mounted the stool after Nsei were Muntong Fong who was succeeded by Fonkentang and then Mbufong and Martin Lufong in that order. It was during the reign of Lufong that Fontong challenged the authority of the reigning Chief. Fontong was a half brother to Fonkentang who was selected as heir to the throne by their father, Muntong Fong. However, with the support of some elders in the village he challenged the authority of his grand nephew, the grandson of Mbufong, years later (Jeffreys, 17/1/1960).

Claims of Bad Governance: A Source of the Conflict

The death of Mbufong on 4th April 1953 led to Lufong taking over power from his father after a two months delay on the 18th of June 1953. He had hardly spent more than two years in power when the seven notables/elders of his village challenged his authority and called for his deposition with the support of a majority of his subject. Spearheaded by his grand Uncle,

Fontong, they accused him of bad governance and the disrespect of the customs and traditions of Bamessing. In a letter to the Ministry of Local Government, they outlined seven points against their Chief. In the first count, they accused him of disrespecting the traditions of Bamessing and justified this with the argument that he got his first child with a woman who was not from Bamessing but a foreigner.³ As it is a tradition in most Grassfield fondoms in Cameroon, the first male child of a chief is supposed to come from an indigenous woman as he is expected to ascend the stool upon the demise of his father.

Besides, his profligacy or licentiousness was taboo as it was against the customs and traditions of Bamessing for a traditional ruler to have sexual relations with the wives of his subjects, young girls and other women that were not his wives. Things were further worsened by bringing them into the palace, desecrating it, and worse still causing the divorce of some women from their husbands. Added to this, the sale of traditional palace artefacts (to a European) was unacceptable as they accused him of disposing-off these artefacts for financial gains to the tune seven hundred and fifty pounds (£750).⁴ Other counts brought against him were the establishment of a Native Court in his village even though he was a member of the Ndop Native Court that arbitrated for the entire Ndop Native Authority and in this design collected fines and fees for his personal interest to the detriment of his subjects. They vindicated this with the attest that he was charged for adjudicating without authority and thus paid two hundred and eighty five pounds (£285) as damages when the matter was reported to the police. The defrauding of his subjects was further highlighted with the claim that he imposed income tax on some of his subjects even though they fell under the pay roll of the poll tax and had been doing so over the years.⁵ Worse still, they alleged that he collected about two hundred and fifty pounds (£250) from his subjects under the pretext that this was to be used for the demarcation of the boundary between Bamessing and Babanki Tungo but misappropriated or embezzled the money without accounting to his people.

He was also accused of discouraging parents from sending their girl children to school. This was because; he had withdrawn the lone female girl that was attending school in his village. This was a serious discouragement to parents who feared that sending their children to school on the bases

³ Letter from M. D. W. Jeffreys, District Officer, to the Senior Divisional Officer, Bamenda, 17/01/1960, p.2.

⁴ Letter from Bamessing Notables to the Ministry of Local Government, Buea, 6/16/1959.

⁵ Ibid.

that they would also be withdrawn by their Chief if they reached the age of maturity. Again, it was also intimated that he was noted for the seizing of raffia palm bushes from some of his subjects who would not support his governance policies nor submit to his unlawful financial demands and handed them over to those who supported him and succumbed to his monetary obligation. His poor governance strategies led to the constant migration of the youths to other localities outside Bamessing, they opined. He disrespected his elders by going on foreign visits without informing them was also frowned upon. Though called to order on three different occasions by the elders, a plea that he changes his attitude and rule as customs and tradition demands, he turned down such advises and continued with the same acts unrepentantly. It was because of these poor attitudes or governance that the elders thus informed the Ministry of Local Government that they have dethroned him in favour of someone who would respect the custom and traditions of his people and not defraud his subjects, encourage the education of the girl child and preserve the cultural values of Bamessing.⁶

In response to these allegations, investigations were carried out by the Senior District Officer (SDO) for Bamenda and his findings justified some of these allegations. In a response to Prime Minister of Southern Cameroons, the SDO confirmed that Lufong was a man full of intrigues in so far as women were concerned. To him, he was a fairly educated young man and in no doubt attracted by school girls and female teachers who were more sophisticated than the ordinary farming women of Bamessing. This therefore means that he was not innocent of the allegations of adultery and irresponsible sexual relations with his subjects. This claim was sustained by a case he brought against Bobe to the Ndop Native Court for defamation. He had accused him of propagating scandalous information that he seduced his daughter who was married to another man. Though the court found Bobe not guilty, such a scandalous life-style and attitude from the custodian of tradition was not welcome by the people. Going back to the case at the Ndop Native Court, the Chief was fined twenty ponds (£20) for deceit or lying against and better still falsely accusing Bobe.⁷ Even when the case went on Appeal at the Bamenda Tikari Appeal Court, it was passed to the favour of the defendant and he was asked to pay the sum of two pounds, two

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ndop Native Court Suit No. 80/58; Claim:- £25 for Defamation of Character by Falsely Defaming the Chief's Name at Bamessing One Month Ago.

shillings and six pence (£2:2:6).⁸ He was unable to substantiate his claims and damages had to be awarded to Bobe. This was so disgraceful to the notables of Bamesing for it was taboo for a Chief to take his own subject to court talk less of being disgraced in the process of adjudication as the court held that he acted irresponsibly and dismissed the case in the two instances cited above.⁹

This was equally true for the operating of an illegal court. This was justified by the fact that in October 1957, Lufong and eighteen others were sentenced to two months or pay fifteen ponds (£15) in the Bamenda Magistrate's Court for operating an illegal court in Bamesing. This is evident or can be justified by the judgement of case no. BA/947C/57 in which he was found guilty and an excerpt of it reads;

That you (Lufong) between the months of March and August, 1957, at Bamesing Ndop, Bamenda Province, in the Southern Cameroons, being resident within the area of Ndop Native Court jurisdiction, did hold without due authority; where at, men were summoned, tried and fined; and thereby committed an offence punishable under section 43(1) of the Native Court Ordinance Cap.142 vol. 4, Laws of Nigeria, 1948.¹⁰

With regard to the disposing-off of artefacts in the palace, the SDO also found him wanting as he posited that an American, Stanley Diamond of Dogun Deutse Jose firm, who was interested in the purchase of African or indigenous works of arts had moved into a deal with Lufong for the exchange of a Renault Car worth three hundred (£300) and some goods with some artefacts in the palace. He insinuated that he was sure some of them were in Diamond's possession. The SDO in his submission to the Ministry of Local government concluded that Lufong was unpopular in his village and that a majority of his people were against him. They were in support of the seven notables and in favour of Fontong taking over from Lufong as their Chief. He therefore endorsed the dethronement of Lufong in favour of Fontong when he opined that there will be little or no resistance if Fontong replaced Lufong as Chief of Bamesing. However, he cautioned that customary processes and methods should be used in handling the matter. However, he was pessimistic as to whether this would bring an amicable solution to the mater as

⁸ Bamenda Tikari Court Civil Appeal No.19/58.

⁹ Ref. No. 170, Letter from Senior District Officer, J. Smyth, Bamenda to the Permenent Secretary, Ministry of Local Government, Lands and Survey, Buea, "Petition from Certain Citizens of Bamesing, 21st August 1959.

¹⁰ Case No. BA/947C/57: Inspector General of Police Versus Chief Martin Lufong, Ndekalendong, Freeboyof the Bamenda Magistrate's Court, 1957.

the two sides (supporters of Lufong and Fontong) were not ready to take that direction.¹¹ With these accusations against the Chief of Bamessing and the SDO's preference for a customary resolution of the conflict, Lufong's colleagues of the Ndop Native Authority and the Ndop Native Court had to intervene to salvage the situation.

Native Authority's Attempts at Resolving the Conflict in Strict Respect of the Customs and Tradition of the People

The Chiefs of the Ndop Native Authority area took the lead in bringing the matter under control. In an emergency meeting that held on the 11th of May 1959, they blamed Fontong for trying to unseat a reigning Chief. They argued that Fontong was at fault and unanimously upheld that succession was from father to son and unequivocally stated that; "we strongly reject any attempt by Fontong to alter our custom in the way he has incited certain sections of Bamessing to kick against our tradition"¹² They further opined that Fontong had lost his right to chieftainship when his father went 'missing'¹³ and handed over the stool to his brother whose descendants had ascended the throne before now.

To them, he could not be claiming the throne on grounds that his father was once Chief of Bamessing. They pushed forth their arguments by revealing that Mbufong, the late Chief, had informed them of his son succeeding him upon his 'disappearance'. The notables were also aware of this wish and this explains why they had to wait for Lufong who was studying in Nigeria for close to two months before enthroning him as their new chief in replacement of Mbufong. Fontong who was resident in the village neither raised any objection nor claimed the throne as he witnessed all these developments. They wondered why he now laid claim to the throne. To them, Fontong had nursed the idea of unseating Lufong because he did not bring the matter to the Ndop Local Council of Native Authority, the Executive Committee of that institution, the Federal Council nor the District Officer for a hearing or advice on the misdeeds of the reigning tenant. They again called on the Native Authority to bring Fontong and his followers to order for attempting to provoke or inflame trouble in Bamessing. It was their conviction that if

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Letter from M. D. W. Jeffreys, District Officer, to the Senior Divisional Officer, Bamenda, 17/01/1960, p.2.

¹³ In the Bamenda Grassfields, a Chief does not dies but moves to meet his ancestors. It is therefore taboo to use the word death and 'Passing on', 'disappearance' among others are preferred in describing the demise of a Chief.

this was allowed to escalate, it would state a precedence that was to be followed by other communities in Ndop and beyond.¹⁴

It was based on this premise or advice that the Ndop Native Authority through its judiciary organ, the Native Court, served the seven notables with summonses including Fontong. However, they refused appearing before the court and only arrest warrants and forceful arrests by the police would they appear to answer charges in Court. Though tried and convicted for fomenting trouble in Bamessing and inciting the people against their Chief, they defendants on appeal and the decision of the lower court was quashed. They were only sanctioned for contempt of the Court and not for violating native law and customs. On the advice of the SDO, the Commissioner of Southern Cameroons dismissed him as member of the court bench. He (SDO) argued that that the activities of Lufong had cause him to lose the confidence of his people and his activities and conduct did not represent an iota of justice which he had to dispense in the Native Court. As such, he could not thus be entertained either as court member, Native Authority Members or the ruler of his people.

The Premiere of Southern Cameroons and the Dismissal of Lufong in Favour of Fontong: Taboo to the Customs and Traditions of Bamessing

The flagrant violations of the customs and traditions of his people or bad governance orchestrated by Lufong ignited the wrath of the Premiere of Southern Cameroons and in consultation with his Executive Council decided to dismiss him from the office of Chieftain. According to him and in line with the SDO's convictions, the conduct of the Chief was such that he no longer enjoyed the support of his people. He argued that out of the fourteen quarters in his village, only four supported him and ten were in favour of Fontong. Though arguments had been raised by the Chiefs of Ndop Native Authority Area that once somebody was made a chief, he remained so till dead, he disregarded this. According to Bamessing tradition, he could only be killed before his successor can take over power.¹⁵ However, some Chiefs of neighbouring villages gave contrary opinions and argued that he could be exiled. In spite of these discrepancies in the traditions of the Ndop area, the Prime Minister noted that; "If native law and custom

¹⁴ Minutes of Emergency Meeting of the Ndop Natural Rulers – the Chiefs - Held at Bamuka Chiefs' Rest House on 11th May 1959.

¹⁵ This was the view of the supporters of the Chief within and without.

requires that Martin Lufong remain chief of Bamessing until he dies, then that is bad law and contrary to natural justice it becomes government's duty to intervene".¹⁶

To the Premiere, the 1959 Ordinance (Appointment and Deposition of Chiefs' Ordinance, Cap 12) gives the Commissioner power to depose any traditional ruler after due consultation with those concerned with the selection (kingmakers). He further states that if inquiries are satisfactorily carried out that such deposition is required according to native law and custom or that it is necessary in the interest of peace and good governance, then the Commissioner can go ahead with the dismissal. Relying on the section that focuses on governance, he therefore posited that it was necessary for the interest of good governance that Martin Lufong be formerly deposed from office as chief of Bamessing. To him, it was unjust that he retains that office as there was sufficient evidence that he had been rejected by his people as three quarter of his people were in favour of getting him out or rid of this position. It was after these considerations that the Executive Council called on the Commissioner to depose him in accordance with section 4 of the Appointment and Deposition of Chiefs' Ordinance.¹⁷

In informing Martin Lufong of his dismissal or deposition, the Executive Council of Southern Cameroons, reminded him that he "had lost support of his people" because "his conduct had offended against native law and custom" that "he had been deposed from chieftaincy according to native law and custom" and advised that "there was no reason to disagree with the grounds of deposition."¹⁸ He was advised to leave the palace only with his belongings and that all chieftaincy properties should not be tampered with. The contestants, seven notables, were also informed and called upon to act expediently in respecting this decision in the interest of the community. This was to be done through the accepted leaders and representatives of the people of Bamessing. Added to this, they were also called upon to effectively follow the processes involved with this exercise traditionally. They were to determine the appropriate time and methods of implementation of this decision, the deposition of Lufong and enthronement of Fontong. The SDO for Bamenda was called upon to oversee the implementation of this decision and use all

¹⁶ SCA (60)85, File No. P.O.333, Bamessing Chieftaincy, Memorandum by Premier, 10th May 1961.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ SCA(60)147, File No. P.O.333, Bamessing Chieftaincy, 23rd August 1960.

means available within his powers to make sure this is effectively done. However, he needed to employ caution in order to guard against the breach of peace.

However, the eviction of Lufong from the Palace was met with stiff resistance as he challenged the right of the government in deposing him. This was on the 19th of June 1960. He refused handing over sacred palace objects to the notables and also emphatically denied leaving the Palace for Fontong. The notables and police men brought in to make sure he leaves the Palace peacefully, in line with the implementation of the decision, were powerless as they would not use force Lufong. The SDO had warned them to desist from any act that might breach the peace of the village. The elders thus called on the SDO to handle the matter. While waiting for the matter to be resolved by the administration, tempers flared in Bamessing as Lufong and his supporters defied Government orders and refused quitting the throne for their opponents and there was clear indication that clashes would erupt. The authority needed to act fast this was not to be through persuasion but direct administrative intervention. The SDO thus advised the Premiere to use Section 2 of the Ex – Native Office Holders Removal Ordinance, Cap. 68 which stipulates that, the Commissioner or Governor may order the expulsion of any Chief, elder or person as well as Native Ruthority members if their activities or presence in any locality in the territory would endanger peace of security of communities.

However, there was the fear that protests would erupt not only from Bamessing but also from other members of the Ndop Native Authority or Chiefs of the area who were against the deposition of Lufong. As aforementioned, there was the fear that such a precedence may be followed by their own subjects and bring disorder to the entire Native Authority area. The position of the Chiefs of Ndop or the Native Authority could not be taken lightly since this represented the views of the entire area as all the chiefs in the area (members of the NA) jointly rejected Fontong on the emergency meeting held on the 11th of May 1961. Table 1 below shows the names of Chiefs and villages they command that took that decision.

Members of Ndop Native Authority who rejected the Deposition of Chiefs Lufong of Bamessing, May 1959

Name of Chief	Division Represented	Position
Njoya	Munka	Chairman
Galabe	Nepkolbi	Member
Zofua (Zofor)	Ngo	Member
Mellow	Baba I	Member
Ghogomu	Bambalang	Member
Ngumbefor	Bichop	Member
Ngri	Bafanji	Member
Nkanyi	Fon of Balikumbat	Member
Nayingwe	Representative, Bamessi	Member
Ndinomba	Representative, Bangola	Member

Source: Compiled by Author with Information Gotten from Minutes of the Emergency Meeting of the Ndop Natural Rulers – the Chiefs - Held at Bamuka Chiefs’ Rest House on 11th May 1959.

That notwithstanding, after due consultation with the Chiefs, the Premiere was assured by the SDO when he postulated that; “I think I can now say that the Ndop Chiefs do not seem to be prepared to support Mr, Lufong. The matter has come before them on two occasions and on neither have they given any sign of wishing to protest against government’s approval of deposition”.¹⁹ It was after this that the Executive Council reiterated its intention of not only evicting him from the Palace but also held that he should be exiled from the Bamenda Division. It was feared that his presence in the Division was not healthy for any peaceful coexistence between Lufong and his supporters and his opponents. The breach peace was therefore envisaged and he was not to be allowed to stay in Bamessing.

Though such decisions were not against the laws of Southern Cameroons and acclaimed by many as a check to the excesses of the authority of traditional rulers in the territory, the choice of succession was greeted with contempt by traditional rulers and other custodians of the traditions of the Bamenda Grasslands. This was because, many saw it as taboo for an uncle to replace the nephew as heralded by the emergency meeting of Ndop Chiefs as aforementioned. Again, succession was from father to son as per the Bamesing and many wondered how there can exist two chiefs (alive) for a single village. To them, it was against the customs and traditions of the people that this should happen. It was based on these arguments that Lufong and his supporters

¹⁹ Ibid.

refused adhering to this decision of the Executive Council and the Southern Cameroons Chiefs' Advisory Council were called in to adjudicate on the matter.²⁰

Southern Cameroons' Chiefs Advisory Council Intervenes to Preserve the Customs and Traditions Governing Succession

The refusal of Lufong and his supporters to accept the decision of the Executive Council made government to refer the matter to the Chieftaincy Advisory Council and the matter was heard in Bamenda on the 29th of May and 6th of June 1961 respectively. Worthy of note is the fact that matters concerning chieftaincy conflicts – recognition and dismissal of chief from office fell under the competence of the Members of the House of Chiefs of Southern Cameroons as per the Recognition of Chiefs Law, 1960. By this law, the Chieftaincy Advisory Committee was usually set up by the Commissioner when such conflicts occurred, especially those that had to deal with the customs and traditions of the people and charged with the responsibility of advising the government on the best decision they could take. Though advisory, the Committee played a pivotal role in bringing sanity to communities plagued by these conflicts and membership was gotten from all the six Divisions of the territory. This was to ensure impartiality and recognition of all the customs and traditions of the various divisions of the territory in adjudicating on such matters. This therefore means that, the Chieftaincy Advisory Council was the highest court of the land that had to manage such conflicts.

It was based on the important role these chiefs played in the management of their communities and the preservation of the customs and traditions of their peoples that the Commissioner for Southern Cameroons appointed into this commission some Chiefs from all the Divisions of Southern Cameroons to handle the Bamessing Chieftaincy Conflict on the 20th of April 1961. Below is a table showing the various Chiefs of the Committee and their Divisions and villages of origin. It should be noted that this was chaired by J. Beely, an administrator appointed by the Commissioner to represent the administration and coordinate the activities of the Chiefs in this particular case.

²⁰ SCA(61)198, File No. P.O.333, Bamessing Chieftaincy, 28th August 1961.

**Southern Cameroons’ Chiefs Advisory Committee Appointed by the Commissioner to
 Adjudicate on the Bamessing Chieftaincy Conflict**

Name of Chief	Division Represented	Village of Origin
Honourable (Hon) M. Kumbongsi	Nkambe	Mfe
Hon. J. M. Buh	Wum	Esu (Isu)
Hon Ghogomu	Bamenda	Bambalang, Ndop
Hon. S. B. Oben	Mamfe	Mbinda
Hon. S. A. Ebanja	Kumba	Balong
Hon. S. P. Dipoko	Victoria	Missaka

Source: Compiled by Author with Information Gotten from Files

The committee had to preoccupy itself in determining whether native law and custom warrants the deposition of a chief. This was to offset misleading information that Lufong was unduly removed from his position as chief by the Executive Committee of the government of Southern Cameroons and that this was against the traditions and customs of Bamessing. Again the Committee had to determine whether the compound of the Chief was owned by him or the people. This was because Lufong had refused leaving the Palace even though a majority of his people wanted him to do so. It was held among his supporters that the compound belonged to his father and so he had absolute authority over it and would not let Fontong take control over it nor give him access to the sacred objects of the Palace. Besides, they had to impartially determine whether the Chief was guilty or not of such offences and also to determine if the people of Bamessing wanted him continue as their chief.²¹

It was believed that since Chiefs from all the ethnic configurations of Southern Cameroons were members of the committee, it was impartial because they understood the customs and traditions of the people when compared to members of the Executive Committees who held their positions on political affiliations. After serious investigations on the matter in Bamessing and comparing laws governing the institution of chieftain in Bamessing and elsewhere in the territory, the Council argued that there was nothing as deposition of Chiefs in Native Law and Customs. In line with one of the findings gotten from the field during their investigations or inquiries, it was commonly held that in the olden days, a chief who acted *ultra varies* was killed, a view that was supported and mostly held by Fontong’s supporters. It was based on this that the Council made it

²¹ Ibid.

clear that times have changed and modern elected government had the right to remove any Chief whose activities were not in the interest of their people or public. They also were of the opinion that the Palace belonged to the people or community and not the Chief or his family and this also extended to the sacred objects found in the Palace.

It was after these clarifications that Lufong was judged and found guilty in all the acts levelled against him. Based on the previous judgements they found him guilty of adjudicating without authority as reported in case no. BA/947C/57 of the Bamenda Magistrate's Court as mentioned before. He was also found guilty of the seduction of girls and committing adultery with women who were not his wives and lived outside the Palace. Abandoning the Palace to foreign lands without informing his elders and refusing to receive advice from his elders were other counts he was found guilty of. The Council also reaffirmed the issue that a majority of his people were against him as their leader by a ratio of three to one. It concluded that; "the Committee is satisfied from the evidence before it, that it has been established that Martin Lufong is an unsatisfactory and unpopular Chief, who has behaved in a reckless and intolerable manner towards his people. They have therefore the right to reject him"²² They therefore upheld government's decision in deposing him and were not against his eviction from the Palace if necessary. They also called for his exile just like the Executive Committee but went further to deny him residence or taking up abode in any of the three divisions of Bamenda Province. It should be noted that the executive Committee had given him the right to settle in any of the other two divisions (Wum and Nkambe) of the Province.

Even though they upheld the decision of the Executive Council, they disagreed on the choice of Lufongs' replacement by the Executive Council and the People of Bamessing. They argued that this was against the customs and traditions of the people. They lamented that it was unfortunate that the Executive Council favoured the enthronement of Fontong who was a nephew to the Chief and made it clear that succession to the position of Chief was from father to son and the people of Bamessing could not arbitrary change the custom. In order to make sure that tradition was not trampled upon, they favoured the institution of a regency committee that was charged with the responsibilities of managing the affairs of the village and protecting the Palace and the

²² Ibid.

sacred objects of therein. Again, it was advised that the son of Lufong should replace his father when he becomes of age. He was five years old and they upheld that at about the age of twenty he should take over the position of his father. In this way the Chieftaincy Advisory Committee suggested that the tradition of succession would be respected and the breach of native law and custom avoided by the government and people of Bamessing. In order to avoid the appointment of another chief during the life time of a reigning chief, they proposed one of Lufong's brothers as temporary Chief to lead the transition committee.²³ In this way, the Chieftaincy Advisory Committee successfully averted a transposition of the customs and traditions governing succession to the office of Chieftainship in Bamessing.

Conclusion

The study analyses attempts made by the Southern Cameroons administration and some sections of the Bamessing population transposing the customs and traditions governing Chieftaincy succession in Bamessing due to the poor governance strategies put in the place by chief Lufong after his ascension to the throne in 1953. It contends that though the institution of chieftain was and has remained a veritable governing arm of the colonial and post colonial states respectively, and respected by the all, bad governance has often ignited conflicts as attempts at unseating reigning tenants has been recurrent in Africa in general and Southern Cameroons in particular. It argues that, the enthronement of Lufong after the disappearance of his father was in line with the customs and traditions of the people of Bamessing as succession moves from father to son. The people had respected this tradition whole heartedly when they waited for Lufong who was in Nigeria for two months to be enthroned as their Chief. However, his poor attitude or governing led to his rejection by the Kingmakers or notables and a majority of his people who had supported his candidature initially.

This rejection was justified by the licentiousness of Lufong as well as the bringing forth of his first son, who was expected to take over the throne upon the disappearance of his father, with a

²³ Report and Recommendations of an Inquiry under the Recognition of Chiefs Law 1960(SC No. 7 of 1960), by chieftaincy Advisory Committee into the Dispute Regarding the Persons Entitled to be Chief of the Village of Bamaessing, Bamenda Divisions, Held at the Community Hall, Bamenda Between 29th May and 6th June 1961.

non native, all against the customs and traditions of his people. Besides the trading of sacred objects and artefacts in the palace was not acceptable as he was supposed to preserve and protect them. Extortion of his subjects through the unlawful institution of native court in his village where illicit fines were collected was another factor that ignited the wrath of his subjects. Things were further complicated by the imposition of income tax on his citizens although they were within the payroll of poll tax, the seizing of raffia palm bushes from citizens who could not meet up with his financial demands, the embezzlement of funds collected from his citizens under the pretext that they were to be used for the demarcation of the Bamessing- Babanki Tongo Boundary, his discouragement of the girl child education and agitations of the youths against his poor governance leading to their constant migrations out of the village were frowned upon by the people. Even though investigations carried out by the SDO for Bamenda Division proved these, the Chiefs of Ndop accused the notables and other dissident for trying to usurp the throne against the customs and traditions of Bemessing by calling for the dethronement of Lufong. To them, the inability of Fontong to challenge the candidature of Lufong upon the 'passing on' of the late chief and bringing the matter to the Ndop Native Court, the administration or Executive Committee of that institution, the Assembly of the Council or for a hearing or advice on the misdeeds of the reigning tenant made him and his supporters wanting for the initiation of escalations and the breach of peace. They thus referred the matter to the Native Court which found the culprits guilty of trying to foment trouble in Bamessing and inciting the people against their Chief though the decision was quashed on appeal as they were sanctioned only for contempt and not for violating native law and customs.

It was at this juncture that the divisional administration called on the Premiere of Southern Cameroons to intervene and laid the matter to rest by dismissing Lufong as Member of the Ndop native court and Native Authority and ruler of his people because he had lost the support of his people due to his bad conduct. It was as result of this that the Prime Minister of Southern Cameroons in consultation with his Executive Council dismissed Lufong not only as chief but also as court and Native Authority Member as advised by the SDO. This decision needed the approval and confirmation of the House of Chiefs that had the final jurisdiction on matters concerning the deposition of Chiefs in the Country. Through a decision of the Southern Cameroons Chieftaincy Advisory Committee that was set up to see into the matter, the verdict of

the Executive Council was reversed. They did not deny the fact that Lufong was guilty of bad governance and acting against the customs and traditions of his people, but argued that it was unlawful to dethrone a Chief and enthrone a new one while the later was still alive. To keep this tradition afloat, they thus endorsed the dethronement of Lufong but rejected his replacement with Fontong for it was unlawful as per the customs and traditions of the Grassfields that a grand uncle should take over the nephew. They categorically made it clear that succession is from father to son. To implement this in Bamessing they called on the government to institute a regency, headed by the brother of Lufong. He had to return power to the son of Lufong who was still five years of age when he reached the age of twenty. With this, they successfully protected and preserved the tradition and customs governing Chieftaincy succession in Bamessing.

Due to the constant escalation of chieftaincy crises as a result of improper succession and the non respect of the customs and traditions governing succession in the North West Region of Cameroon and beyond, it is hoped that following this example, governments can successfully replace Chiefs who do not rule in the interest of their people or better still do not respect the principles of good governance without disrespecting the customs and traditions of the people. In this way, they will effectively minimise succession conflicts and its associated consequences on the development of local communities.

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