

Encumbrances to Non-Governmental Organisations (Ngos) Efforts towards Conflict Resolution in the North West Region Of Cameroon, 1990-2010

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ABSTRACT

Conflicts have existed since the creation of man and have remained an undeniable aspect of the human society. Conflicts have manifested in various ways in Cameroon and the incidence has indeed been high in the North West Region. This study entitled "Challenges of Non-Governmental Organisations in Conflict Resolution in the North West Region, 1990-2010" seeks to examine the difficulties that NGOs involved in conflict resolution faced between 1990 and 2010 in this part of Cameroon. The culture of peace has been difficult to nurture in the region because of the proliferation of conflicts. The present study therefore, seeks to explore the sector of NGOs with special focus on their challenges in conflict management and resolution since many of these NGOs were devoted to human rights issues, capacity building and conflict resolution. A critical study of existing literature on the subject of conflicts and our numerous visits to the field revealed that NGOs in this domain had invested valuable time and resources to prevent the escalation of tension among the antagonist of the region. Despite the influential role and enormous resources deployed by these NGOs, many obstacles perturbed the realisation of their missions. By the end of our research these challenges which constituted the "*raison d'être*" of the present study turned out to be internal and external.

Keywords: NGOs, conflict resolution, prevention, management, challenges.

Résumé

Les conflits existent depuis la création de l'homme et sont restés un aspect indéniable de la société humaine. Les conflits se sont manifestés de diverses manières au Cameroun et leur incidence a été effectivement élevée dans la région du Nord-Ouest. Cette étude intitulée "Les défis des organisations non gouvernementales dans la résolution des conflits dans la région du Nord-Ouest, 1990-2010" cherche à examiner les difficultés que les ONG impliquées dans la résolution des conflits ont rencontrées entre 1990 et 2010 dans cette partie du Cameroun. La culture de la paix a été difficile à entretenir dans la région en raison de la prolifération des conflits. La présente étude cherche donc à explorer le secteur des ONG en mettant l'accent sur leurs difficultés en matière de gestion et de résolution des conflits, étant donné que nombre de ces ONG se consacrent aux questions de droits de l'homme, au renforcement des capacités et à la résolution des conflits. Une étude critique de la littérature existante sur le sujet des conflits et nos nombreuses visites sur le terrain ont révélé que les ONG dans ce domaine avaient investi du temps et des ressources

précieux pour prévenir l'escalade des tensions entre les antagonistes de la région. Malgré le rôle influent et les énormes ressources déployées par ces ONG, de nombreux obstacles ont perturbé la réalisation de leurs missions. À la fin de notre étude, ces défis, qui constituent la raison d'être de la présente étude, se sont révélés être internes et externes.

Mots-clés: ONG, résolution des conflits, prévention, gestion, défis.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict resolution is as old as the creation of man and has been a worldwide phenomenon that involves individuals, States, organisations and the civil society. Conflicts of various kinds have erupted in many parts of Cameroon, especially in the North West Region. The region is reputed to have registered the highest incidence of state civilian, land, boundary and farmer-grazier conflicts in the country since independence (P. Bungfang, 2000, p.2). The root of some of this vice can be traced to the colonial era. Since colonial times, the people of this region have witnessed an increase in the occurrence of conflicts. These conflicts are mostly manifested in the form of intra-kingdom and inter-kingdom conflicts.

During the pre-colonial era, most conflicts arose over the question of land succession, refusal to pay tributes and the non-performance of mortuary rites by friendly neighbours during the "disappearance" of a king, although their incidence was not as alarming as today. Economically, attempts to monopolise trade in certain commodities such as palm oil, clay pots and the refusal to give off some princesses for marriage to other kingdoms were also major causes of conflict. Whatever their causes and dimensions, these conflicts were peacefully resolved through traditional methods. Some of these methods included mediation, conciliation, negotiation, appeasement and atonement rituals, diplomacy and arbitration. These methods were generally effective since the people believed in them and trusted them (E.Yekong Sobseh, 2007, p.3).

These conflicts however, resurfaced during the German and British colonial periods, especially when colonial authorities introduced the tax system and an arbitrary chieftaincy institution. Some kingdoms were obliged to pay taxes through others. The creation of administrative units and the classification of chiefs into various categories were also sources of conflicts (M. Bolack Funteh, 2005, p.21). Colonial authorities attempted to resolve some of these conflicts their way but faced many challenges. In most cases they either suppressed indigenous aspirations or sharpened differences between ethnic groups. Their legal framework for conflict resolution generally undermined indigenous customs and practices.

The Western mechanisms to a certain extent became a major contributing factor to the incessant conflicts in Africa, Cameroon inclusive. The colonial period saw both indigenous and colonial methods of conflict resolution moving side-by-side. Despite this, colonial instruments gradually eroded the indigenous methods of conflict resolution (E. Sobseh, 2007, p.20). This was because colonial masters imposed their own mechanisms of resolving conflicts on Africans by destroying and modifying some of the binding traditions and customs.

Not all of these conflicts were satisfactorily resolved during the colonial period. Some of them continued into the post-colonial period while new ones surfaced in the region. Apart from the renaissance of land and boundary disputes, other forms of conflicts engulfed the province from the

late 1970s (E. Sobseh, 2007, p.22). These included religious and farmer-grazier conflicts. Religious conflicts resulted from intolerance and tribalism within church circles, while farmer-grazier conflicts were enhanced by the non-alienation of grazing land from cultivable lands by the authorities in question (A. Mukong, 1999, pp.1-2). The major stakeholders in the early years of independence were, in order of importance, the State and traditional authorities.

In this paper, we shall focus on the challenges faced by four (04) NGOs prominent in the area namely: the Mbororo Social, Cultural and Development Association (MBOSCUDA), Ecumenical Mission for Peace and Development (EMPED-foundation), the Ecumenical Service for Peace (SeP) and the Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) from 1990 to 2010. NGOs selected for the present study had to meet the following criteria: they must have been active in the region by playing an important role in conflict resolution and promoting of peace; they must have at least a head-office based in the region and must be in direct contact with people in conflict zones. Despite their presence and active involvement in conflict resolution in the North West Region, their activities have not glided on hitch free. These NGOs face both internal and external challenges in the execution of their mission.

The Advent of NGOs in Cameroon and in the North West Region

In Cameroon, NGOs became popular with the liberalisation of associations and civil rights organisations by law no. 90/053 of 19th December 1990. However, before this period, HELVETAS, the Swiss Association for International Cooperation (SAIC) which was formerly known as SATA (Swiss Association for Technical Assistance) had started its development cooperation in the former West Cameroon federated state as early as 1962. HELVETAS during its forty-five years of activity in Cameroon was mostly involved in the provision of portable water in rural communities, rehabilitation of farm-to-market roads, bridges, community centres and other infrastructural buildings in Cameroon (HELVETAS Cameroon, 2011).

The activities of HELVETAS began in the former West Cameroon with three SATA water engineers stationed in Kumba, Mamfe and Bamenda. After starting water supply projects in close collaboration with the benefitting villages and the local committee development offices, the lack of qualified Cameroonian technical staff led to the establishment of the Building Training Centre in Kumba (BTC) to instruct the required technical artisans like masons, plumbers, carpenters and providing advance level courses for foremen, works supervisors, technicians and maintenance staff. Due to the high demand for portable water in the villages, the programme was rapidly expanded to areas like Ndu and Victoria (Limbe). With unification in 1972, it was extended to the French speaking regions of the country areas of Bafoussam and Yaounde. Unfortunately, the community development philosophy never gained a successful foothold in this part of the country. Later, the department lost its power, became weak and inefficient when it was integrated into the central government in Yaounde (M. Bolack Funteh, 2005, p.8).

After handing over most of the institution's projects and activities to local bodies, HELVETAS concentrated its interventions and assistance (mainly the water sector) in the North West Region and transferred the programme Director's office to Bamenda. New partnerships came up first with some NGOs and local councils. This led to the new council support programme, which in recent times became very successful and strengthened the ownership of the water project communities.

HELVETAS eventually ended its activities in Cameroon in 2007 on a satisfactory note (HELVETAS Cameroon, 2011).

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWFN) carried out numerous protection and conservative projects in the various regions with the Korup National Park project in Ndian and Manyu Divisions in the South West Region being the most outstanding project sites. Other NGOs like the Centre for the Environmental and Rural Transformation (CERT), the Society for the Initiatives and Rural Development in Environmental Protection (SIRDEP), the Friends of Nature Club Association (FNCA) among others greatly enhanced the rural community on environmental protection issues and their related advantage as well as improved their standards of living (M. Bolack, 2005, p.10).

Improving the living standards of Cameroonians also became the preoccupation of some NGOs like the Heifer Project International (HPI) Cameroon. It was involved in the promotion of snail farming, which is a delicacy especially in the South West Region of Cameroon. This led to an increase in the availability and improvement in snail farming. In the domain of livestock and poultry, it introduced pigs, rabbits and goat projects in the country especially in the Littoral, West, North West, and the Adamawa Regions of Cameroon. Over 103 animals were placed at the disposal of farmers and five (05) farmers received training in five (05) different communities of the country on how to rear these animals.

In the North West Region itself, a lot was done especially in Bui and Donga-Mantung Divisions where groups of disabled persons have been receiving income from fowls introduced to them by the HPI-Cameroon (Henry Njakoi, 2001, pp.12-24). From the above presentation, we can say with some degree of certainty that the advent of NGOs in Cameroon have remained an indispensable tool for the socio-economic development in the areas they operate. It is against this background that the next section of this paper sets out to evaluate the activities of some NGOs in the North West Region of Cameroon in the domain of peace building.

With the advent of numerous land, boundary and other conflicts in the 1990s, new civil rights movements and related associations emerged in the North West Region to protect civil rights, women's and children's rights that were severely abused. To this effect, the State and traditional authorities were no longer the prime stakeholders in conflict resolution. Civil non-governmental organisations also became actively involved. Their involvement was not only due to the fact that this period witnessed the emergence of a multitude of conflicts, but also because of the adverse effects of these conflicts. Table 1 illustrates some NGOs involved in peace building in the Region.

Table I: Some N.G.Os Involved in Peace Building in the North West Region

N°	Name of NGO	Abbreviations	Location of Head Office	Year/creation
1	Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture	ACAT	Finance junction Bamenda	1999
2	Community Human Rights and Advocacy	CHRAC	Commercial avenue Bamenda	2004
3	Ecumenical Mission for Peace and Development Foundation	EMPED	Council junction-Ntarikon Bamenda	1996
4	Ecumenical Service for Peace	SeP	Presbyterian Mission Ntamulung Bamenda	2003
5	Mbororo Social Cultural and Development Association	MBOSCUDA	Old-town Bamenda	1992
6	Strategic Humanitarian Service	SHUMAS	Mile 6 Nkwen Bamenda	1995
7	Centre for Human Rights and Peace Advocacy	CHRPA	Ghan Street Bamenda	_____
8	Justice and Peace Commission	JPC	Big Mankon Cathedral	2002

Source: Computed by Author from study in the North West Region of Cameroon, August 2011.

The consequences of conflicts in the North West Region were multifarious. According to Okwudiba Nnoli, conflicts are not totally negative. Though armed conflicts lead to social disintegration and obstruct development, the results of such conflicts in the North West Region have not only been negative, but also positive at times. Destruction of infrastructure, breakdown of families, displacement of people and the loss of lives have always been inevitable. Conflicts have also resulted in a decline in intermarriages, disruption of education, and stagnation of the economy and the destabilization of the ecosystem.²³ With reference to the Musaka-Essimbi Conflict, Assumpta Lum Ngonba recounts that the destruction was horrible. She said they saw thousands of butchered banana and plantain stems, carcasses of animals, and heaps of school books some of which had been partly burnt. She also added that they saw burnt houses, some of which were reduced to ashes, and corpses, with some having huge large machete cuts on their heads.²⁴

There is, therefore, a need for the prevention, management, resolution and if possible termination of conflicts in this region. The presence of non-governmental organisations (henceforth, NGOs) especially those involved in conflict resolution in the region has, therefore, been in an attempt to counter the adverse effects of these conflicts.

²³ Interview with Laura Naddin Ngwa, age 51, Coordinator of Justice and Peace Commission, Archdiocese of Bamenda, 11/08/2011.

²⁴ Interview with Assumpta Lum Ngonba, age 35, Capacity Building Officer for the Justice and Peace Commission for the North West Region, on the 11/08/2011.

Internal Challenges faced by NGOs in the Region

The activities of NGOs in contributing to and promoting the culture of peace in the North West Region of Cameroon have not been an easy ride. They battled with the management of a complex and diverse range of issues. Internal management issues included strategic planning, budgeting, staffing, governing structure of the organisation, growth and change within the organisation. All of these exerted pressure to bear on the possibility of these NGOs in the peace building process. In this section, we have examined some of the internal challenges that were common with these NGOs. In an attempt to examine these internal challenges, we grouped them under financial, managerial or administrative, structural and the poor functioning of NGOs.

Financial Challenges

Challenges related to finance were the most common among NGOs in conflict resolution in the North West Region. Most if not all of the NGOs involved in conflict resolution had low levels of self-sustainability. This resulted in their over-dependence on income from donors. With the high rate of dependency, there was the risk of being more responsive to donor agenda than the need of their constituencies. This was because most donors preferred the NGOs to operate strictly according to their dictates, thereby caring less on the practical needs of the people directly concerned. With this over-dependence, the NGOs had no other choice but to try to fit in their own agenda to suit their donors. In most cases these donors were the only source of finance to these NGOs in conflict resolution. In other words where donors failed to disburse the needed funds, NGOs became dormant and inactive. Some of these NGOs were either forced to abandon some of their activities prematurely or completely due to this financial handicap.²⁵ The issue of the long-term sustainability of NGOs was therefore real.

There was the fear that agencies funding NGOs in under-resourced societies, where there was no evidence of medium-term capacity to absorb these costs, were simply reinforcing what some had termed the “global soup kitchen” or globalisation of social welfare. They were not into income generation activities that could subsidise their sources of income (E. Ndenecho Neba, 2009, pp.50-56). In some cases, donors withdrew their donations in the middle of a crisis situation without any notification. This was the situation with the EMPED-Foundation that worked with the Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund from 1999 to 2001. This donor later withdrew her activities in Cameroon without informing them. Since EMPED relied almost completely on Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund, it almost closed down. However, HELVETAS Cameroon stepped in and sponsored EMPED’s activities from 1998 to 2002.

The sale of the organisations’ publications such as the “Ecumenical Youth Peace Manual” and member contributions were never enough to sustain the annual operation of the organisation. Annual contribution of EMPED members was 10.000 FCFA. This contribution was grossly insufficient as reflected in the 2006 annual budget. Income from sales of publications and member contributions was 660.000FCFA (EMPED, 2006, p.6). This amount was simply equal to the cost of rents for the same year which stood at 600.000 FCFA. In its annual report for 2006, the organisation had a deficit of 2.155.704 FCFA. Another cause for alarm in the same budget was the amount that was set aside for the payment of salaries. An amount of 5.520.000FCFA was paid out

²⁵ Interview with Joseph Chongsi Ayeah, age 42, executive director Chrapa (centre for human rights and peace advocacy), 12/08/2011.

as salaries to workers for the 2006 budgetary year out of a total of 11.740.000.²⁶ We found this unfair, taking into consideration that the amount in question was half of the operating budget for that year. This situation brought into question the reason for the existence of such NGOs. With this trend one might be tempted to consider most of these organisations as money making rather than real partners in conflict resolution and peace building.

Apart from EMPED, MBOSCUDA was also not able to reach out to some conflict areas within its scope of intervention due to financial hurdles. Apart from registration from members (Mbororo community), annual contributions, sale of association material including cultural and artistic creations and free will donations, MBOSCUDA had little fund raising activities. MBOSCUDA was about ninety five percent (95%) dependent on external funding. They were present in all Divisions in the region, but were not able to reach out to all farmer-grazier communities in conflict.²⁷ This at times led to a feeling of neglect by some members of MBOSCUDA who could not get the necessary assistance they expected by belonging to the organisation.

Management Challenges

Some of the internal challenges faced by these NGOs were related to management. Among these managerial challenges was the governance of NGOs and the relations between board members and staff. This was largely due to the boards' inability or unwillingness to carry out their responsibilities of governing the organisations.²⁸ Board members often lacked the time or the expertise to carry out their responsibilities effectively. As a result, senior staff members were often left to make policy decisions with little or no support from board members.²⁹ The governance picture of some of these NGOs was quite complex. Most of them were governed by self-perpetuating, largely self-appointed boards of directors. Tensions often occurred between staff and senior managers because of the staff expectations that they would be equal partners in the decision-making process.³⁰ This was the general feeling among most of the staff of NGOs in the North West Region.

Some of the NGO staff we talked to such as Assumpta Lum Ngongba of the JPC and Magdaline Asanji of MBOSCUDA all agreed to the fact that due to poor internal management, some members of staff found it difficult to contribute their know-how which could positively transform the organisations. However, decentralisation can have the paradoxical effect of increasing bureaucracy as organisations devolving power on the one hand, tend to set up all sorts of control measures on the other. This problem revealed a clear gap between the values that NGOs expose and what actually happened in practice. Balancing the needs of the different stakeholders who each feel they have an equal right to the decision-making process can create a number of management problems for these organizations such as slowness in decision making and abuse of power. Whatever the case, NGOs in conflict resolution need a certain degree of decentralisation to avoid tension between staff and management which will enhance the feeling of responsibility and belonging among its workers or members. This will equally enable field workers to have a sense of belonging and value to their respective organisations.

²⁶ Interview with joseph chongsi ayeah.

²⁷ Interview With Sali Djang, Age 51, Mboscuda Programme Coordinator For The North West Region, 09/08/2011.

²⁸ Interview Julius Niba Fon, Age 39, Advisor To The Netherlands Development Organization (Snv), 16/08/2011.

²⁹ Interview With Sylvester Muchu, Age 41, Executive Secretary Emped-Foundation, 11/08/2011.

³⁰ INTERVIEW WITH DIVINE CAMARA, AGE A.47, DIVISIONAL OFFICER BALI-NYONGHA, 16/08/2011.

Structural Challenges

NGOs equally faced challenges in the area of performance evaluation. This was sometimes considered as a problem by donors, but failure to resolve it reflected on NGOs eventually, and was perceived as a challenge. Evaluating performance is relatively easy where activities are routine, objectives are few and clear. It was noticed that NGOs under our study had no great distinction between immediate “outputs”, mid-term “effects”, and long-term “impact”. The impact or effects of outputs effects could be measured relatively cheaply and reliably without the measurement process itself distorting the objectives of the organisation or the goals of the staff. Most of the NGOs involved in conflict resolution in the area under study did not conduct internal performance evaluation. They were more than often concerned with project writing and reports to their donors whom they depended on and were afraid of losing. Little time was dedicated to internal or self-performance evaluation. Meanwhile, these NGOs should encourage the evaluation of their performances so as to improve on their output and efficiency. Also, NGOs should be encouraged to evaluate their performances because it is only through this that internal loopholes can be identified and closed.

Another major challenge was that of writing and following up project proposals to donors. NGOs in the arena were more than the charitable organisations. NGOs were all in competition for the same grants and funds and it became very difficult to receive any. Many of these NGOs did not know methods of effective fundraising. They used a generic proposal for all applications which, at times, were poorly written, and did not contain the necessary information needed for a proposal. There was also no follow up after sending a proposal. Accepting defeat was common and these NGOs did not keep on trying to improve their fundraising method. Receiving funding also had its downfalls. Often donors came with conditions that did not agree with the organisation’s mandate. Some donors also required extensive documentation that was very foreign to the context, language and education levels of the staff. Filling out a western style form can be a very difficult task, and filling it out incorrectly can cause the donor to back away.³¹ To tackle this situation, NGOs should make use of experts in this domain or take the patience to send staff on training to acquire the necessary skills in this domain.

The absence of volunteers was another challenge identified in the NGO sector in the Region. Most of the NGOs in our case study were not able to acquire enough volunteers to assist them in their peace building processes. Even the very few which they had succeeded to train were not always committed. They more often left with the knowledge acquired in search for “greener pastures” elsewhere.³² Among the four NGOs in our study, only two (JPC and EMPED) had made use of volunteers. The JPC had four volunteers (Kuma Judith, Angela Johnson, Paul Juakongzi and Wirsiy Germaine) but by 2011, only one was left (Wirsiy Germaine) and was also planning to leave. EMPED in 2006 had just one volunteer (Muchu Romeo) and in 2011, there was none. The issue of voluntarism should be encouraged through media campaigns and publicity in the region. This is because the North West Region has a huge reservoir of idealistic, young, energetic and well-educated graduates who are unemployed or underemployed. Many of them are searching for opportunities to serve their country and gain work experience.

³¹ Interview with sylvester muchu.

³² interview with magdaline asanji, age 43, mboscuda’s women and gender coordinator, 11/08/2011.

Another pertinent problem was that of insufficient personnel. The NGOs in our case study had limited personnel relative to the amount of work that needed to be done. Due to their achievements, they were overwhelmed with demands for their services. This was because besides conflict resolution, they were involved in other activities such as supporting victims of human trafficking especially young girls, women and children, improving access to justice for vulnerable groups, election monitoring and observation and the promotion of equality and advancement of the marginalised and people (L. Naddin Ngwa, 2011). All these activities needed a corresponding human resource which they did not have. The JPC and MBOSCUDA who were involved in almost all of the above activities could boast of only four (04) permanent workers out of the eight (08) that it had. The four were: Laura Naddin Ngwa (Coordinator), Asongwe M. Clodette (Secretary), Ngongba Assumta Lum (Field Staff), and Yaunde Kongbi (Administrative Assistant). The other four; Kuma Jude Mbom, Angela Johnson, Paul Juakongzi and Wirsy Germaine were volunteers and support staff. MBOSCUDA also had to cut down its staff from fifteen (15) to only five (05) with the same objectives. EMPED also has not been able to employ more than ten (10) staff since 2007 (L. Naddin Ngwa, 2011). This problem of human resource was directly linked to finances and to a lesser extent laying hands on qualified personnel.

Poor Functioning of NGOs

Poorly organised and insufficient grassroots coordination characterised most of the NGOs involved in conflict resolution in the North West Region. NGOs had good structures but the implementation and functioning of these structures was a problem. This loophole was evident in the relationship between NGOs and their grassroots organisations. There was little or no liaison between the grassroots structures and headquarters. For example the JPC had coordinators in all parishes within the Bamenda Archdiocese. This was a very good initiative as these coordinators were responsible for creating and managing peace commission in their respective parishes. These commissions were supposed to handle minor conflicts and refer major ones to the head office in Bamenda. However, this was not the case as in most parishes, the JPC coordinators who had been trained found it very difficult to function because they had been cut off from the main office in Bamenda. Little attention was paid to the difficulties that were faced by these grassroots coordinators.³³

Besides that, NGOs also faced challenges related to high demand for their services. With increasing successes in the areas of conflict resolution and the promotion of peace, the services of NGOs as mediators were highly solicited by other organisations. Typical among such cases was the overwhelming demand for MBOSCUDA's services by government officials and other NGOs. Some of these organisations included the Ozone Friendly People (OFP), Forest and Agro-forestry Promoters (FAP), PLAN Cameroon, the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) and the Rural Development Consultancy (RDC).³⁴ With the high demand of their services, MBOSCUDA was unable to meet up with some of its commitments.

The inability of NGOs to meet up with such demands was due mainly to inadequate capacity building. NGOs in conflict resolution in the region were involved in so many other activities apart from conflict resolution which undermined most of their capacities. After acquiring the basic

³³ Interview With Godwin Bobvala Titafoncham, Age 49, Coordinator Of The Jpc Bali-Nyongha Parish, 12/08/2011.

³⁴ Interview with Sali Django.

skills, most staff members of NGOs were expected to train others to replace them in the future, but eventually they turned up not doing so with little or no refresher training courses and updates on conflict resolution. These NGOs seemed to be so busy scrambling for donors instead of seeking the required skills for the effective running of their organisations. According to Mckensey, most NGOs do not carry on capacity building not because they do not want to, but because they do not have the knowledge, skills and techniques to do so (Mckensey & Company, 2001, pp.27-28). NGOs should, therefore, increase their efforts on capacity building. This should be done by investing much more time and redirecting resources towards refresher courses and the provision of professional education to the staff. This will enable their few members of staff to be dynamic so as to respond to the various demands of services.

In this section, we were able to discuss some of the internal challenges faced by NGOs in conflict resolution in the Region. Most of these internal challenges were related to finances, management, structural and poor functioning of these NGOs as a whole. This analysis enhanced our understanding of some of these challenges. Nevertheless, besides internal challenges, these NGOs equally faced external challenges discussed in the following section.

EXTERNAL CHALLENGES FACED BY NGOS IN THE REGION

Apart from the internal challenges, NGOs in conflict resolution in the North West Region also faced external challenges. These external challenges ranged from isolation, difficult access to documentation, corruption, “political predating”, poor road network, bureaucracy, unhealthy competition, the poor attitude of some traditional rulers and the difficulty of accepting NGOs as partners in conflict resolution. To better understand these issues, we have attempted to group them under administrative challenges, environmental challenges, competition, and lack of collaboration.

Lack of Collaboration among NGOs

The first external challenge was isolation and lack of inter-organisational communication and coordination. NGOs in conflict resolution in this Region mostly operated on an independent basis. There was little communication and cooperation among them, especially in the domain of conflict resolution. It was very common for the administrators of these NGOs to say “we played a very big role in the resolution of the conflict. I do not think we noticed the presence of any other NGO”.³⁵ These assertions were contrary to what we discovered in the field. For instance, in the farmer-grazier conflict in Wum, it was discovered that MBOSCUA, EMPED, CHRAPA, SODELCO, JPC and SNV Cameroon had been actively involved. All of them claimed not to have noticed the presence of the other NGOs. They all had success stories to tell about such areas. In Donga-Mantung Division, EMPED, JPC MBOSCUA and SeP claimed to have been the lone NGO involved in conflict resolution in the area. When we interviewed some of the people in these areas they could hardly remember more than two of these NGOs. The lack of collaboration among these NGOs limited their various capacities in conflict resolution.

The lack of collaboration was not only noticed among NGOs in the area of conflict resolution. There was also a lack of collaboration from conflicting parties. The reluctance of conflicting parties to accept NGOs as mediators in conflict situation has not been an easy walk over for these NGOs.

³⁵ Interview with ewi nee kang elizabeth nsih. Age 45, farmer and coordinator of the menchum women's association for the fight against aids (mewofa), 23/08/2011.

The advent of NGOs in the North West Region was a fairly recent phenomenon. They only surfaced in the region after 1990, thus knowledge about them had not spread to all communities in the region. For a long time now, the State had always been considered as the sole custodian of peace, especially in inter-community conflicts. Communities in the region, just like in other regions of the country, always looked up to the State as the lone mediator in conflicts resolution.³⁶

Administrative Challenges

In addition to challenges linked to collaboration were administrative challenges. In this domain the most recurrent challenge was the difficulty in accessing documents related to conflicts. This was a common problem among all of the NGOs in our case study. They complained that it was very difficult to lay hands on documents on most of the conflicts they were dealing with in the region. Most often, these were crucial documents related to certain conflicts. According to the NGOs these important documents were either voluntarily withheld by some elite, traditional rulers and in some cases State authorities for their private gains.³⁷ Some State authorities viewed civil society organisations as opponents and enemies who should not meddle in delicate affairs such as conflict resolution.³⁸

With the absence of such documents these NGOs found it very difficult to break through stalemate situations in the field. The parties involved often made matters worse by providing doubtful and contradictory information which could only be verified through access to such documents. In addition to this, most people did not know that there existed another party in conflict resolution apart from the State. Because of this, it was difficult for NGOs to get the right information and work with the conflicting parties in an attempt to resolve conflicts.³⁹

The high level of corruption, impunity and inertia within government services in general also worked against NGOs in conflict resolution. Much energy, time and resources were spent to ensure that planned activities were correctly and timely executed, especially those needing the collaboration of government services.⁴⁰ Administrative authorities often looked at NGOs as a threat to them because they always wrote petitions against their corrupt practices and delays in the treatment of files on conflicts in which the NGOs were involved. The Executive Secretary of EMPED, Sylvester Muchu testified that some Divisional Officers refused to sign authorisations and attestations of recognition to permit them carry out their activities. Some of these corrupt officials asked for envelopes before validating peace building seminars in their areas of jurisdiction.⁴¹ One of such cases cited by our informant was the refusal of State authorities to issue them letters of recognition and competence to the British High Commission in Cameroon which was willing to sponsor activities of EMPED in the region. According to him, no reason was given for that refusal and several attempts to find out always ended in vain.⁴² This kind of attitude should be changed by the administrators concerned so that both the government and NGOs work together to find lasting solutions to some of these conflicts.

³⁶ Interview with Laura Naddin Ngwa.

³⁷ Interview with Laura Naddin Ngwa.

³⁸ Interview with ewi nee kang eliabeth.

³⁹ Interview with joseph chongsi ayeah, age 42, executive director chrpa (centre for human rights and peace advocacy), 12/08/2011.

⁴⁰ Interview with Assumpta Lum Ngongba.

⁴¹ Interview with Sylvester Muchu.

⁴² Interview with Sylvester Muchu.

In addition to the passive attitude or *laissez-faire* attitude was the reluctance of some administrators to oversee the process of demarcation. Richard Ndi reported that there had been a number of instances where communities accepted boundary settlements but waited endlessly for State officials to conduct the demarcation process. This reticent attitude may be as a result of the benefits that some administrators enjoyed from the parties in conflict. Some administrators, after receiving such “bribes” from both parties, found it difficult to resolve the conflict and eventually looked for ways of “running away” from the area by asking for transfers.⁴³ The government should, therefore, ensure that territorial boundaries are well established with visible demarcations and not arbitrarily.

Unhealthy Competition

The NGO sector in the North West Region has been very competitive. Many NGOs have to compete with others in the domain of conflict resolution. Apart from the NGOs mentioned in our case study, others such as the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV), Ozone Friendly People (OFP) and the Agro-forestry Promoters (AFP) have also been involved in one way or the other in the process of conflict resolution in the region. In order to gain credibility from foreign donors and the local community, they scramble over conflict areas. This situation makes it difficult for some NGOs to catch up with the pace and meet up with their objectives. This mad rush has led to unhealthy practices such as blackmailing of which many NGOs claimed to have been victims. This was the case in the Balikumbat-Bafanji conflict of 1998/1999 where EMPED, SeP and many other NGOs laid claims to have been the main actors in the area during the resolution of the conflict and the subsequent peace building process. They argued that their activities were usually carried out at the tail end of the conflict when both communities were already at the peace building phase. Toh Nja'ah Helen testified to this claim in the following words:

That is what happened in the Balikumbat-Bafanji conflict which we have been handling for a long time. One NGO which I will not like to mention the name came in at the tail end and, tipped the traditional rulers to recognise their presence and by so doing were claiming credit for work they never did. We were shocked when we were received with a lukewarm attitude when we got back for follow up. ⁴⁴

Another case of dishonesty among NGOs was cited by Fon Nana Wanda III of Bawock. He said information had reached him that a certain NGO which came under the pretext of providing assistance conducted interviews, took photos and video images of him and his people and sold the images to a foreign TV station (name withheld) for huge sums of money. This kind of atmosphere resulted in lack of trust, honesty and inefficiency which resulted in poor output. Some communities in the region were sceptical of NGOs because of such dishonest attitudes. Such situations brought up the question of credibility among NGOs in the Region. NGOs were at loggerheads with each other both in the quest for recognition in the field and with donors. Some NGOs in the region have also been battling with the challenge of division caused by political “predators”. These were individuals or groups of individuals that used the names of some NGOs for their individual benefits and at the detriment of the organisation.⁴⁵ This was the case with MBOSCUA and the activities of a man called Alhadji Baba Amadu Ndampullo who owned the tea estate and the Elba ranch. He was said to have been “threatening” the Mbororo, especially those

⁴³ Interview with Helen Toh Nja'ah, age 32, EMPED Project Coordinator, 11/08/2011.

⁴⁴ Interview with helen toh nja'ah.

⁴⁵ Interview with sali django.

who are members of MBOSCUDA, thereby discouraging them from paying their annual contributions which was highly needed for the organisation to operate. In the words of Sali Django:

*Alhadji Baba Amadu Ndampullo is the main person who does not want to see MBOSCUDA evolve. He has been trying to use MBOSCUDA for his own personal interest by blackmailing and discrediting the organisation. He is said to have an akali court and a detention cell in his complex which he uses to trial and detain Mbororo people who are members of MBOSCUDA. This he does with the assistance of a good number of gendarme officers whom he has gotten from the state under the pretext that he has a lot of investments to protect. He has intimidated a lot of Mbororo people to surrender their land for his use. He is not even a Mbororo but tries by all means to identify himself with the Mbororo. His father was from Kano in Nigerian and his mother a Princess from Kom.*⁴⁶

Evidence to justify this fact was provided by Robert Nso Fon and Musa Ndamba (R. Nso Fon and Musa Ndamba, 2008, pp.13-17). Their article was based on the activities of Alhadji Baba Amadu Ndampullo and his struggle with MBOSCUDA. This issue of political predating worked in so many instances against MBOSCUDA and gave it a bad name at various levels thereby creating an atmosphere of scepticism among some of its members and donors.⁴⁷ This kind of atmosphere made it very difficult to bring opposition parties to dialogue. The result of this lack of cooperation was poor results.

Environmental Challenges

Prominent among environmental challenges faced by NGOs in the region was the poor road network in some of the conflict areas. In fact, not all roads leading to conflict areas in the Region were readily accessible. This aspect greatly hampered movement, coupled with the rugged topography of the region when compared with other regions of the country. Since the colonial period, communication within and beyond the region has never been easy. Road construction in this part of the country had been neglected by the successive governments since independence. For instance, the Bamenda Ring Road which links Bamenda and the administrative towns of Ndop, Kumbo, Nkambe, Wum and Mbengwi is still to be tarred. Surprisingly, this road has existed as a trunk 'A' road designed since colonial times from Victoria (Limbe), passing through Kumba, Mamfe, Bamenda and Nkambe to Wum (Southern Cameroons Information Service, 1958, p.73).

During our field study, we noticed that nearly all the administrative towns were linked by un-tarred roads that become impassable during the rainy season, especially from June to August. In the dry season the roads are very dusty. However, the region can boast of a few kilometres of partially tarred road, from Santa to Bamenda, on the Bafoussam-Bamenda high way, Bamenda to Fundong, Bamenda to Ndop and some portions from Jakiri through Kumbo to Nkambe and Bamenda to Bafut, and Batigbo to Bali. Other secondary roads, known as farm-to-market roads or trunk 'B'⁴⁸ roads, link various parts of the region with the major un-tarred trunk 'A' roads. This situation made it difficult for the staff and volunteers to reach such areas easily. Some of them had to trek sometimes for days. Once in the field they were also expected to spend days and weeks

⁴⁶ Interview with sali django.

⁴⁷ Interview with alhadji haruna umaru, age 41, mboscuda paralegal for menchum division, 25/07/2011.

⁴⁸ In Cameroon's roads terminology, Trunk A roads are national roads, while trunk B roads are provincial and divisional roads.

in some cases. In addition to the problem of accessibility was that of communication. Conflicts in the Region were sporadic and cut across linguistic barriers. This became a problem especially when field staff was expected to get information on the possible causes of the conflict, its resolution and consequent peace building process. In such situations they turned to interpreters who at times were unable to transmit the messages with the exact precision and meaning. This led to misunderstanding since conflict resolution is a very delicate affair.⁴⁹

The irresponsible attitude of some traditional rulers in the North West Region was also a problem. Some of these traditional rulers did not reside in their villages and, at times, were not informed about conflicts within their communities. This was the case with the *Fon* of Angong who was residing in Bamenda at the time of the conflict between his village and Bepong, and is reported not to have received the information from EMPED when they contacted him for permission to intervene in the conflict.⁵⁰ Besides the absence of some of these traditional rulers from their villages, it is reported that some traditional rulers asked for envelopes before attending peace building seminars even after their transportation and feeding had been taken care of. According to our informant, “these traditional leaders think that they should be paid because they feel that the NGOs were benefiting from the peace building effort”.⁵¹ With this mindset, it was often very difficult to rally traditional rulers who were indispensable in conflict resolution and peace building especially with the financial situation of most of these NGOs.

The responsibility has to be borne both by the traditional rulers and the NGOs. Traditional rulers should adopt a more responsible behaviour by delegating powers so that in case of their absence they can always be contacted to get reliable information. On the side of NGOs sensitisation seems to be the only way out. For example, some traditional rulers need to be clarified on certain issues about the existence and functioning of NGOs so that they stop looking at NGOs as money making bodies instead of peace makers who are out to assist them.

Besides all, the delay in releasing funds by donors also played negatively on the activities of NGOs in the region. Some NGOs complained that sponsors made things difficult for them by not releasing funds on time. This delay was coupled with the demand for much paper work which most NGOs were not familiar with.⁵² In a conflict situation, there is need to act fast so as to prevent it from reaching the threshold of war. Since NGOs depended much on sponsors and foreign donors, some of these organisations found themselves in a helpless situation when their sponsors or donors did not act in time for them to intervene in a conflict situation. At times the sponsors came with stringent demands which most of these NGOs could not meet up with. Ndi Richard confirmed this when he said that at times they were helpless in conflict situations when their sponsors delayed in responding to them. In order to avoid such “embarrassments” NGOs should reduce their over-dependence on donors and turn to local resource mobilisation. They could also save part of what they receive from these donors so as to use in such situations.

Despite these numerous challenges faced by NGOs in the North West Region of Cameroon, they remain veritable actors in the domain of peace building in the area. It is from this backdrop that the next articulation focuses on the general assessment of NGOs in the area under study.

⁴⁹ Interview with Richard Tanto Ndi.

⁵⁰ Interview with helen toh nja'ah.

⁵¹ Interview with assumpta lum ngongba.

⁵² Interview with Richard Ndi.

General Assessment of NGOs Peace Activities in the North West Region

The promulgation of Law no.90/053 of December 1990 by President Paul Biya liberalised the creation of associations in Cameroon. This prompted the creation of many NGOs in the country and in the North West Region in particular. The activities of NGOs left a profound impact on the region. These NGOs were involved in several activities such as humanitarian, bringing citizens concern to the government, advocated and monitored policies and the encouragement of political participation through the provision of information. Some were organised around specific issues such as human rights, environment, agriculture, or health. They provided analysis and expertise, served as early warning mechanisms both to the State and the local population. Meanwhile, other NGOs were involved in conflict resolution because they wanted to contribute in solving the numerous conflicts in the region and the need for the promotion of the culture of peace.

It would be unfair to talk about conflict resolution in the North West Region without mentioning NGOs. Though the advent of NGOs in the region is recent in the country and the region in particular, these organisations proved to be indispensable as they were needed not only in the humanitarian domain but also in the domain of conflict resolution.

The North West Region was plagued with numerous conflicts most of which had devastating effects. Some of these effects included damage to property and loss of life. Most of these conflicts were related to access to land and to boundary, and were mostly handled by State authorities, especially when it concerned inter-community conflicts. Conflicts within the same community were often referred to the traditional authorities and could only be referred to State authorities when deemed necessary. With the overwhelming need to maintain peace in the region, NGOs decided to intervene in an attempt to salvage the situation.

NGOs especially those earlier mentioned were able to intervene at various stages of the peace-building processes. While some intervened and were able to prevent some of the conflicts from escalating into war, most of them came in during the peace-building processes. The activities of NGOs in conflict resolution were able to contribute in the peace-building processes during the Balikumbat versus Bafanji land and boundary conflict, the Oku versus Mbessa land and boundary conflict, the farmers versus graziers conflict in Wum, the Balikumbat versus Bafanji land and boundary conflict, the Bali-Nyongha versus Bawock land and boundary conflict, just to name a few. Some of these activities included dialogue with the parties in conflict, sensitisation campaigns, workshops and seminars. The main aim was to ensure active participation in the seeking for lasting solutions. Through these methods NGOs let the people to understand that they were the only ones who could resolve their conflicts amicably without necessarily going to war against each other. In addition, the mentality of the population of the region towards conflict resolution was greatly transformed as people were made to realise that apart from the State, NGOs could also be very resourceful in resolving their conflicts. All these NGOs worked very closely with State authorities either through the reports and recommendations that they often made or through their joint efforts in the field during the diagnostic and dialogue stages.

As a result of the presence and constant intervention of NGOs in conflict resolution in the area under study, relative calm returned to most of the conflict “hot spots”. The frequency of conflicts has also reduced thanks to the sensitisation done by most of these NGOs in the region on how to

resolve conflict through dialogue and avoid waging war on each other. Training and capacity building techniques on how to resolve conflicts in their early stages were widely used. The outcome of such trainings was that most of those who were trained used the knowledge and skills they had inquired to resolve conflicts within their communities at their early stages.

In the course of our exploration of the world of NGOs in the North West Region, we also discovered that while some of these NGOs were trying to do their best in resolving some of the conflicts in the areas, others existed only on paper as they could not state with precision their objectives and the areas where they intervened. Among these fictitious NGOs, some did not have offices while others were housed in private residences and often had staffs consisting of one person only who, in most cases, was the founding director. Most of them who even claimed to be involved in conflict resolution were unable to furnish us with the information on their activities in such areas. In some cases these “theoretical” NGOs could not identify the major parties involved in different conflict areas in the region. In this regard the motivation behind the creation of some of these NGOs was questionable since the existence of such organisations was often short-lived. Very often, it was difficult to trace these NGOs as they generally abandoned their activities half way as soon as they were able to convince their donors and get the required sponsorship they needed. That was why we had criteria for selecting NGOs for our study.

It was against this background that many informants believed that most of these NGOs were out for money making. In addition to the above-mentioned challenge are the numerous internal and structural challenges that these NGOs were facing. Most of their staff members could not even boast of their capacity as peace builders or trainers. With the above findings, it was tempting to draw a negative conclusion on NGOs in conflict resolution in the North West Region, but a closer study of some of the NGOs proved otherwise, as they demonstrated their willingness, readiness, and ability to resolve conflicts. These NGOs also proved that though they lacked the necessary resources to perform better, they were a necessity in the region. Whatever the case, NGOs are indispensable partners in the world today. In the North West Region they proved that they were reliable partners in promoting the general welfare of the people particularly in the domain of conflict resolution and peace building despite the challenges earlier mentioned.

CONCLUSION

The main issue raised in this paper was that NGOs in the North West Region faced many challenges in their attempts to promote the culture of peace in the region. They operated day by day with these both internal and external challenges yet they managed to get by. The community of NGOs is now far larger than it was a decade ago. This is so because it is increasingly being felt around that these organisations have more advantages than disadvantages compared with government agencies that perform similar tasks. While exploring the world of NGOs, we discovered that there were many in the North West region with very good intentions. They were battling with the management of a complex and a diverse range of issues. Internal management issues included strategic planning, budgeting, and staffing, governing structure of the organisation, pressure from donors, growth and change within the organisation. These NGOs also faced the challenge of management of external relationships such as relations with the government, the private sector, other NGOs, the environment in which they operated and also with their target communities. All of this exerted pressure on these NGOs in the peace-building process to yield

more fruits. These challenges were largely responsible for their inefficiency and inability to successfully resolve conflicts in the region.

In a nutshell, NGOs in the North West Region were provided with the enabling environment in which to operate, they could be reliable partners in conflict resolution and peace building. Providing this environment involves all the stakeholders in the activities of the NGOs such as the State, religious organisations, other NGOs, donors and the beneficiary communities. In their attempts to remedy conflict situations in the region, NGOs used varied methods and techniques including dialogue whereby meetings were organised to bring together members from both sides to the table, the introduction of community participatory peace building programs, sensitisation programs, seminars where local peace building techniques were taught to the communities, using food aid as incentive for collaborative activities, and the provision of basic necessities to victims. These and many more enabled the NGOs to record successes in their various areas of intervention, thereby contributing enormously in the domain of conflict resolution in the region. The facts gathered from our study clearly indicate that our initial theories were all proven to be correct.

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