



Media's Roles in Reporting Corruption in the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) Lands Restitution Process in Fako Division: 2014-2021

Jonas Menyoli Matute

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of Buea, Cameroon

Kingsley Lyonga Ngange

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of Buea, Cameroon

Stephen Mokondo Moki

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of Buea, Cameroon

ABSTRACT

Media's roles in exposing corruption is itemised in the CDC land restitution process in Fako Division of Cameroon, captioned as "The Land Grabbing Saga in Fako Division" by newspapers. Journalism in general and investigative reporting in particular, play a critical role in raising consciousness of and fighting against corruption. It is one of the most effective means of raising public consciousness about corruption. It is in this light that the researchers set out to investigate the actual role played by the media in reporting corruption in the CDC land restitution process. Two qualitative research methods were used to gather data. The first method, the qualitative content analysis, examined contents of four editions of CRTV Buea Press Club radio programme and also exploited contents of some newspapers and online media platforms on corruption in the CDC land restitution process. The second research method, in-depth interview, was used to gather data from some elites of Fako Division, members of the affected villages, journalists who reported on the corruption, some accused persons and CDC officials to ascertain media's role in exposing corruption. The data reveal that the media played three roles in exposing corruption in the CDC land restitution process: giving information and creating awareness; public education; and prompting peers (other journalists) to also report on corruption. The elites and members of the affected communities attested that some of them were not aware of any corrupt practices until they heard about it on CRTV Buea Press Club and later followed it on newspapers and online media platforms. Findings also show that media investigative reports corroborated evidence to establish the occurrence of corruption in the restitution process. The media exposed this issue by naming and shaming those involved in the corruption (publishing their names and pictures). Amongst other things, this study recommends that the media should be considered as an important tool in the fight against corruption; those interested in exposing corruption in the media should be involved in investigative journalism that will enable them back their reports with documented evidence since corruption is a complex crime. Also, people in public

offices should be compelled by law to make available information that is of public interest and good to journalists to enable them expose societal ills (like corruption), especially in public offices and spheres.

Key words: Media, roles, CDC, Corruption, lands restitution process, surrendered lands, Fako Division.

INTRODUCTION

Land grabbing is a worldwide phenomenon that has always threatened peace in several communities in the world. The Land Matrix Partnership, an International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO), estimated that some 227 million hectares of land have been grabbed worldwide since 2001, with 70% of this being in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ntaryika, 2013). As part of a trend that is escalating across Africa, Cameroon has been described in Caiffa (2016), as one of the African countries most exposed to land-grabbing. Ciaffa (2016) cited the case between local communities in the South West Region of Cameroon and a US multinational known as Herakles Farms, which intended to clear thousands of hectares of rainforest to create a palm oil plantation that led to tension. This incident saw 244 farmers filing two court complaints and an international petition calling on the Cameroon government to halt the project.

Land crisis in Fako Division, Cameroon, is even more complicated. Eno and Fombe (2016) opine that the availability of surrendered land by the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) has enormously facilitated the development of Fako Division. What the CDC failed to mention is that behind, the said development, there are lots of contestations from the indigenous population who believe they are being deprived of their rights regarding the distribution of these lands. The CDC lands restitution process has resulted in court cases filed against traditional rulers and elites whom some Bakweri communities accuse of working with administrative authorities to short-change and dispossess them of the said land. Based on persistent complaints from indigenes of Fako Division against some of their traditional rulers and administrative officials, the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) opened investigation on this matter in 2014. The government has signed different ministerial decisions suspending CDC land restitution.

The National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC), better known by its French acronym, CONAC, the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms as well as Civil Societies Organisations, etc., are government agencies that publish reports yearly on their contributions in the fight against corruption. On the other hand, there is a paucity of reports in Cameroon on what the media is doing to also fight corruption. Such reports can only be established using research. It is against this background that this study investigates some selected media content that mentioned corruption in the CDC land restitution process and also interviewed some elites of Fako Division, members of the affected villages, journalists, some accused persons and CDC officials with the objective to examine the role the media has played in exposing corruption in the CDC land restitution process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background to CDC land in Fako Division and the restitution process

The indigenous people of Fako Division are the Bakweris. Lemoigne (2010), maintained that soil fertility in Fako Division due to the Mount Cameroon volcano has been an attractive factor to a diversity of population for centuries. The fertility of the soil in this division also attracted

the Germans as early as 1894. The Germans forcefully occupied the lands against the wish of the indigenous people of this area by establishing large plantations in 1896 after occupying as much land as possible hence, leaving the indigenous population almost landless (African Unification Front, 1898 ;Bederman, 1968). Bederman (1968) added that the Germans seized over 400 square miles of the most fertile land that belonged to the Bakweris without any financial compensation. The German rule ended in 1916 after the First World War. In the years following, the British occupied the Western while the French occupied the Eastern part of the then Kamerun as mandated territories of the League of Nations. This Western part was jointly administered as part of Nigeria by the British. Another World War erupted (Second World War), and at the end of this war in 1945, British Cameroons became a United Nations Trust Territory. Before this period, there was increase awareness amongst the natives on how they have been dispossessed of their lands.

The natives (Bakweris) demanded for the German seized lands in Fako Division to be appropriated to them, yet, Africa Front (2005), stated that no serious attempt was made to this respect. The birth of the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) followed an Ex-enemy Land Ordinance No. 38 of 1946, from the Nigerian Government empowering the governor to purchase land in Cameroon previously owned by the Germans and companies, which the British had seized during the war. As explained by Bederman (1968), it is the second Ordinance No. 39 dated 1946 that directly saw the creation of CDC on a certificate of occupancy for sixty years during which period, the lands were expected to be developed to benefit all people. Ndeh (2016), saw the creation of CDC as the indigenisation of colonial plantations. According to Bederman (1968), the creation of CDC came as a shock to the Bakweri Land Committee as they were unaware of this plan by the British to transform the plantations into the CDC. Bederman (1968), explained that though the BLC quickly expressed their resentment, it was nevertheless difficult for them to disagree with the decision taken to create the CDC because some arrangements were made that the local people would take increasingly active part in the running of the corporation in future years and that the plantations will not merely be for private gain but for the common benefit of the inhabitants of the territory as a whole.

Also, by the deed of surrender, the CDC surrendered all its rights, titles and interest under the previous certificate of occupancy to the Bakweris. By this same deed, the government of Southern Cameroon agreed to lease the CDC all lands for a period of ninety-nine-years and this took effect from January 1, 1960. These rights according to Eno and Fombe (2016), were surrendered to the government of West Cameroon and both CDC and the government were required to surrender the lands at the end of the lease (99 years) to the legitimate owners who are the natives (Bakweris). The CDC was handed to the Federal Republic of Cameroon government in 1961 when the colonial masters departed. This plantation has since then been managed as a parastatal company owned by the state of Cameroon. In 2002, the indigenous inhabitants of Fako Division took steps to reclaim their ancestral land the plantations occupied. Precisely in October of 2002, Kofele-Kale (2007), noted that the Bakweri Land Claims Committee (BLCC) brought in litigations against the State of Cameroon before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights for violations of various provisions of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights 12 (hereinafter "Banjul Charter"). Bakweri Land Claims Committee did this litigation on behalf of the traditional rulers, notables and elites of the indigenous minority Bakweri peoples of Cameroon.

Kofele-Kale (2007), noted that their claims were more specifically that the State of Cameroon had violated Bakweri rights over ancestral land occupied by a State-owned agro-industrial corporation, the CDC. The BLCC therefore, according to Kofele-Kale (2007), sought a declaration from the Commission to the effect that the lands occupied by the CDC are private property as defined in positive law 13 belonging to the Bakweri; the Bakweri be fully involved in the CDC privatisation negotiations to ensure that their interests are effectively protected following the privatisation of this corporation; the ground rents owed the Bakweri people dating back to 1947 be paid to a Bakweri Land Trust Fund for the benefit of the dispossessed indigenes; the Bakweri acting jointly and severally be allocated a specific percentage of shares in each of the privatised companies; and that, BLCC be represented in the current and all future policy and management boards, as was the case in colonial times.

It should be noted that the BLCC was provoked to bring litigation against the State of Cameroon after the Presidential decree of July 1994 announcing the privatisation of CDC (Kofele-Kale, 2007). However, according to Tande (2006) and Ndienla (2009), cited in Alden (2011), the commission in 2006 found against Cameroon's government on almost all counts but fell short of demanding remedy. Instead, it referred the matter to mediation as the next phase and recommended that the government and the BLCC settle the matter amicably. At the same time, its findings observed that the BLCC had presented a strong historical claim and had also presented compelling evidence with respect to the lack of independence of the judiciary. The commission's findings were only published in 2009, following endorsement by the African Union. Ngongi (2013), explained that, after the appearing at the African Union Court in Banjul to answer the case against the Bakweri Lands Claim Committee (BLCC), the State of Cameroon decided to each time surrender land to Fako villages needing expansion. The only document guiding the restitution or surrendering of CDC lands to the Bakweri people is Ministerial Order No.000097/2.5/MINUH/D200 of 3rd of March 2003, to lay down procedures to process applications to surrender State lands exploited by Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC). Notwithstanding, the restitution process has been challenged and some Bakweri chiefs and elites accused of conniving with some members of the administration and land officials to short-change the procedure.

Corruption and anti-corruption initiatives in Cameroon

Akombi (2009) described corruption as an endemic practice in Cameroon. This especially after being accorded first place twice (1998 and 1999) as the most corrupt country in the world by Transparency International Corruption index (Bechem, 2018). Though Nwel (1999), stated that corruption is not specific to Cameroon, he argued that the need to examine corruption in this country is crucial.

While examining the causes of corruption in Cameroon, Nwel (1999), stated that, there is a general moral decay and deterioration in the country, which has led to a negative climate, deplorable salary situation, love for easy money and the State's monopoly of the audio-visual media. For example, Nwel (1999), explained that:

"At CRTV, coverage, interviews and other invitations (debates, show biz, and concerts) are sold in the same way as SONEL, SNEC and Telecommunications workers sell their services in private to potential clients and to subscribers. If you do not want to pay into private pockets, then you will not be served or you might get disconnected without any hope of a rapid and free reestablishment."

The example stated by Nwel (1999) above is one of the ways corruption manifests in Cameroon's public sector, where there is the violation of the obligations of probity, fidelity and impartiality in the exercise of a public service to the detriment of the user. Individuals request to be compensated to perform their duties either with money, gifts, promises or presents, otherwise refuse to carry out such function. In this light, this study considers any form of compensation that state officials involved in the CDC land restitution process received as corruption. It could be in the form of receiving portions of the CDC surrendered lands as gift from natives of Fako Division for easing the restitution process, as well as other forms as payments not stated in the Ministerial Order No.000097/2.5/MINUH/D200 of 3rd of March 2003, prescribing the procedures for CDC land restitution. While examining the level of fraud and corruption practices in doing business in Cameroon, Mua (2015), noted that corruption is high despite anti-corruption initiatives in the country.

Though corruption is a global problem that exist everywhere (Nyingchia, 2020), occupying such a disreputable position as most corrupt country in 1998 and 1999, is a serious cause for concern. The Cameroon Penal Code is the main national legislation that deals with corruption as an offence. This document otherwise known as law No. 67-LF-1 of 12th of June 1967 identifies and punishes several forms of corruption. These include: bribery, indulgence, undue demand, compulsion of public servant, procuring influence, misappropriation of public funds, and corruption of employee.

In addition to the Penal Code, the Cameroon government has signed different international conventions that encouraged the fight against corruption and other related offences. One of these conventions is the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, which is the first legally binding international anti-corruption instrument. This convention was adopted on the 31st of October 2003 and ratified by Cameroon on the 25th of April 2004. It is on the basis of this convention that the global community took the opportunity to establish an effectively set up bench marks for effective anti-corruption strategies.

Cameroon adopted the African Union Convention on the fight against corruption on the 12th of July at the African Union Heads of States Summit at Maputo in Angola. According to Nyingchia (2020), the adoption of this convention required the Cameroon government to establish bodies in charge of preventing corruption, and the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) was created in compliance to this. NACC was created through Decree N°. 2006/088 of 11 March 2006 as the central organ in charge of the fight against corruption in Cameroon, and it became operational on 15 March 2007 (NACC, 2011). It was placed under the authority of the Head of State with headquarters in Yaoundé, the political capital of Cameroon.

However, an Ad Hoc Committee was created before NACC to fight corruption in 1998 after Cameroon was first rated most corrupt country in the world in the Transparency International Corruption index. The Ad Hoc Committee was lodged at the Prime Minister's Office. This committee was later replaced by the National Observatory Against Corruption, which was created by Prime Ministerial Order N°. 001/PM of 4 January 2000. Nyingchia (2020), described the National Observatory as another shadow institution that could not effectively fight corruption due to lack of resources and independence. Consequently, it was abolished by Decree N°. 2006/088 of 11 March 2006 relating to the creation, organisation, and functioning of NACC. This decree is the only legal instrument for the moment relating to the organisation

and functioning of the NACC. Since its creation, NACC has stepped up efforts to fight corruption in Cameroon through different ways. From past NACC reports, it is observed that this organisation does not only fight corruption but also educate the public in a bid to denounce and prevent corruption (NACC, 2014, 2016, 2020).

Among the different sectors of corruption reported by NACC, the land sector happens to be one of the most mentioned. Corruption in the lands sector occupied 2nd position with 15.7% out of 12 sectors implicated in highest number of complaints for corruption and other related offences reported to NACC in 2019. According to the NACC (2019) report, the cases that were recorded had to do with double sale of land, issuance of fake land certificates, Bailiff's and Surveyor's costs, extortion in Sub-Divisional offices, Notary's fees, etc. Land affairs again featured 2nd position with 14.6% out of 9 sectors implicated in highest number of complaints for corruption and other related offences in NACC (2020) reports. In addition to its regular public awareness campaigns in the fight against corruption, NACC uses its micro programmes, "Espace CONAC", aired on radio and television to educate the public on how to denounce corruption. NACC has continued to broadcast "Espace CONAC" in English and French. For example, one of the themes discussed in 2014 was corruption in the issuance of land certificates. This theme coincided with the year CRTV Buea Press Club and many newspapers reported corruption in the CDC lands surrendered to indigenes of Fako Division for the purpose of restitution. Funwie (2021) lauded the efforts of NACC in the fight against corruption pointing how it's investigating capacities and mandate to gather and analyse allegations and information about corrupt practices has presented findings that have led to disciplinary or legal proceedings against perpetrators. Funwie (2021), noted that, there are many investigations that have opened, leading to arrests made and a handful of government officials tried and sentenced to serve prison term for corruption or misuse of power since NACC went into operation.

The functions of the mass media in fighting corruption

The mass media serves the basic functions of informing, entertaining and educating the public (Nity & Singh, 2017). Buccur (2000), opined that one way we acquire knowledge is through the media, whose role is to disseminate information to an audience, thereby empowering them. Buccur (2000), further argued that the information we gain from the media gives us more power no matter who we are because the more we know, the more we can effect change both on a personal and societal level. In the same vein, Schauseil (2019), stated that the media can play at least three main functions regarding corruption: watchdog on corruption, promote integrity, and engage citizens in anti-corruption efforts. The watchdog function is founded on an understanding of the media as the "fourth estate" of democracy within a system of checks and balances with the purpose to monitor and observe the behaviour of public officials in the legislature, executive and judiciary.

The watchdog role imparts the press with the responsibility of being a platform for discussion, investigators of impropriety, an adversary to monopoly over power and knowledge and the advocates of truth, freedom and democracy (Franklin, Hamer, Hanna, Kinsey & Richardson, 2005). According to Franklin et al (2005), the watchdog is embodied in the traditional idea of a 'fourth estate', historically accredited to Edmund Burke. The idea of presenting or looking up to journalism as a social 'watchdog' originated from a classical liberal conception of the power relationship between government and society within a democratic state.

In principle, the watchdog journalists are expected to investigate, fact-check and interview political and public figures to ensure accountability before they proceed to publishing any information. Salas (2018) and Coronel (2008), stated that in carrying out their job, the watchdog journalists gather information relating to wrongdoings of persons in power and then deliver it to the public for them to understand what is happening in their society and stop such wrongdoings.

On their part, while examining the watchdog role of the media, Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng and White (2009), and McQuail (2000), maintained that the media is also expected to contribute to shared consciousness and to act as critic or watchdog to hold the government to account. That is, providing surveillance and information about possible relevant events by putting them in contexts, as well as guidance and advice that will enable the public to make informed decisions.

Likewise, while performing its informative function as stated in Nity and Singh (2017), the media can sensitise, educate and provide information that can enable citizens and policymakers to arrive at informed decisions and policies. This function makes the media to serve as the watchdog of the society especially of those in power or administrative positions who are often accused of abusing power and of corrupt practices. Livingston (2013) argued that the media, in all its various forms, must play a crucial role in giving the public a voice to counter corruption and for letting people know the complaints, mechanisms available and how they can use such mechanisms effectively. In this light, Stapenhurst (2002) maintained that the media can act as a force against corruption in ways that are both tangible and intangible. For the tangible ways in which the media serves as a force against corruption, Stapenhurst (2002), explained that journalists can launch an investigation using series of news stories on authorities to expose their misdeeds. By exposing their misdeeds to the public, it may prompt public bodies to launch formal investigations into allegations of corruption hence forcing such corrupt officials to resign, be sacked, impeached, etc.

In addition to exposing public officials, Stapenhurst (2002), stated that the news media can reinforce the legitimacy of public anti-corruption bodies by helping to disseminate the findings, thus reducing the ease with which interested parties who hold power can meddle in their work. Furthermore, if the resulting public pressure leads to a reform of those bodies, the long-term effectiveness and potential of the media to act as a counterweight against corruption is strengthened. On the other hand, Stapenhurst (2002), contrasted that, the intangible ways the media can fight against corruption can be characterised as those checks on corruption, which arise from the broader social climate of enhanced political pluralism, cheered public debates and a heightened sense of accountability among politicians, public bodies and institutions that are inevitably the by-product of a hard-hitting, independent news media.

Mendes (2013), stated that the fact that the media is often referred to as the fourth pillar in democracy with a key role to play in monitoring and investigating the actions of those in power and informing citizens about them, does not mean the media and journalists are immune to corruption. This means that, the watchdog role of the media can be jeopardised. This is because, when the media becomes part of the corruption, it will be difficult for it to expose corrupt practices. Eigen (1999) cited in Nogara (2009), also added that the media can play an important role in ensuring public accountability by monitoring and investigating the actions of those who

are granted public trust and who may be tempted to abuse their office for private gain. Using the case of the media in Uganda, Nogara (2009), illustrated how media exposure of corrupt practices in the military and in the police force, involving high-ranking officials also led to several parliamentary investigations. In the cases of military procurement corruption involving the purchase of second-hand helicopters from Belarus, which became known as the "junk helicopters" scandal, and the illegal exploitation of natural resources from the Congo, Nogara (2009) noted that the president was prompted to set up several commissions of inquiry to investigate ministers and officials featuring in parliamentary probes and in the media.

Though this led to the resignation of only a few cabinet officials and some reinstated by the president in the next cabinet re-shuffle, Nogara (2009) applauded the media for contributing to raising public awareness on and hostility towards corrupt behaviours by reporting on corruption. Media coverage also contributed to exposing flaws and weaknesses in existing laws and regulations that promoted a climate favourable to corruption (Nogara, 2009). Sowunmi, Raufu, Oketokun, Salako and Usifoh (2010), also maintained that, the role of the media in promoting good governance and controlling corruption is critical. They argue that the media does not only raise public awareness about corruption by investigating and reporting indices, but its causes, consequences and possible remedies of corruption. They however remarked that the effectiveness of the media in performing this function would largely depend on access to information and the degree of freedom of expression, as well as professional and ethical values of investigative journalists.

While pointing out that the media and the audience share a symbiotic relationship, Bucur (2000) noted that the journalists have a great responsibility to educate and inform the public honestly by seeking the truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues without manipulation. Knowing that the media can be entangled in corruption (Transparency International, 2011), there is no doubt that the media may get involved in a game of manipulating the audience thereby failing to expose corrupt officials and practices.

In addition, the journalists can also serve as intermediaries, located between specialists and the public (Bucur, 2000). In the case of land grabbing, the journalists can invite specialists on land tenure and lawyers to explain certain legal provisions to the audience during a round table radio or TV programme or conduct an indebt interview with such experts and publish the interviews in a newspaper. In such a situation, the specialist or expert acts as a resource person who is able to explain and clarify the audience on the technicalities and legal provisions regarding land tenure while the journalists make efforts to put the information in a clear, exact, and understandable manner, translating terms and statistical data into accessible language for better understanding by the masses (Bucur, 2000).

While being the watchdog of the society, the media can strive to put pressure on the powers that be to put up accountability mechanism for checks and balances in the management of state affairs including the management of land. Mungu-Pippidi et al (2011) pointed out cases in Taiwan, South Korea and Ghana where the media together with the civil society pressurised their governments to adopt anti-corruption policies and for increase investigations and prosecutions of corrupt officials. However, they noted that though pressure by the media is a key factor to force the powers that be to put up accountability mechanism that checks corruption, the media itself may face sustainability problems.

The media affect our attitudes and norms through three mechanisms: they serve as watchdogs, agenda setters, and a collective forum for a diverse set of voices. As watchdogs, the media keep an eye on government actions and protect the public interest by exposing cases of mismanagement, misuse of authority, and corruption. They contribute to ensuring accountability and transparency of governments and other powerful factions by reporting such events. When it comes to corruption, the media's position as a watchdog is perhaps the most evident (Norris and Odugbemi, 2010). Similarly, Gonzáles (2007), established three key positions of the media in the battle against corruption: a) the primary discoverer of corruption, b) a watchdog that can also deter corruption by instilling fear of public exposure among potential corrupters, and c) a public educator about the consequences of corruption and how to combat it.

The media, as agenda setters, will bring corruption to the attention of the public and politicians. One of the most important political roles of the media is to set the agenda. They attract attention to societal issues by addressing them and putting them on the public agenda. Corruption is seldom addressed in general, either because it is seen as a social norm or because people are afraid of consequences if they do. In the eyes of the public, media coverage legitimizes corruption as an issue: if the media believes corruption is a problem, the public will pay more serious attention to it. Furthermore, lawmakers may be forced to rethink current laws and policies as a result of media pressure. This is especially useful in democracies, where lawmakers must be concerned with election results (Ajzen, 1991). People may also use the media to express their views on corruption and their personal encounters with it. This mechanism is based on the concept of the public sphere, which states that dialogue flows between the state and people providing space where both sides share transparency and legitimacy.

The media may not be traditional tools in the fight against corruption. However, they are crucial in achieving the cultural change that must accompany any legislative change to make laws and institutional changes sustainable. Media can amplify the effect of anti-corruption legislation by a) reaching and mobilizing a broader audience, b) motivating political leaders to act, and c) facilitating a cultural change that will improve the sustainability of change (Anne-Katrin and Sumir, 2012). While the media has a lot of ability to help in the battle against corruption, organizations that deal with them should be aware of certain tactics and processes that can help them work with the media more effectively. These suggestions are divided into two categories: learning how the media works and learning how people use the media (Byrne, Arnold, and Nagano, 2010). It's crucial to figure out which media are most applicable to the target audience, since only properly tailored outreach campaigns can be successful and long-lasting. Sometimes, a combination of media is most effective: corruption can be addressed on the radio or on television, and then continued and intensified by social media. Interpersonal communication, such as via village meetings, is also extremely important for spreading a message and mobilizing people to fight corruption (Byrne, et al., 2010)

Following the identification of the target audience and their preferred media, a partnership with the media should be created. A coalition of reform-minded partners is needed for long-term systemic change. By raising the public profile of an anti-corruption alliance and establishing it as part of the public conversation about corruption, a coalition with the media, with journalists or editors, will strengthen its efforts (Coronel, 2010). In many countries, media coverage of corruption has led to considerable political and social change. In the Philippines,

investigative reporting on the president's illegal assets led to his ousting. In India, reporters uncovered deeply entrenched corruption in the defence industry and motivated many other reporters to use similar methods. Currently, a movement against corruption is sweeping through the country, which could not possibly be as successful as it is if the media were not covering it extensively. In that particular last example, we see how traditional media and social media function together to amplify the movement, to give it legitimacy and clout (Anne-Katrin and Sumir, 2012).

There is a paucity of studies on mass media and corruption in Cameroon. However, two studies, Tanjong (2009) and Wantchami and Ngange (2017), published on the media and corruption in Cameroon. Tanjong (2007), administered 700 questionnaires heads of households for them to assess the role of the media in exposing corruption in Cameroon. The result of the research demonstrates the media as the most active institution in the fight against corruption in Cameroon. A total of 52.7% of the respondents claimed the media to be most active followed by the judiciary (12.1%), the executive (11.4%) and the legislative (9%). However, 51% argued that the media's fight against corruption is not succeeding as opposed to 40.6%. Lastly the private media were reported to be more dynamic than the public media in this effort. The author concluded that the Cameroon media must strive to sustain their efforts in combating corruption in the country. On their part, Wantchami and Ngange (2017), adopted a quantitative content analysis to compare the content of a private (The Post) and a public (Cameroon Tribune) media. According to the results, the private media, The Post newspaper covered more stories on corruption (70.6%) than Cameroon Tribune (29.4%). Majority (88.9%) of the stories on corruption reported in The Post newspapers were found in the front page while only 11.1% were found on the front page of Cameroon Tribune. Hence, The Post newspaper gave more prominence on corruption stories compared to Cameroon Tribune. The results also revealed that The Post centred its coverage on corruption mostly by investigating public officials (85.7%) and accusation of corrupt practice on public officials (78.6%). On the other hand, Cameroon Tribune centred on legal proceedings on corruption (75%).

The role of investigative journalism in the fight against corruption

Investigative journalism is a form of journalism in which reporters go in depth to investigate a single story that may uncover corruption, review government policies or draw attention to social, economic, political, or cultural trends as well as loopholes in legislation and legal articles. It involves exposing to the public, matters that are concealed either deliberately by someone in a position of power or accidentally behind a chaotic mass of facts and circumstances that obscure understanding (Abdulrahman, 2019). Nwabueze (2012) argues that investigative journalists exist since the muckraking era in the late 19th and 20th century. This kind of reporting is tilted towards unravelling hidden facts that are of enormous significance to society. To this backdrop, Asemah and Asogwa (2012), averred that investigative journalism is key to democratic governance and national development for developing countries.

Journalism in general and investigative reporting in particular, plays a critical role in raising consciousness of and fighting against corruption. They are one of the most effective means of raising public consciousness about corruption. However, investigative journalism is very challenging. Of thousands of journalists around the globe, only a few select this profession and decide to be investigative journalists (Abdulrahman, 2019). Pollack and Allern (2018), investigated on methods used by investigative journalists in revealing large-scale corruption

related to the expansion of Nordic telecom companies in Uzbekistan. They found that investigative journalists have played a crucial role in the disclosure of corruption, sometimes cooperating across media organisations and countries, demonstrating the importance of journalism as a public good for democracy (Pollack & Allern, 2018).

Suntai and Shem (2018), concluded in their study on tackling institutional corruption through investigative journalism that this type of journalism has the potency of combating corrupt practices. According to the writers, it has the potential to reduce and eradicate corruption in society. Investigative journalism is a daunting occupation, and as a result, it has faced many challenges throughout history, in a variety of countries, and almost everywhere. The media plays a paramount role in exposing corruption and taking legal, political and penal action against it. According to Mendes (2013), the media provides a critical route for information about governmental, administrative, and business activities to be disseminated throughout society, providing the public with a critical capacity to hold those in power accountable, and the media's ability to be an effective tool against corruption is highly dependent on having a sufficient degree of media freedom (Weaver et al, 1977). Similarly, Weder and Brunetti (2003), argued that there is a connection between media freedom, media plurality, and levels of corruption, and that an independent and proactive media serves as a powerful channel of external influence, with a unique ability to expose government and business officials' transgressions.

Theoretical framework

The agenda setting and social responsibility theories form the theoretical base of this study. As postulated by McCombs and Shaw (1972), the agenda setting theory projects the capacity of the media to tell audiences what issues are major and important, thereby setting the agenda. The core assumption as explained by the authors is that, instead of being pervasive, the media are persuasive in focusing public attention on specific events, issues, and persons and in determining the importance people attach to public matters. On these bases, this study holds that media can create public awareness by constantly reporting and educating the public on corruption. The social responsibility theory on the other hand, advocates for a free press without any censorship but at the same time, the content of the press should be discussed in a public panel. This theory is one of the Four Theories of the press proposed by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956), where they explained the media should move beyond the simple "objective reporting (facts reporting) to "interpretive" reporting (investigative). They argue that the media should analyse, interpret and report facts with clear explanations. This theory has been selected for this study because it helps in understanding professionalism in media by setting up a high level of accuracy, truth and the presentation of information in a decent and responsible manner.

METHODOLOGY

Two qualitative research methods were used in this study. The first method was qualitative content analysis that examined the content of four editions of a CRTV Buea radio programme called "Press Club". This programme first treated the saga and raised concerns of corruption in the CDC land restitution process. The content of some selected editions of Cameroon newspapers and online platforms that also mentioned corruption in the said land restitution process after the radio programme was banned were also content analysed. The second research method was in-depth interviews. This method was used to gather data from some

elites of Fako Division, members of the affected villages, journalists who reported on corruption in the CDC land restitution process, some accused persons and CDC officials to ascertain the role the media played in exposing corruption.

FINDINGS

Textual analysis was used to present the data. The analysis followed the six-step model by Bryman (2012), and Bello (2015). This model comprised: (1) careful reading of the transcript (2) coding or indexing by labelling relevant pieces such as words, phrases, sentences, actions, concepts (thematic analysis) (3) deciding the most important codes, and creating categories (4) labelling categories and deciding on the most relevant ones and how they connect to one another (5) deciding whether hierarchy could be created in the categories in order of importance or not and (6) presentation, interpretation and discussion of results. For illustration, excerpts have been extracted from the media contents and interviews to support the themes. In some cases, portions of the newspapers have been scanned and presented to serve as evidence.

Research question one: What are the roles of the media in exposing corruption in the CDC land restitution process?

Three roles were identified from the data: giving information and creating awareness, public education and prompting other journalists to expose corruption.

Role one: Giving information and creating awareness

It is commonly said that information is power. Without information, one cannot be aware of what is happening within and without their immediate environment. This is one of the themes that cut across almost all the interviews with participants of the study. Participants confirmed that they got to know about corruption in the CDC land restitution process from the media, especially CRTV Buea Press Club. To confirm the information and awareness creation role of the media on this issue, the following excerpts from CRTV Buea Press Club, newspapers, online platforms and interviews have been captured as follows:

Excerpt 1: "Cameroon is going through a very difficult period of its history as we are battling between fighting out of proportion corruption and embezzlement... Fako land happens to be one of those sectors where we can easily join in the loot by simply becoming an administrator in the area, a land official or a chief (traditional ruler) ..." (CRTV Buea Press Club of 12/07/2014).

Excerpt 1 is an extract of the last edition of CRTV Buea Press Club before the programme was banned from airing. Just like in other editions of the programme, the host, after introducing the programme and then, presenting guests (members of the panel), always introduced the topic of the day. Corruption in the CDC land restitution process in Fako Division was the focus. The host in this edition introduced the programme with a very hard tone. He stated that corruption was high in Cameroon and that CDC land was one of those areas that one just needed to become an administrative or a traditional ruler in the area in order to loot. After the CRTV Buea Press Club was banned from airing, it was observed that the newspapers and online platforms took over the fight to continue exposing the state of corruption relating to the CDC land restitution process. Hence, the informative and awareness role of the media was seen in their news reports, columns and editorials as follows:

Excerpt 2: "Fako land isn't no-man's land. But provocatively, that is the perception of some government officials in the division who dream of being untouchables flaunt. They grab

community land with insulting impunity. They are ready to employ any means; hook or crook, including silencing the media, to expropriate land offered to the community by the Cameroon Development Corporation for their personal interest.” (*First/lead paragraph of The Guardian Post No. 0633 of July 29, 2014*)

Excerpt 2 is captured from the editorial. The media once more brought to public attention corruption taking place in the CDC land restitution process in Fako Division. It made it known that instead of the native communities to gain such land lease; it was some government officials who were using different unorthodox means to short-change the community of such surrendered lands for their own interest. In this editorial, the editorialist questioned why some elites of Fako Division were silent over this land crisis. This editorial was coming barely two weeks after CRTV Buea Press Club was banned from air. Series of newspapers both in English and French languages continued reporting on the land crisis in the division especially in their headlines and cover stories as seen below:

Excerpt 3: “Fako elites have called for the creation of a judicial commission of inquiry to address the current land crisis plaguing the division as a result of the illegal alienation of Fako ancestral lands.” (First/lead paragraph of The Horizon No. 212 of August 18, 2014).

Excerpt 4: “Le secrétaire général adjoint et porte-parole de la BLCC fait un déballage sur le dessous de la crise foncière au sujet de la rétrocession des terres de la CDC aux village Bakweri.” (First/lead paragraph of La Nouvelle Expression No. 3772 of July 18, 2014).

Excerpt 5: “...excessive grabbing of communal land by some senior administrators (non-natives) of the division and beyond; indiscriminate sale of ancestral land by some insatiable Fako chiefs and elites; the...” (Second paragraph, Fako News Centre accessed on December 2, 2021 from <https://fakonewscentre.com/fakolandcrisis1.htm>).

Excerpt 3, 4 and 5 are extracts from newspapers and an online news platform that all raised awareness of corruption in the CDC land restitution process. Cameroon being a country where English and French are both official languages, the media exposed the issue of corruption in both languages. Excerpt 4, shows that, even journalists working for newspapers that publish in the French language took interest in exposing corruption in the CDC land restitution process. In Excerpt 4, the journalists of French expression conducted an interview with the Assistant Secretary General of the Bakweri Land Claim Committee (BLCC), Barrister Ikome Mbella Ngongi. In this interview, he opened up to the journalist in exposing the mafia scheme by administrative authorities to grab CDC surrendered lands in Fako Division meant for the natives. Hence, news about corruption in the land restitution process was not only limited to the English speaking audience in Cameroon, but also those of the French expression as the news was delivered to them in the language they understand.

The media also made use of banner (large) headlines, placed the stories on the front pages and also used colours to highlight and show emphasis on certain portions of the headlines that reported corruption in the CDC land restitution process. In terms of the nature of the headlines, all the exhibits (fig. 1 to fig. 6) below show that the newspapers used banner headlines with large characters that cut across the front pages of the newspapers.

Figures displaying newspapers front page headlines that exposed corruption in the CDC land restitution process



Figure 1: The Guardian Post No. 0632 of 24 July 2014



Figure 2: Eden No. 859 of 16 July 2014

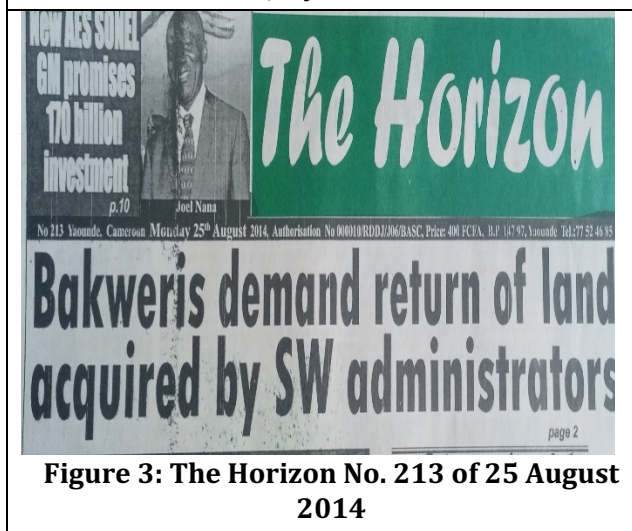


Figure 3: The Horizon No. 213 of 25 August 2014



Figure 4: The Star Vol. 2 No. 293 of 4 August 2014



Figure 5: The Post No. 01561 of 8 September 2014

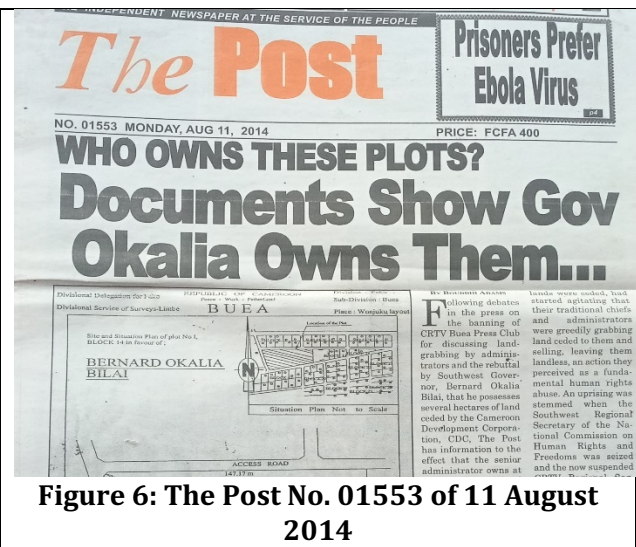


Figure 6: The Post No. 01553 of 11 August 2014

The data in the figures above represents some newspapers front pages. In addition to using large headlines, colours were also used to highlight certain portions of the headlines. For example, in the headline in Fig. 1, the words, “gov’t and CONAC” were highlighted in red within other words in the headline. The use of these colours was to grab the attention of the readers.

It should also be noted here that stories regarding the corruption in the CDC land restitution process were usually placed on the front pages and served as the cover stories. Stories on the front pages of the newspapers with large headlines and use of colours all combine to increase visibility and expose the issue more to the public. The front page is the most pride page in a newspaper and it is easily accessible to readers, even those who do not have money to buy them. Readers can easily see the stories when the newspapers are displaced in the newspaper stands.

There is evidence from interviews conducted to show that the media played a role in informing and creating awareness.

Excerpt 6: “I think it has been quiet a long while and it was since the period that there was a radio programme over radio Buea and one of the main speakers who brought awareness to me. I started having ideas about this land saga. ...the bible says that, my people perish because of lack of knowledge and the radio especially has done a lot of awareness and were it not of the radio programmes, I would have been totally out of ehh...what is happening especially to the land that I belong to.” (*Elite 1*).

Excerpt 7: “Well they created a lot of awareness, they work so relentlessly, so hard in order to develop the information to the citizens of Fako and that is why Fako people some who matter took upon themselves to see how they can put this nonsense to a stop. So the media played a very important role and that is why I am sure there is some calmness in it now.” (*Elite 2*).

Excerpt 8: “As counsel, representing some communities at the time, I had the privilege also to read from the press. So, I also got information from, the media.” (*Elite 3*)

Based on what has been captured in excerpts 6 to 8 above, the participants acknowledged getting information and becoming aware of the ills that were involved in the CDC restitution process particularly through CRTV Buea Press Club. Some of them stated that they were following it from a distance until participants in the programme raised their awareness to the problem. The participant in excerpt 11 even confessed that she would have been totally out of touch with what is happening especially to the land that concerns her if not of the media. Therefore, it can be argued that the newspapers in this sense played the role of providing information and creating awareness to the public by reporting and mentioning that there was corruption involved in the leased land from CDC to the indigenes of Fako Division. The words, corruption and Fako land often emerged in most of the reports published in the newspapers regarding the land CDC was returning to the natives of Fako Division.

Role two: Public education

The educational role of the media is prime when it comes to issues of public interest like corruption, especially that involving public officials against the common man whom they are supposed to protect. The media can give information but for it to succeed to create the desired impact, it must go beyond just providing information to explaining and interpreting the concepts for the public to understand better. By providing information to the public, Buccur (2000) holds that the media provides the public with knowledge that helps to empower them. Portions of the CRTV Buea Press Club, newspaper stories, online platforms and interviews have been extracted to substantiate how the media played the educational role on this issue as seen below:

Excerpt 9: ...the African Court in Banjul, The Gambia. The Bakweri Lands Claim Committee "went to foreign equity" to pressurise Government to hand back indigenous lands that were grabbed from the Bakweris during the days of colonialist." (Paragraph 2, front page, The Post No. 01561 of 8 September 2014).

Excerpt 10: "I want to bring to the attention of the general public, Presidential Circular No. 003 of 8 February 1982. This circular was addressed specifically to the Prime Minister of the Republic and Head of Government, the Minister of Territorial Administration and the Minister of Lands and State Property..." (CRTV Buea Press Club, 12/04/2014).

There are two major issues that the media brought to public attention. The first was on the legality of the Bakweri rights to the CDC occupied land. This means the CDC occupied land was not state property as many state officials claim. Secondly, was the fact that administrative officials are prohibited from owning such lands. As seen in excerpt 9, the article gave a background on the relationship between the Bakweris and the CDC occupied land and how the Bakweris had taken the Cameroon government to the African Court in Banjul, pressuring the government to return their land. This same educative information was presented in the CRTV Buea Press Club of 05/04/2014, CameroonPostline.com accessed on December 10, 2021, The Median Newspaper online, accessed on December 14, 2021 and other newspapers. Resource persons who mastered the historical and legal implication of the CDC occupied land were interviewed to educate the public. This information is considered educative because it gave knowledge regarding the ownership of the land many considered as state property.

Excerpt 10 also widened the knowledge of the public regarding administrative officials owning large portions of the land given to the natives of Fako as fallouts of the restitution process.

Administrators, Senior Divisional Officers, Governors, Government Delegates, Mayors and government officials in influential positions working within Fako Division are not supposed to own parts of this land as per Presidential Circular No. 003 of 8 February 1982 that was disclosed in the programme and other media outlets. On the contrary, those who have been benefiting more from the land restitution process have been these state officials, most of whom are not even natives from Fako Division.

Interviews conducted with indigenes from Fako Division also testified that the media played and educative role as seen below:

Excerpt 26: "Mola you're right. I want to appreciate that team which headed that programme over radio Buea which went a long way and we heard it was suspended because of what we cannot understand. But it is at that time the Bakweri man became quite aware and I want to also appreciate, a one-time registrar of Lands who was in Buea, who had a programme in radio Buea who educated our people on how to have land, how to make land become private. Private here means having a land certificate...)" (Elite 3).

Role three: Prompting other journalist to expose corruption in the CDC land restitution process.

Excerpt 27: "...radio programmes like the CRTV Press Club which was ran by professional colleagues. From what they expressed, from how they presented, at least you get some other facts which might have escaped you while you were in the field. So, it is an important programme and those facts will go to edify your own reports while you are reporting yeah." (Journalist, The Post newspaper).

This journalist like others explained that he got inspired to start exposing corruption after following another media handling the issue. In this case, he mentioned CRTV Buea Press Club.

The empirical model showing the graphic presentation of the responses to reach question one which is analysed above is as follows:

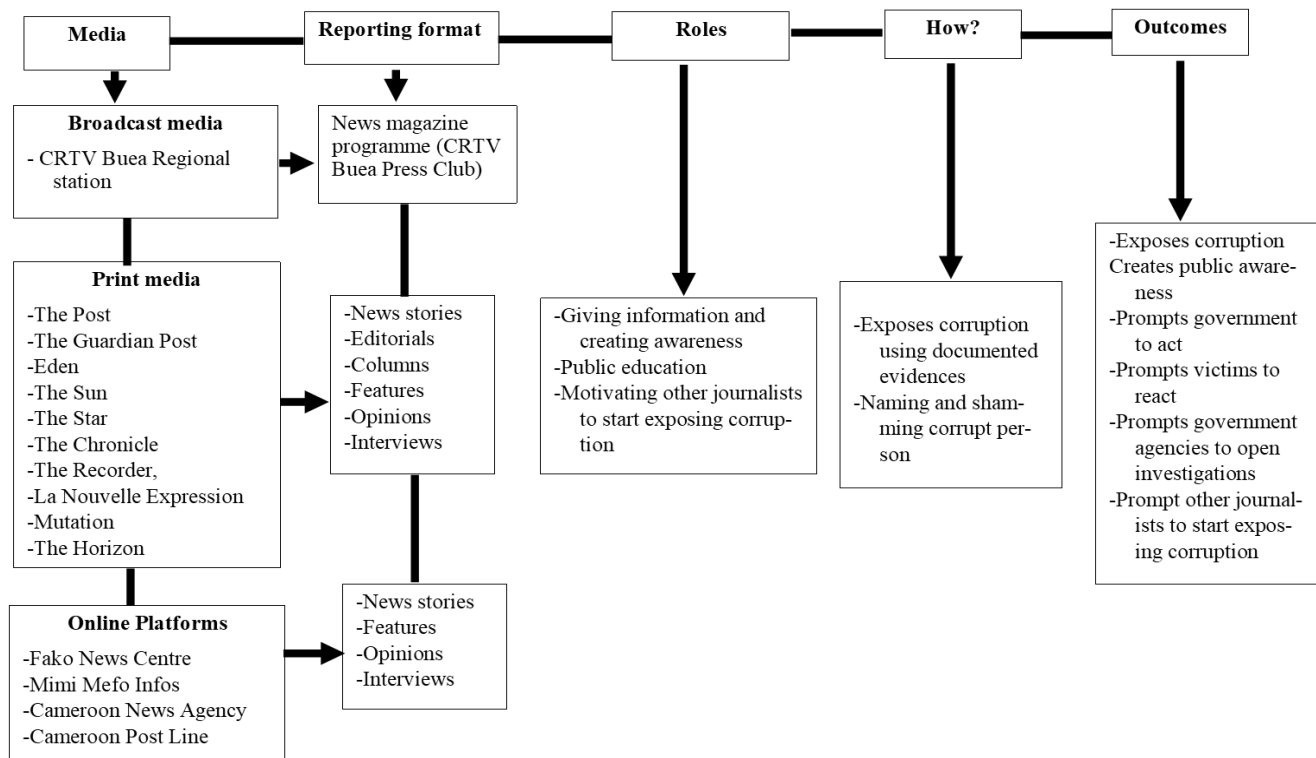


Figure 1: Empirical model summarising the research findings of research question one

Source: Authors, 2022

Research question 2: How did the media expose corruption in the CDC land restitution process?

Naming someone as being corrupt especially in the media is very risky as that person can use such accusations to sue for defamation in the court of law. To free themselves from such suits, the data in this study depicts that the journalists carried out extensive investigations as recommended in investigative journalism and published documented evidence to prove corruption in the land restitution process. The media also named and shamed those involved as seen in figure 5 and figure 6 (see table 1). The Post Newspaper in figure 6 published the Site and Situation Plan of Plot No. 1, Block 14 amounting to 1 hectare of land within the Wonjuku Layout in Buea Subdivision. This document was established at the Divisional Service for Surveys, Limbe, Fako Division. The former mayor of Buea, Patrick Ekema Esunge (of late) who is said to have given these portions of land to the said governor had denied same in an interview he granted that was published in The Recorder No. 055 of 27 August 2014, that Governor Bernard Okalai Bilia owns no land within Buea.

Similarly, The Post No. 01561 of 8 August 2014 (see Figure 5) carried another document of the Cadastral Plan registered at the Divisional Service for Surveys, Limbe, Fako Division. This document showed another large portion of land the then SDO for Fako Division, Zang III owned within CDC surrendered lands to Ngeme village in Limbe II Subdivision as the lands were registered in his name. These evidences came to expose these administrators (SDO Zang III and Governor Okalia Bilai) who had claimed non-ownership of portions of CDC surrendered lands.

CONCLUSION

Summarily, the media remain an indispensable agent in the fight against corruption. The data in this study depicts that the media played a great role in exposing corruption in the CDC land restitution process that led to awareness and action. Even elites of Fako Division testified that they were not aware of their rights to the land and that there was corruption involved in the restitution process. The media succeeded to give the public information that created awareness, as they were educated and empowered. From the data, it shows that the natives of Fako became more conscious of their rights to the CDC land that was being surrendered and so, started demanding for the return of land South West Administrators had fraudulently acquired as seen in figure 3.

Also, the findings showed that other journalists were motivated by other media to start exposing corruption. This amplified the amount of media coverage of corruption. Media reports also prompted government agencies like NACC (CONAC) to open investigations as seen in figure 1. This is in line with Nguyen (2017), who explained that an exogenous increase in anti-corruption news coverage by media might portray the seriousness of the situation, and in response, the country's government institutions might induce corruption-crackdown efforts. This study recommends that the media should be considered as an important tool in the fight against corruption. Secondly, those interested in exposing corruption in the media should be involved in investigative journalism. This will enable them to use documented evidence in their reports that will make them more credible and hence, they can openly name those involved without fear as seen in the media used in this study.

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