Self-Abnegation in West Cameroon Local Governments: a Missing Facet of Legislators and Customary Court Judges

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Abstract: *The services of local government legislators and customary court judges are often associated with self-abnegation. However, most of these officials use their positions as money making ventures and material and financial considerations have been the principal catalyst in the quest for such offices. It is because of these recurrent occurrences in developing countries in general and Cameroon in particular that the study revisits the situation in West Cameroon. It contends that most of these officials used their offices in amassing wealth as the quest for increases in allowances and privileges became the common characteristic. Where these perceived gains were not forthcoming, legislators and judges resorted to corrupt practices and their decisions/judgements were often based on material and financial considerations. When some of them found it difficult to raise money from services offered to their constituents, they simply abandoned their duties for personal businesses or juicy opportunities elsewhere. The study concludes that legislation which warrants only selfless and dedicated individuals to seek for these positions is needed. Again, it holds that local communities should be empowered to sanction recalcitrant officials with little or no interference from central authorities. In this way, the engaging of unpatriotic citizens in the management local government affairs will be checked.*

Keywords: *Local government, Legislators, West Cameroon, Customary Court Judges*

I. Introduction

Local government (LG) legislatures and customary courts have remained invaluable institutions in the enhancement of the development of communities. In order to accomplish this task more neatly, LG Legislatures make laws and also control finances of their areas of jurisdictions through the institution and management of budgets. They also control executive actions through the 'vote of no confidence' on local government chairmen or mayors if the former cannot work properly for the interest of their communities. Added to these, LG legislators (councillors) who are the people's representatives can initiate investigations on the executives and their peers if they suspect any foul or fetid game in the discharge of their duties. They thus, represent public opinion and remain excellent links between LGs and the people and as such articulate public interests, educate their constituents, ensure accountability and proper use of resources by the authorities, limit or check the excesses and arbitrary rule of LG managers (Mezey, 1979; Nwoba, Ojo and Tiben, 2015).

This is equally true for judges who through the dispensing of justice in Customary Courts institute law and order and ensure accountability in their areas of jurisdiction in Cameroon. For judges and Legislators to effectively carry out these functions, they are supposed to be calibre of men and women of noble character and imbued with a sense of sound judgement, endurance and tactfulness (Shea, 1990). Better still, they must be men and women of integrity and trusted by the public as individuals who can make good rules, dispense justice without fear or favour and defend their interests. They are also expected to be able to carry out their functions devoid of the influence of monetary or financial peddling and services provided void of personal gains and interests. Added to these factors, they must be satisfied with the emoluments provided by LG policies. The City of Subiaco (www.subiaco.wa.gov.au) has summarised these characteristics when it indicates that, they must be a group of people who can act lawfully with reasonable care and diligence. They must not engage in activities which damage their reputations and that of LGs and must be accountable to the public among others. Urala Shire Council (2010) makes it clear that the spirit of sacrifice must be high among these officials as they have to sacrifice their salaries and rely on benefits or allowances that accord with their services rather than demand for

wages or pay. The salary factor, therefore should not affect their activities as they must be ready to sacrifice their services for the development of their municipalities.

In spite of this factors that guide the selection of councillors and customary court judges, the reverse is true as in most instances, some of those elected or appointed into these offices in Cameroon today are men of doubtful quality. Many of them gun for these offices not for the interest of serving their people but because of the financial and material gains they expect to benefit. This explains why the urge to become a LG legislator is low when compared to the quest for membership into the National Assembly and Senate, where handsome salaries and allowances are accorded and have drawn the attention or interest of the well-educated and resourceful persons in society. To make the position of LG legislator attractive, the salary element has been introduced into the LG system in Cameroon though limited to position of Mayors and their deputies. This is an indication that the spirit of sacrifice and the zeal to serve as LG legislator is not really visible in the country especially in rural areas where most of these institutions are poor and unable to provide enough resources for development.. In such situations, it becomes difficult to embezzled such minimal funds, though not uncommon, by those manning LGs when compared to urban areas where the combat for these positions are daring. Though some of the legislators as well as customary court judges are dedicated and selfless, a majority of them assume such offices for their personal gains and interest. Such a scenario is not new and can be traced to the period between 1961 and 1972, before the unification of the two Cameroons, especially in West Cameroon where LGs were well entrenched and instrumental in the management of local affairs. It is because of the inability to get selfless and dedicated persons interested in LG affairs and the fact that the government of Cameroon has recognised this problem by introducing the salary element in these institutions that the paper revisits the state of affairs in West Cameroon.

It should be recalled that the British policy of Indirect Rule empowered local communities as they were given the onus to participate in the development of their areas through the creation of LGs. However, many of the legislators and court judges that animated local development and dispensed justice did not carried out their functions properly. They were interested in the personal benefits that were to accrue from such offices. Where these remunerations were not forthcoming or encouraging, they preferred carrying out their personal businesses to the detriment of LG affairs. Some legislators of them did not show up during council sessions and failed in publicising legislations or educating their people on the decisions taken by LG assemblies. Some of them even misdirected their people on LG decisions if these were not in favour of their political interests. Many of them did not bother to attend meetings as they paid attentions to other commitments that would be beneficial to them financially. Even if they attended meetings, this was for the purpose of drawing allowances for themselves and not for the good of their constituents. This argument can be sustained by the fact that they clamoured for more meetings even if there was nothing to deliberate on. They kept on demanding for increases in allowances and any attempt at resisting their pleas by the government was frowned upon. Again, they also insisted on more privileges that were associated with their offices and kept on comparing their allowances with those received by salaried civil servants. As such, they remained unpatriotic and some did not hesitate to abandon their duties as legislators to take up more lucrative jobs and some even preferred serving as LG court staffs where they were sure to benefit financially.

Many of the councillors cherished the position of the judge because of the monetary gains that were associated with that office when compared to that of legislators. However, just like the former, they kept on demanding for more increases in their allowances and even refused hearing cases or stayed away from court sessions under the argument that the remunerations received as sitting fees was too small or not encouraging. They preferred engaging in activities that would fetch them more money. Some of those who remained faithful to their calling engaged in corrupt practices that were against the oath of office. They meted justice on material bases and financial considerations. Such practices have continued unabated over the years and it is hoped that with the exposition of these ills that were recurrent in the territory between 1961 and 1972, the authorities will learn from the pass and institute rules and regulations or policies that will ensure only those having their communities at heart to seek for such offices or represent their people in LG legislatures and serve as customary court judges. Before delving into the crux of the matter, it is necessary to highlight the British administrative colonial policy

and the institution of LGs and customary courts which entrusted the management of local affairs to indigenes who acted as legislators and customary court judges in these structures respectively. This organisation was exported into the post colonial period and embraced with little modifications by the West Cameroon government.

II. Background and Setting

The British Policy of Indirect favoured the devolution of power to local councils and elders. In this direction, chiefs lorded over local councils which functioned as LGs.[1] For effective administration, these LGs or native authorities were charged with the responsibility of collecting taxes and dispensing justice. . It therefore means that they manned the native courts or tribunals and became legislators in the native authorities that were created by the British colonial authorities and maintained law and order in their areas of jurisdictions (Ja/a(1917)1. Memo No. 9. Native Administration in Nigeria, 1917). Though made up of smaller units that were synonymous to the clans of the territory before in 1949, they were merged into bigger and viable units and granted more authority and independence in the management of local affairs after this date. In this connection, Bamenda, Nkambe, Wum, Victoria, Kumba, and Mamfe became higher tiers of LG and representation was drawn from the clans (hitherto native authorities in their own rights as mentioned above) which were also recognised as lower tiers of LG. They thus became embryos to these institutions and remained unaltered upon independence.[2] Representations to local government legislatures which came from the ranks of chiefs and elders before 1949 was further extended to all groups that were found in the various LG areas after the administrative reorganisation of that year. Before 1960, judges were drawn from the legislatures and it was only after this date that the two offices were separated but LGs had to continue paying the premiums or emoluments of judges.[3]

West Cameroon is former British Southern Cameroons that makes up the North and South West Regions of Cameroon today. It was ruled as part of the Eastern Region of the British protectorate of Nigeria and upon independence in 1961; it became one of the Federal States of the Cameroon Federation and was renamed West Cameroon. The Germans had colonised the territory in 1884 but were ousted from the territory after World War I. With the outbreak of the War in Europe and its extension to German colonial possessions in Africa, the Allied forces, Britain and France jointly attacked and expelled them from the territory and this ended German rule. The victorious powers thus divided the territory between themselves with Britain taking one fifth and the French, four-fifth in 1916. This division was confirmed by the Mandate Commission of the League of Nations and Britain and France became the mandatory authorities over their respective spheres.[4] The area under study fell

[1] See Protus Mbeum Tem. 2016. Flaws in the Native Administration System in Southern Cameroons: A Factor for the 1949 Creation of Local Government Units, *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, Volume VII, No I, Quarter I 2016, pp. 1 – 24, for the evolution of the Local government System in West Cameron and reasons for the creation of more viable LG units in the territory in 1949.

[2] For the organisation of the Local government system in the territory under focus, see Protus Mbeum Tem. 2017. The Federal Administration Permeating the West Cameroon Local Government System in a Reunited Cameroon 1961-1972, *Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences;Vol:8 No:1:January-March: 2017.*

[3]See Protus Mbeum Tem, (2016). Customary Courts' System in West Cameroon: Reforms and Conflict with the Federal Administration, *African Research Review, An International Multi - disciplinary Journal,* Vol.10 (5), Serial No.44, September, 2016: 230 – 240 for details on the evolution of the Native Court System in West Cameroon in the colonial and post colonial periods.

[4]For details on the institution of colonial rule in Cameroon, administrative organisation and political evolution of British and French Cameroons from 1916 to 1961, see Chiabbi E. 1989. "British Administration and Nationalism in Southern Cameroons, 1914-1954" in Njeuma, M. 1989. *Introduction to the History of Cameroon*. London: Macmillan Publishers, pp.171-19; Ebune, Joseph B. 2016. The Application of British Indirect Rule in the Kumba Division: A Decolonial Assessment 1916-1961. *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 4 No. 2; Elango, L. Z. 1997. *The Anglo-French Condominium in Cameroon, 1914-1916: A History of Misunderstanding.* Limbe: Navi-group Publication; Fanso, V. G. 1989. *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges, Vol. 2. The Colonial and Post Colonial Periods. Limbe: Macmillan Publishers Limited;* Mbuagbaw, T. E., Brian R. and Palmer, R. 1987. *A History of the Cameroon,* New Edition. Essex: Longman; Ngoh, V. J. (Ed.) 2004. *Cameroon from a Federation to a Unitary State, 1961-1972, A critical Study.* Limbe: Design House; Ngoh V. J. 1990. *Constitutional Developments in Southern Cameroons.* Yaounde: CEPER; Ngoh, V. J. 1996. *History of Cameroon Since 1800.* Limbe: Pressbook; Njeuma, M. 1989. *Introduction to the History of Cameroon.* London: Macmillan Publishers.

under the British sphere. Though administered as separate territories (British and French Cameroons) between 1916 and 1961, upon independence they reunited to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon. Former French Cameroun took the appellations East Cameroun and British Cameroon became West Cameroon. The two states maintained the systems of administration bequeathed to them by colonialism. In this connection, West Cameroon continued with the LG system they inherited from the British colonial authorities and these institutions continued playing important roles in animating local development through legislators and judges..

III. Personal Interests and the Quest for Increased Financial Allowances

As highlighted before, progress in rural communities is often facilitated when legislators sacrifice their time, pleasures and money for the development of their communities. Seen as men and women of character whom everyone had to emulate, they had to serve as examples to their communities in terms of patriotism and morality or conduct. In this connection, they were to assist chiefs and tax collectors in the execution of their duties (Ja/g(1964)1, No. CI544, Kom-Bum Council Committee Minutes, 1964). Their functions were also to make sure that their constituents were versed with LG legislation(Jb/a(964)1, Local Government Councils General Correspondence, 1964). To be more precise, they had to sacrifice their entire being as aforementioned for the comfort of their people and accelerate the development of their constituencies (Ma/a(1957)1, No. LG2016, N. A. Legislation Enforcement of, 1957). Many did much in that direction and the spirit of patriotism was high among some of them.

However, others found it difficult to sacrifice their personal interests and their businesses came first before LG engagements. They preferred putting or carrying out their personal activities first and left LG businesses waiting and absenteeism from meetings was common in the territory. In some of the LG areas, attendance was so poor that if two-third of members were present during LG sessions, the turnout was described as excellent. People kept away from meetings for no justifiable reasons and apathy was rife among members (Jb/a(964)1, Local Government Councils). This was so severe that some had to be dismissed and replaced for this obnoxious practices (Ja/b(1954)1, Bamenda North Western Federation Council). Such absences worked against the smooth functioning of LGs in West Cameroon as legislators, who kept away from meetings, were blank on certain legislations. This made them ignorant of the decisions arrived at in their absence and thus could not effectively sensitise their constituents. This made it difficult for the implementation of LG resolutions. Even when in attendance, during LG sessions, the performance of some of them was poor as they knew little or nothing with regards to the functioning of these institutions or its businesses. They hardly uttered a word during sessions and only responded to the direct questions of the District Officers when in attendance. Some also did little or nothing in publicising legislation and surrendered their tasks to LG officials or employees like messengers and agricultural staff (Ja/g(1968)3, No. CI139, Specification of Composition Wum Central Councils, 20-5-1968). Even when some attempted sensitising their people, this was to protect their political interests and for the victimization of their opponents (Ma/a(1957)1, No. LG2016, N. A. Legislation, 1957).

Furthermore, some legislators knew little or nothing with regard to voluntary services and did all they could to benefit financially for services performed even if it fell within their official responsibilities. Many came for meetings not for the good of their constituents but to benefit from allowances or remunerations/sitting fees. Some were of the opinion that meetings be held constantly even if there was nothing on the agenda to be discussed. Such demands for regular meetings, because of the quest for allowances, was unacceptable to LG authorities as J. Lafon, Secretary of State for LG in West Cameroon, warned that if these practices continued unabated, their proponents would be expelled from LG legislatures in the territory (Cb(1953)1, Bamenda Province Annual Report, 1953). Where the cherished personal gains were not forthcoming, they were ready to engage in any activity, even if it was unlawful, that would be beneficial to them even at the expense of LGs. According to Grifith, one of the colonial administrators in the territory, very few councillors were honest and a

majority of them were making profit from services provided under the guise of LG and it was difficult to eliminate this malpractice (Ja/g(1957)1, No. WD.1A/Vol.4, Minutes of Wum Divisional Meetings, 1957).

To make their money making ventures a reality, they kept on demanding for increases in allowances. This was not new in West Cameroon as the constant quest for increases in allowances can be traced to the colonial period. By 1949, twenty (20) and thirty (30) shillings were paid to legislators and LG chairmen as sitting allowances for meetings respectively. Transport allowances were also offered to LG legislators. In this connection, those who trekked to the LG headquarters from their villages received one (1) shilling and six (6) shillings was offered to those who used their cars as transport allowances. Distances covered were also taken into consideration. Legislators from far off areas who passed at least a night on the way received additional income. The Chairmen received seven shillings six pence (7:6) and legislators five (5) shillings. Such amounts were the same for Executive Committee members and Chairmen of the Executive Committees with regard to the convening of committee meetings (Ja/a(1942)2, No. LG3210, Allowances to Council Members, 1942).

However, these universal rates in the territory were not welcome by most legislators who kept on demanding for increases in sitting allowances. Some even went as far as voting new rates without the approval of the colonial authorities. For instance, in the Wum Divisional Council, legislators voted to increase their sitting allowances to the tune of one pound ten (1:10:0) shillings (Lf/a(1950)1, No. B946, N. W. Federation Estimates, 1952-53; NAB, Lf/a(1949)1, No. B725, Bamenda N. W. Federation Estimates, 1950-51). This new rate was disavowed by the colonial authorities as the District Officer for Wum argued that this was not only unlawful but unacceptable. He went further to lampoon or castigate them for instituting such legislation in a division where financial resources were deplorable. To him, such amounts were impracticable and insinuated that legislators had to sacrifice for the socio-economic development of their LG areas. His rejection of this legislation and insistence on the sacrificial duties, role or patriotism of legislators with regard to development was not welcome by the legislators. The denunciation by the district officer did not deter the legislators who out rightly denounced the administrator and continued demanding for more financial remunerations and other allowances during council meetings. Their insistence and determination to increase their emoluments led to the institution of another rise in allowances in 1955; One pound ten (1:10:0) shillings for Executive Committee meetings attended per member and this was also extended to the Finance and General Assembly meetings (Ja/a(1942)2, No. LG3210, Allowances to Council Members, 1942).

This was not particular to the Wum Divisional Council as other LGs in the territory also followed suit and increased their rates and the universality of these amounts that existed and functional in the entire territory was ignored. The situation became so severe that huge sums of LG budgets were spent on allowances. Some of these institutions spent more than half of revenue raised from taxation for the payment of sitting allowances. In order to bring uniformity and control to the exorbitant rates adopted by LG legislators in the territory, the Commissioner of Southern Cameroons decided to limit the amount that would be spent by these institutions as sitting allowances in the territory in 1956. Local governments could not spend more than half of the money collected from taxation or gross tax and amounts were limited to between twelve (12) and fifty (50) percent. As the rule stated, LGs with annual budgets of less than fifty thousand (50.000) pounds were not to exceed or pay more than twelve (12) shillings per legislator as sitting fee and the minimum was set at ten (10) shillings. The rates were the same for all members irrespective of portfolios or post of responsibility in LGs. This was equally true for all meetings and previous discrepancies in payment for general and committee meetings attended became a thing of the pass.

The precedence started in the colonial period continued unabated in the post colonial period. . This time around, LG legislators argued that the 1956 rates no longer sufficed due to increase in standards of living and economic situation of the country. In response to these demands, the government of Southern Cameroon increased these rates in 1960 and LGs had to spend not more than ten (10) percent of their budgets for the payment of allowances (Ibid). Though the percentage dropped by two, there was an increase in the pay package due to increase in total revenue raised by these institutions in the territory. Table 1 shows the various amounts received in relation to total revenue of each LG area.

Allowances Paid to Local Government Legislators as Sitting Fees, 1960-1964

Local Government Turnover in Pounds	Per Meeting		Travelling Per Night		Detention		Transport	
	Member	Chairman	Member	Chairman	Member	Chairman	Member	Chairman
Less than 45,000	25 shilling (s)	35s	5s	7s 6 pence (d)	10s	15s	6d	1s
45,000-120,000	40s	50s	5s	7s 6d	10s	15s	6d	1s
120,000 and Over	50s	60s	5s	7s 6d	10s	15s	6d	1s

Source: Compiled by Author with information from NAB, Ja/a(1960)4, No. CI616, Allowances to Council Members, 1960, 7.

As depicted on table 1, local governments with higher incomes saw their remunerations for attending meetings or sitting fees better than those with poor financial standings. These allowances also took into consideration their travelling costs. Those from far off areas who covered longer distances to the LG headquarters and spent at least a night out of their villages received extra payments. Provisions were also made for transport allowances in the new schedule (Ja/a(1960)4, No. CI616, Allowances to Council Members, 1960). These were the rates that ushered LG legislators into independence in 1961.

The quest for compensation for every work done by legislators continued in the post colonial period. The government knew too well that councillors needed to be motivated in order to ensure maximum output. As such, a new schedule for allowances was adopted by the Ministry of LG in West Cameroon in 1964. Just like the case of the 1960 schedule, the rates vary and were based on the income of LGs. Different rates were prescribed for the presidents or chairmen, their vices and members. LGs with less than 31,140,000 francs (frs) were to allocate 1,600frs, 1,200frs and 900frs for the presidents, vice presidents and members as sitting allowances respectively. Those with income between 31,140,000frs and 83,040,000frs, received 2,000frs, 1,800frs and 1,300frs in that order. Meanwhile, LGs with more than 83,040,000frs as annual incomes paid 2,300frs, 2000frs and 1,800frs to their presidents, vice presidents and members respectively as sitting allowances.

The 1964 schedule also took care of travelling allowances and 400frs, 300frs and 200frs were paid to the presidents, vice presidents and members respectively. Detention allowances were also paid and 700frs, 500frs and 400frs were offered to legislators in that order. Equitability in transport allowances was also exercised in the new schedule and just like the case of the 1960 rates; all members or legislators received the same amount irrespective of their functions. This time around, it was calculated in relation to miles covered to the headquarters. This stood at 20frs per mile for those using public transport and 40frs for one's car or personal transport (Ibid., 5). The rates for 1964 have been summarised on table 2.

Table 2: Allowances Paid by Local Governments to Legislators, 1964-1968

Local Government income in Francs	Allowances Per Meeting Attended			Travelling Allowances			Detention			Transport Allowances per mile covered		
	President	Vice President	Member	President	Vice President	Member	President	Vice President	Members	President	Vice President	Members
31,140,000 and less than	1,600frs	1,200frs	900frs	400frs,	300frs	200frs	700frs	500frs	400frs	20frs	20frs	20frs
Between 31,140,000 and 83,040,000	2,000frs	1,800frs	1,300frs	400frs,	300frs	200frs	700frs	500frs	400frs	20frs	20frs	20frs
Above 83,040,000	2,300frs	2,000frs	1,800frs	400frs,	300frs	200frs	700frs	500frs	400frs	20frs	20frs	20frs

Source: Compiled by Author with Information from File No. NAB, Ja/a(1960)4, No. CI616, Allowances to Council Members, 1960.

These rates remained intact until 1968 when new ones were instituted. This was in response to incessant demands from legislators and new the rates received by the chairmen, vice chairmen and members increased to 2,800frs, 1,800frs and 1500frs respectively. Travelling allowances were kept at 300frs for all members and transport allowances as per miles or kilometre covered remained unchanged. These universal rates for West Cameroon were no longer determined by the annual incomes or budgets of LGs. Better still, revenue collection was no longer the determining factor in the payment of allowances as was the case before 1964 (Ibid).

Government action in regulating allowances was not convincingly appraised or accepted by legislators wholeheartedly as they kept on demanding for more. Such a scenario had been forecasted by Beaumort, colonial administrator in Southern Cameroons in 1949. He was against the introduction of allowances to local government legislators because they had a salary element. However, it was necessary to do so because the spirit of sacrifice was absent or better still; there was neither the zeal nor will to serve voluntarily in the territory. However, if this was not introduced, it would have been difficult to get people interested in serving as LG legislators (Ma/a(1949)2, No. 4405, Vol.1, Local Government Reform, 1949). He equally warned that the introduction of allowances could have disastrous consequences in future as more and more demands will follow. This is exactly what happened. He wanted a situation similar to what held in Britain where individuals offered their services freely to their constituencies and people (Ibid). However, this system could not be adopted in the territory. He thus favoured the adoption of a policy or system where guarantee could be made only of pocket expenses to councillors. To him, the financial situations of LGs was not such that would warrant exorbitant amounts or salaried schemes to councillors for this would have attracted job seekers and not those willing to serve their communities.

IV. Pursuit for More Privileges and abandonment of Legislatures for Lucrative Opportunities

Though enormous efforts were made in containing the quest for more allowances by LGs and encouraging free services to their people, pressure for other privileges from some of the members increased. A good example was the quest for more carriers by traditional members (traditional authorities). Before 1964, each councillor was entitled to two. These carriers transported their luggage and accompanied them to the LG headquarters during meetings. The termination of this privilege in 1964 met with stiff resistance from legislators especially traditional members. They did not only pressurise for the reinstitution of this privilege but also for an increase in the number of carriers from two to four. The pressure put on the authorities yielded fruits as the government gave in. By 1966, the privilege was not only reinstated but the number of carriers rose from two to four (Ja/a(1960)4, No. CI616, Allowances to Council Members, 1960).

This demand was neither necessary nor in good faith. . Traditional members or chiefs had palace servants or nchindas who could be used for such duties free of charge. Besides, the using of four guards/carriers was unreasonable for one wondered the amount of luggage each of the legislators could carry. The increase in the number of carriers meant more expenses and LGs had to bear the extra financial burden as they paid for these services couple with the transport allowances offered to the chiefs. Others (legislators) even went as far as demanding for the provision of transportation facilities to meetings from LGs. A case in point was the traditional authority of Bum who in a letter to the Secretary of State for Interior demanded for the provision of this facility in 1968. Such demands were unhealthy and not in consonance with the spirit of patriotism. If each member or better still, all traditional rulers represented in these institutions were to demand for this facility, while still receiving their allowances, this would have had a serious consequence on LG finances. Without that, this was rejected by the Secretary of State.

Where councillors never succeeded in accruing more material and financial resources or gains from their services, they preferred quitting their functions as representatives of the people in favour of other sectors that were profitableto them. These vacancies ignited extra expenses as LGs had to organise bi-elections to replace them. This can be illustrated with the examples of the representatives of Cherembong in Wum, Fungom village and Fuanatui in Kom who all quitted their positions in 1962. The Wum representative had left for religious

studies overseas and the others preferred picking up paid jobs as LG employees at the expense of the Legislature (Ja/g(1960)4, LG6573/S.2, Wum Divisional Council, 1960 election and Tenure of Office, 1960). Others like Thomas A. Induk, David Abre and John F. Aka also resigned as councillors and took up appointments as dispensary attendants, court messenger and court member respectively in 1970. In a similar vein, clement Mana also resigned and became a council staff (Ja/g(1968)3, No. CI1139, Specification of Composition for Councils, 1968, p.27; and see also NAB, Ja/g(1968)3, No. CI1130/1d, Specification of Composition Wum Central, 20 – 5 – 1968).

Local government legislators kept on comparing their premiums with that of LG employees especially court members who were often castigated by legislators for receiving huge amounts of money disproportionately to work done (Ci(1950)1, Annual Reports, (Report of 1952) enclosed. Also 11950, 1951, 193 and 1954). As such, there was no enthusiasm to become a councillor or legislator. Many cherished being court members and were ready to hold the office of councillor cumulatively with that of court judge. However, such moves were thwarted by the Ministry of LG which made it clear that the two positions were incompatible and each member had to choose one. When this rule was enforced in 1962, many of them preferred court benches and not the legislatures (Ma/a(1955)4, No. LGP164, Native Court Service Fees, 1958). This argument can be justified with the example of chief of Azza Wachong of Benakuma who held both offices by 1962 and when forced to relinquish one in 1963, he chose the position of judge (Ja/b(1961)6, No. LG936, Esimbi Clan Council Minutes, 1961). It was rare to see a court judge resigning to become a legislator or member of the LG assembly. This explains why this feat orchestrated by Thomas Teh of Mbesinaku made news in West Caneroon when he quitted the court bench to become a councillor in 1963 (Md/e(1963)3, No. LG2199/S.10, Kom Native Court Ward 10, Wum, 1963). They preferred the courts because of the financial benefits that went along with that office.

V. Office of Customary Court Judge as a Means of Livelihood

Appointment to the position of judge in customary courts was an honour and entailed responsibility to the public. Sacrifices in the interest of their communities were needed and it was not to be a means of livelihood as many viewed it. Members were to be men of high moral standings and appointed from the elite or aristocratic class of their societies like the chiefs and elders (Jb/a(1960)2, No. LG2179, Membership of Native Authority Council, 1960). Just like councillors, some betrayed the honour and confidence bestowed on them and money making became the focus. Similar to the posture put up by councillors, the quest and demand for sitting allowances and salaries took centre stage. This is true with the case of the Kom Customary Court where the first panel appointed by the government of West Cameroon, in 1962, after independence, refused taking up their positions. They(Joseph C. Nkuo, Ngoicha, Mrs Muna, Bobe G. H. Musow and Patrick Yuh) argued that their remunerations or salaries were not commensurate or reflective of the office and duties they had to perform. The two pounds seven shillings and eight pence (2:7:8) offered to them as monthly sitting allowances was seen as debasing and insult to their personalities. They categorically rejected it. The calculations of these amounts were based on the number of cases handled by any court in the territory and this procedure held for the entire Bamenda Divisions where the Kom Customary court was found. It therefore means that the system was not particular to members or judges of this Court as it took cognisance of the number of cases handled by each panel. It should be noted that there was more than one panel in each court and this was to make judges more efficient by reducing their work load and giving them opportunities to engage in other gainful activities. In order words, they were not to rely solely on court sitting fees for survival.

The constant demand for more pay from customary court judges in West Cameroon was not heeded to by the government. To show disgust for government policy in this direction, many of them protested by staying away from court sessions. Even threats of dismissals from divisional or district officers would not deter them. This is true with the case of the 1962 panel appointed to the Kom Customary Court (Ibid.). Even though they took the oath of office and promised serving their people without reservation, they did not lived up to expectations. They disregarded the amounts offered them as sitting fees and did not bother on the amounts spent by LGs in the payment of many courts members as there were often as many courts in the territory as the clans that existed. (Ma/a(1956)1, No. 3210/S.1., Remuneration of Native Court Members, 1957). They absented from court

sessions for longer periods without convincing excuses or justifiable reasons. For instance, the case of the judges of Esimbi court was so pathetic that out of five court members in 1961, only three manned the bench regularly (Ja/b(1961)6, No. LG936, Esimbi Clan Council Minutes of Meetings, 1961). This could also be likened to Kom where one of the judges, Dennis Njinni, preferred hooking unto his trade and stayed away from court sessions for longer periods constantly. This was because he believed that the position of judge was not beneficial financially. His personal interest stood paramount as between February and October, 1962, he did not show up in court. Such negligence continued unabated leading to his dismissal in February 1967 (Md/e(1963)3, No. LG2199/S.4, Kom (Njinikom) Customary Court Membership, Ward 4, 1963).

While others stayed away from courts because of poor financial remunerations, those who remained faithful to their positions did all they could to derive financial gains from the services provided irrespective of the consequences. In this direction, corruption became so embedded and severe in courts so much so that the Secretary of State for LG remarked that these courts had been turned into "houses of commerce where justice is meted out only with material considerations" in 1968 (Ma/a(1967)3, A. G. Vol. 1, Commission: Customary Court, 1967). This activity in some of the courts were so glaring that the Prime Minister of West Cameroon had to suspend them in 1968. The case of the Kom Court is a good example. The term of office for judges was also reduced to one year and renewal of membership was based on good performance and proves of self-abnegation and ability to sacrifice for the community. Judiciousness in the administration of justice also became the guiding principles in the selection of judges (Ibid). This act of irresponsibility from judges was not surprising as voluntary services and sacrifices from some of the people were not cherished in the territory.

VI. Conclusion

The paper examined the efforts made by legislators and customary court judges in providing selfless services to their LG areas communities. For them to effectively carry out their functions, they were expected to be men and women of high moral standings and exceptional in character and could sacrifice their personal interests for their people. Being men and women of integrity who could endure and imbued with a sense of sound judgement and tactfulness in managing local affairs, they were to be trusted by the public as being able to make good rules and protect their interests. They were to perform their duties without fear of favour and had to rise above the influence or temptation of monetary or financial peddling. However, the study argues that this was not so in West Cameroon as these officials worked for individual or personal benefits to the detriments of their communities and indulged in activities that were at par with their call to service or oath of office. The study asserts that the urge for personal financial gains remained a cankerworm amongst judges and legislators as they preferred focusing on their personal businesses to the detriment of LG affairs. Many absented from LG meetings and court sessions when they were not sure of benefitting financially from the exercise. Some only did so to draw allowances (sitting fess) for themselves and not for the good of their constituents. The quest for financial gains became so glaring that they clamoured for more meetings and insisted that these be scheduled regularly even if there was nothing to deliberate on. Furthermore, the demand for increases in sitting fees and other privileges was against the spirit of sacrifice and call to service that goes along with their offices. This characterised their working environment and was a constant source of conflict with the authorities. The constant comparison of their emoluments with salaried LG staffs made things worse as some of them gladly quitted their positions to pick up staff positions in the very LG areas where they served if this would favour them financially.

This therefore means that patriotism was farfetched from them as they did not hesitate to abandon functions for more lucrative jobs. Legislators who remained faithful to their calling or office strove hard to draw material and financial benefits illicitly from their activities. The study further holds that some of them did not only pay little interests in educating the people on LG legislation but also went as far as misdirecting them especially if this was to favour them politically. The dispensing of justice or better still the activities of judges were based on financial and material considerations. This therefore worked seriously against LG performances and this state of affairs which set in immediately after independence has continued unpurtubed. It is because of the continuation of these processes that the study concludes that; governments should institute policies geared towards the selection of dedicated individuals who have the people at heart and are ready to work for the interests of their

communities selflessly. They should not rely on patron-client relationship or party disciplines in choosing these candidates but allow the people at the grassroots to select candidates they have confidence in. Strict rules and the empowerment of local communities with regard to the firing or sacking of underproductive legislators and officials should be instituted rather than wait for green lights from central authorities, which is often difficult, especially when these individuals are supported and owe their rise to the central elite.

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How to Cite:

Protus Mbeum Tem, " *Self-Abnegation in West Cameroon Local Governments: a Missing Facet of Legislators and Customary Court Judges*". International Journal of Arts and Social Science, 2019. 2(2), 36-46. ISSN: 2581-7922. www.ijassjournal.com