

GOOD GOVERNANCE IN CAMEROON: PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICE IN AN EMERGING CAMEROON BY 2035

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ABSTRACT: *With increasing pressure from the Breton woods and other international donor organizations for African states to move towards good governance, some of these countries including Cameroon are gradually attempting to institute reforms towards the attainment of these goals. Apart from instituting reforms that will grant free political participation, the government of Cameroon has also come up with the policy of regional balance that is intended to ensure a kind of equality in the distribution of what is commonly referred to as the National Cake. It is important to note that Cameroon is very diverse in terms of Ethnic nationalities and there is a gross disparity amongst these nationalities in terms of the natural distribution of resources. Some of the regions are naturally richer than others in terms of natural potentials and the government in her quest for good governance has come up with the theory of regional balance to guarantee fairness in the distribution of these resources. The paper is aimed at examining the perception of good governance in Cameroon and whether these perceptions actually match the practical implementation of this concept. The study equally looks at the instruments of good governance and the progress that has been attained since the introduction of the concept of good governance. The tenets of good governance, its features and the major obstacles to its application constitute the main thrust of this research work. With regards to methodology, this study adopts a kind of inter-disciplinary design given that the study cuts across issues of geography, resource allocation and management, state policy and balanced development put in historical perspective. A qualitative instrument of analysis was adopted to give a critical insight to issues of governance in the society under study. In doing this a serious dichotomy is drawn between the perception of this policy and its practical application on ground.*

KEYWORDS: Good Governance, Politics, Resource Allocation, Management, State Policy, Balance Development, Cameroon,

INTRODUCTION

Cameroon and the Quest for Good Governance: Internal Dynamics and External Pressures

In trying to trace the roots of the concept of good governance which became very prominent in Cameroon only in the 1990s, it is important to establish the internal degeneration of the state apparatus as a result of poor governance mechanisms and of course the external pressures that ensued from the Breton Woods and other international donor agencies. There is no single day that Cameroon media –the radio, the television and newspapers will not carry articles on the good governance concept from different perspectives. But this paper holds the view that there is much trumpeting of the concept than putting in place mechanisms that will

ensure its realization. There is the zeal to realize this concept but this is not backed by the good will and determination to see this dream come true.

Cameroon having hardly recovered from the convalescences of her colonial dependence still has the trappings of a fragile state because of political fragmentation based on the cultural diversity between the Anglophones and the Francophones.¹ The fragmented nature of the political state of Cameroon which can partly be attributed to its complicated colonial past has been further compounded by the multiplicity of ethnic groups that are found in the country. The natural differences on ethnic configuration were further complicated by the kind of colonial inheritance which did not only turn the country into a bi-cultural state but the colonial structures inherited exhibited bad governance in the kind of clientelists governance structure that was left behind at the departure of the colonialists. This kind of inherited structure only helped to intensify fragmentation on ethnic lines and this has complicated the process of statehood in many different domains.

The craving for good governance in Cameroon just like in many other African countries can be attributed to the poor governance structures inherited from colonialism and the bad seeds of governance planted by the early post independence regimes of President Ahidjo and his successor- President Paul Biya.

Internal Governance Crisis and the Need for Good Governance

In discussing internal governance, it is imperative to examine the nature of colonial policy that was inherited and how it prepared the way for poor governance in Cameroon. The two regimes that have ruled Cameroon since independence inherited a kind of clientelists structure and through this system Ahidjo and Biya employed neopatrimonial precepts to win grass root support and loyalty from the different regions of the country. These colonial concepts that were inherited initiated inequality, injustice and prejudice that were implemented based on ethnic lines and other class principles. In all, these principles were contrary to the canons of the good governance debate. This inherited structure exacerbated favouritism and poverty because those who were co-opted into the neo-patrimonial regime considered the wealth and revenue of the state as theirs and the masses were abandoned to languish in poverty. Particular ethnic groups were favoured at the expense of others.

Since independence this system has unconsciously presented the plight of the masses or dominated groups as passive and overestimates or exaggerates the integrationist's virtues of the regimes based on the values of clientelism. This constitutes the basis of the neglect of the masses resulting in a high level of poverty in the country. Those who are cheated by this kind of governance system will always clamour for an improvement in the governance structure. This prejudiced administrative machinery put in place has eaten deep into the fabrics of the society and is manifested in any small nucleus of the state department. A typical example is what is happening in the University of Buea under the leadership of Dr. Nalova Lyonga, where meritocracy has been completely sacrificed for ethnic empowerment of the Bakweris.

The poor management of state resources (poor governance) has been a major cause of poverty in the country². The fact that the state has been rated twice by Transparency International (an anti-corruption Non-Governmental Organization) as the most corrupt

¹Awasom, N.F. Challenges to Nation-State in Africa: Anglophone- Francophone Swing between Primordial and Modern Identities and Sensitivities in Cameroon, an Historical Perspective Paper presented to Laureates of Governance Institute of CODESRIA. Dakar, August 2003, p.9.

country in the world tells you the deep rooted nature of corruption in the country. The corruption of the national bureaucrat and capital flight remains major sources of leakages in the economy. It is estimated that during Ahidjo's Twenty-two years of leadership, Cameroon lost a total of CFA 965 Billion Francs in bad investment, embezzlement and other forms of fraud, (Kah Forthcoming). These were signs that even though the state was rich in terms of natural resources; poverty and inequality were still very prevalent because of poor management and the lack of good will to institute good governance practices. This kind of patrimonial structure that was enshrined under president Ahidjo and inherited by Biya has continued to worsen the functioning of the state apparatus and this makes the institution of good governance an imperative if Cameroon must be an emerging economy by 2035.

Still in line with the client patronage system that was created some ethnic groups were favoured over others in terms of appointments and resource allocation. For example when Ahidjo took over power in the early 1960s he introduced a kind of *Tammany Hall Style patronage* based on personal, family and ethnic networks of local interest.² He did this by co-opting people he trusted into the public service and giving them strategic positions. His close aides and appointees were empowered economically and administratively. Ahidjo was a big patron with a set of clients, each of whom was in a turn a patron to another set of clients, (Delancey: 1989:59). This was possible because centralization gave the president tremendous authority over most aspects of politics and economic control. Centralization of power was therefore another negative vice of governance. This explains why in the wake of this good governance struggle, the masses are also calling for decentralization as a way to reduce administrative bureaucracy and inertia that is negating efforts geared towards millennium development goals. It is therefore not surprising that under Ahidjo, the northerners dominated the civil service through the strategic positions that were granted to them.³

During the early days of Biya's leadership, he maintained the client patronage that had been put in place by his predecessor for some time but this was not for so long because authority was gradually shifted from the old client patronage to a new one composed of Biya's Beti folks and other trusted individuals from other regions. A new network of clients were created and empowered as pressure was gradually mounting from Biya's own kin and kiths for him to push aside the Northerners and grant them powers, (Ndeh: 2010:66). When Biya took power in the early 1980s, the Betis immediately developed the feeling that *it was their time* to benefit from the *National Cake* since their son and brother was in charge. It was in this light that Biya gradually shifted authority from the northerners to the Betis. Therefore following this kind of colonial structure that was inherited two ethnic groups were seriously empowered over the others-the Muslim northerners and the Betis. This has established grounds for gross imbalance in the distribution of resources. It is these poor governance mechanisms that has increased poverty rate in the country and has resulted in increasing pressure on the government to institute good governance. The theory of regional Balance in resource allocation and distribution of state resources as preached by the government may present itself as a very important principle of good governance but the truth is that the implementation of this principle allows much to be desired and it is the interest of this paper to make a critical appraisal of the selective and discriminatory implementation of the policy.

² Ibid.;

³ Ibid.,

External Pressures for Good Governance

The cry of the international donors to establish good governance practices in Africa may not be entirely for the benefit of the African people but incidentally if implemented this will lead to the participation of the masses in governance, fairness in distribution of resources and the reduction of the gap between the poor and the rich. Some anti-capitalist and anti-western scholars argue that the clamour by the center for good governance at the periphery is meant to guarantee their interest. It is argued that in the event of democracy and liberalization of these peripheral economies, the opportunity will also be created for multinational companies from the north to penetrate these economies and establish economic networks for the interest of the northern states and above all good governance will create a stable atmosphere for foreign investment especially in areas where conflict has destabilized foreign investment. It is at the heels of these arguments that the Breton Woods and other northern donors have tact democratization and good governance as a condition to qualify for loans from the north.⁴

One of the conditionalities of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) of the Breton woods was the liberalization of national economies and the creation of an enabling environment for business operations through good governance. It was based on these laid down conditions that the Breton Woods and other international donors had to put pressure on African governments to adopt the platform of good governance through what could be referred to as SAP. Whether some of these governments were actually ready for good governance or not, is something that is yet to be established. But the irony is that a majority of the governments that were interested in obtaining loans from the north adopted good governance on paper and the practical implementation of this concept is still a big subject of debate.

What is Good Governance?

Good governance is about the processes for making and implementing decisions that is convenient to the governed and the governors. It is not about making “correct” decisions but about the best possible process for arriving at a consensus decision. Good decision-making processes and therefore good governance share several characteristics. All have a positive effect on various aspects of local government including consultation policies and practices, meeting procedures, service quality’ protocols’ councilor and office conduct role clarification and good working relationships.

Tenets of Good Governance

Accountability is a fundamental requirement of good governance. Local governments have the obligation to report, explain and are answerable for the consequences of decisions it has made on behalf of the community it represents. In the same vain good governance should be transparent. People should be able to follow and understand the decision-making process. This means that they will be able to clearly see how and why a decision is made- what information, advise and consultation council considered and which legislative requirements (when relevant) conditioned that particular decision.

For good governance to be legitimate and accepted it must follow the rule of law. This means that decisions are consistent with relevant legislation or common law and are within the power of council, which must be an elected body. For example in the case of Victoria Local Government, relevant legislation included Local Government Acts 1989 and other

⁴ Joseph Stiglitz. Globalization and its Discontents. Will Guardian. nd

Legislations such as the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 and the Equal Opportunity Act 2010.⁵ This is to say that good governance should be responsive. Local governments should always try to serve the needs of the entire community while balancing competing interests in a timely, appropriate and responsive manner.⁶

Good governance in all its ramifications should be equitable and inclusive. A community's wellbeing results from all of its members feeling that their interests have been considered by council in the decision-making process. This means that all groups, particularly the most vulnerable should have opportunities to participate in the process. In light of distributing state resources and ensuring equity there are many different principles that are applied by different states.

In some countries like Nigeria the land mass theory or/and the population theory is used in the distribution of state resources. Where the land mass theory is employed, resources are distributed according to land surface area and where population theory is applied, the resources are distributed according to the population of the various regions. But in Cameroon this researcher did not get any evidence of the application of any of these theories. There is no defined parameter in ensuring equity and this explains why distribution of state resources is largely the discretion of the Head of state and his state ministers who determine when and how to distribute state resources. In the absence of well defined concepts of equity, distribution becomes imbalanced leading to favoritism, prejudice and inequality. For example if you take the statistic of the Annual Investment Budget, there are regions out of the Ten Regions that make up Cameroon with a very tiny population and a small land surface, that end up with higher sums in the national investment budget than others that are thickly populated and with a larger land surface.

The concept of regional balance is aimed at establishing a kind of balanced development with the aim of mapping out the development needs for the various regions to see areas that are more advanced than others. This should be done in such a way that one can have a clear picture of the administrative, economic and social needs of the different regions before a kind of balance can be established.

Also the resource base theory can be used to determine to a certain extent the distribution of natural resources.

Also, local governments should implement decisions and follow processes that make the best use of the available resources and time to ensure the best possible results for the community. This is to say that the concept of good governance involves participation. Anyone affected by or interested in a decision should have the opportunity to participate in the process of making that decision. This can happen in several ways- community members may be provided with information, ask for their opinion, given the opportunity to make recommendations or in some cases be part of the actual decision making process.

The Fluidity of Good Governance Practices in Cameroon

Good governance in Cameroon is more theoretical than practical. Efforts to encourage good governance are frustrated by the corrupt practices perpetuated at the level of state

⁵ Bhatia, H.L. *History of Economic Thought Fourth Revised Edition*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978, p.43

⁶Ibid.,

departments. For instance, when President Paul Biya came to power in the 1980s, he wrote the communal liberalism, which was a compendium of the good practices that he envisaged to implement with the aim of driving the state towards development. This good intention expressed by Biya in the communal liberalism was not backed by appropriate action and this explains why the state machinery has remained inert to the fight against corruption. Going by the tenets expressed above, it is important to mention that Cameroon still has a long way to go so far as establishing good governance is concerned.

Corruption, Embezzlement and Misappropriation as trajectories of Bad Governance in Cameroon

Corruption has led to injustice and inequality thus widening the gap between the rich and the poor in the country. There is a high level of corruption in the custom department and the other services like the police and gendarmerie. It is often said that with money all things are possible and those who traffic in human part or who move with contraband goods, easily play the game because of the corrupt uniform men that we find on our highways. Hence one can move with head of a human being or marijuana in his car from southern Cameroons to the far North so far as the person has money to settle the control check points on the highway. There are vehicles that ply the roads without insurance and other official documents because the drivers bribe their way. Corruption is also very common in our port facilities where import and export is done. Those involved in import and export business defraud the state of huge sums of money with the complicity of the custom officers who collect money and make wrong declarations or who even do not declare the goods at all.

Corruption can also be noted in terms of recruitment of workers in the public service. It is said that if you don't have a *God Father* who is a member of government and who knows the house so well then you can hardly be recruited as a public servant.⁷ This doctrine of *god fatherism* has destroyed the state machinery because it has perpetuated incompetence and mediocrity in the public service. Those who are appointed are not the best in terms of quality and experience rather they are those who have *protégés*⁸ in the public service. This goes with the saying that if your brother or father is on top of a plum tree, you will eat the best of plums. This system has established a kind of framework where the best brains that are poor languish in abject poverty and joblessness in the face of prevailing mediocrity. The picture of this kind of faulty governance system has been presented by the musicians La Pero De Mbanga, Awilo and Longue Longue in many of his clips.

Corruption is also noted in the health sector where drugs that are meant to be distributed to patients for free are sold at even higher prices than the official prices of those drugs in the market. In the educational sector, principals of government schools will collect bribe before admitting students into these establishments no matter the performance of these students. The places reserved for the best brains are sold to the rich. Even at the level of recruiting coaches for the Cameroon National Team, Ministers go into shady deals with incompetent Coaches so as to get kick-backs and this is what has destroyed Cameroon's rich football heritage over the years. These are few examples that reflect the corrupt nature of a country that dreams to be emerging in 2035.

⁷Kah Henry Kam ' ' The Culture of Appointments, Arrogance and Chop Broke Pottism in Cameroon's Contemporary Governance (Forthcoming).

⁸ This term is a French word which means a protector.

There is no way that a country will emerge without values of accountability and participation of the masses in governance. Even those who are elected by the masses to represent them in the House of Representatives do not come back to report to the electorates and render accounts of their expenses. The annual sums that the parliamentarians collect for development projects end up in private pockets because they are not accountable to the people they represent.⁹

Since independence Cameroon has been an oil exporting country with so many other unexploited oil reserves around the Bakassi Peninsula and other areas. But the country has remained poor and underdeveloped because of poor management.¹⁰ The revenue derived from these oil resources was never included in the national budget and it was not public news because it was not made known to the people.¹¹ It was only recently that the IMF and the World Bank in their initiative of transparent governance forced the Cameroon government to include part of the oil revenue into the national budget. Managing oil revenue was therefore a secret affair between the presidency and the general manager of SONARA, the oil refinery and this explains why only very close collaborators of the Head of State or *L'enfant Sheriffs* of the system were appointed to occupy sensitive positions like that. One had to win the total confidence of the Head of State before you were appointed to head the oil refinery. For accountability and proper management to be attained, there must be broad base participation in governance and these are the key values of good governance as indicated above.

Fraud, corruption and embezzlement are equally high in the award of government contracts. Contracts are awarded not through tender Boards and in several occasions, the purported Tender Boards are just smoke screens where contracts are awarded to girl friends other close family relations. This accounts for poor execution or the non execution of government contracts. Most at times these contracts are even awarded to companies that do not exist, that are ghost contractors.¹² These are all leakages that drain the state of its resources and increase unaccountability and misappropriation. For Cameroon to emerge in 2035 these vices that have perpetuated bad governance must be put on check and structures put in place to increase participatory governance.

CONCLUSION

It is somehow very difficult to recount all the parameters of bad governance in Cameroon in this paper. However drawing from the few examples that have been cited above, it is important to state that the concept of good governance emanated from the very poor structures that were inherited from the colonial system and this was further exacerbated by greedy politicians that took over the African states at independence. This political class that was largely a colonial creation came with a clientalists agenda that only contributed enormously to imbalance, inequality and poor governance. Poor governance is manifested in

⁹ Ndeh Martin Sango. Participant/Observer Account.

¹⁰ Mark W.Delancey. Cameroon, Dependency and Independence. Boulder and San Francisco: Westview Press 1979, p.31.

¹¹ Ndeh, M.S. *Neopatrimonialism and the production of poverty in Cameroon in Cameroon: The state at the crossroads of Poverty and Politics in the 21st Century*. African Journal of Contemporary Issues, Vol.10 No.3, December, p.69.

¹² Interview with Tom Njiwung. Worker with the Contract Regulatory Agency in Maroua. Buea, 13 th July 2014.

the high level corruption, embezzlement and mismanagement of state funds that has characterized post colonial governance in Cameroon. Ethnicity, regionalism and fragmentation based on certain artificial classes that were inherited from the colonial structure has left the Cameroon state very fragile. Attempts at fighting these ills has registered very little success because of the increasingly poverty that is caused by misguided government policies and the inability of the government to generate an encouraging economic growth rate. The state has not taken the appropriate measures to generate employment and create a vibrant private sector that would encourage foreign investment. These estranged policies have left the state populace at the troy of poverty and poor living standards. Against this back drop of poor management the dream of Cameroon becoming an emerging nation in 2035 remains a far-fetched dream. For this dream to realized, the government has to create structures that will fight, corruption, embezzlement and misappropriation and guarantee accountability and the bottom to top approach of decision making. Adopting this approach will increase the chances of broad base participation which is a very essential principle so far as good governance is concerned.

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