

## Review Article

## Inconsistency in Market Fees and Rates in Fundong and Wum Public Markets, West Cameroon, 1965-1972: A Source of Conflict between Traders and Local Government Authorities

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**Abstract:** Public markets usually constructed by local governments have remained important ingredient in the enhancement of social interactions/cohesion among diverse groups. It creates feelings of common belonging among peoples and improves trading relations especially in diverse ethnic and social communities which may be in conflict. Besides, they have also become sources of revenue to local government authorities. In spite of these goodies associated with public markets, the paper argues that the attempt to raise revenue through the imposition of fees and rates by local governments instead raised problems between traders and local officials in West Cameroon. Using the examples of Fundong and Wum markets, the study contends that traders and Local Government authorities disagreed on fees and rates. Traders believed that these were too high. They argued that some of the stalls in the markets partially constructed by them in collaboration with local authorities. They also provided security in the markets by paying the night Watchmen. It was because of these arguments that they assumed that fees and rates charged by local authorities were supposed to be minimal in recognition of their efforts in constructing and securing these markets. This disagreement was further sustained by the fact that trade was not lucrative in these market areas when compared to others in West Cameroon. As such, they resisted the payment of fees and rates instituted by local government authorities and the problem was only resolved by the West Cameroon government as it forced the Wum and Fundong local Governments to accept new and minimal rates and fees proposed by the central authorities.

**Keywords:** Public Markets, Local Government, Wum, Fundong and West Cameroon.

### INTRODUCTION

Public markets have remained important venues or places where people meet on daily bases and have greatly contributed to the enhancement of social interactions/cohesion among diverse groups. Hence, the intermingling of social networks, improved communications and identity creates feelings of belonging among the people (Bonkat, 2014:290; Project for Public Space, 2013: 5). These interactions have also improved trading relations especially in diverse ethnic and social communities which may be in conflict. It facilitates reconciliation as groups work together to secure livelihoods and individuals concerned may become connectors between communities in conflict (Anderson, 1999: 45). It is because of these benefits and the need to promote economic development and sustainable livelihoods to their communities that local governments (council) have continuously provided market infrastructures to their communities over the years.

Though local government efforts have been praised for greatly contributing to the economic growth of communities and empowerment of citizens through the creation and establishment of these markets, the formulation of people friendly policies have often been a problem. These bodies have most often than not instituted and implemented policies that do not take into cognisance the value of the economy and people they are supposed to serve (Susanne, Oliver, Serge and Nachi, 2014:4). Besides, the establishment of market spaces in less favourable areas and increased taxation have led to conflict and resentment against public authorities by the people (Porter, *et al.*, 2005:11). Added to

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this, limited sources of revenue available for local governments in developing countries have led to heavy reliance/dependence on these markets for revenue leading to constant increases of rates and fees. This moves constantly resisted by traders and this has resulted to incessant conflict between them and local government authorities (Heymans and Pycroft, 2003:24).

This scenario which is common in most African Countries in general and Cameroon in particular is not new. Such developments can be traced to the early years of independence when local governments' efforts and interest in the construction of markets became ingrained. Though such endeavours were a continuation of colonial policies, it won more grounds in the post-colonial period as more markets were constructed to boost local economies. In West Cameroon, Such ventures were so important that it did not only encourage trade and commerce but also provided setups for meetings and interaction of different peoples and cultures of the country. This fact can be buttressed by the fact that people from all works of life, religion and cultures moved into these markets from far and near. In spite of the good intentions of local government authorities, these markets became sources of conflict when occupants or those who demanded spaces in the markets disregarded fees and rates charged or instituted by the powers that be.

Though the situation was common in the entire West Cameroon, the cases of Fundong and Wum Markets have been singled out as it became a hot bed of problems between the people and local government authorities. This therefore means that even though these public markets were constructed with the hope of encouraging trade as aforementioned, the attempt to raise revenue from through the imposition of fees and rates on users instead raised problems between traders and local officials. This needed the intervention of the West Cameroon government for incongruities to be addressed. This disagreement stemmed from the refusal of traders to pay the amounts charged as they believed that these rates were too high and argued that some of the stalls in the market were constructed by them. They thus owned them and challenged the authorities' right to levy such exorbitant rates.

It is because of the inability of the authorities to institute policies that recognises the value of the economy and traders' aspirations in these market areas and subsequent conflicts that it is hoped, this paper may provoke policy makers to see the need to institute policies that are acceptable to the people they govern. It also anticipates that policy makers will learn from the mistakes of the past and move into partnership with traders and users of market facilities in determining the amounts of fees and rates charged. It is wished that through this endeavour, the incessant conflict between traders and local government authorities that are inherent in Cameroon, today, can be overcome or minimised.

### Setting and Background

Wum and Fundong are the administrative headquarters of Menchum and Boyo Divisions of the North West Region of Cameroon. These towns were formerly part of Bamenda Division in Southern Cameroons between 1916 and 1949. With the creation of new divisions in the territory in 1949, they fell under the jurisdiction of division (Wum). This organisation remained unaltered throughout the British colonial period and even after 1961 when Southern Cameroons reunited with former French Cameroons to form the Cameroon Federation.<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that, when the Germans colonised Cameroon in 1884, Fundong and Wum fell under the Kom and Wum Stations of German Kamerun. With the outbreak of World War I in 1914 and the ousting of the Germans by British and French forces from the territory in 1916 and subsequent division of the territory between these victorious powers, the area under study fell under the British sphere of influence. Between 1916 and 1949, as earlier mentioned, these areas were administered by the Bamenda Divisional authorities.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>More insight into the political and administrative changes witnessed in Cameroon in General and Southern Cameroons in particular can be gotten from the works of; T. E. Mbuagbaw, R. Brian and R. Palmer (1987). *A History of the Cameroon*, New Edition. Essex: Longman; V. J. Ngoh (Ed.) (2004) *Cameroon from a Federation to a Unitary State, 1961-1972, A critical Study*. Limbe: Design House; V. J. Ngoh (1990) *Constitutional Developments in Southern Cameroons*. Yaounde: CEPER; V. J. Ngoh (1996) *History of Cameroon Since 1800*. Limbe: Pressbook; M. Njeuma (1989) *Introduction to the History of Cameroon*. London: Macmillan Publishers, V. G. Falso (1989) *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges, Vol. 2. The Colonial and Post Colonial Periods*. Limbe: Macmillan Publishers Limited; N. N. Mbile (1995). *Cameroon Political Story: Memories of An Authentic Eyewitness*. Limbe: Presbyterian Printing Press; Victor T. Le Vine (1964) *The Cameroons: From Mandate to Independence*. California: Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

<sup>2</sup> 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, 1 – 24, for details on the administrative evolution of Southern Cameroons and the creation of new administrative units in 1949. The Division was upgraded into the Bamenda Province in 1949 and was renamed the North West Province in 1968. By a Presidential Decree in 2008, Provinces were transformed into regions and it took the appellation North West Region as per the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon.

The establishment of Native Authorities by the British saw the Fundong and Wum administered from the Kom and Wum Native Authorities with headquarters in Kom and first in Weh and then Wum respectively. Though administered under these different units with supervision from Bamenda, the divisional headquarters, the administration of these entities was brought closer to the people with the upgrading of the Bamenda Division into a Province and the carving out of three new Divisions from the new Province, Wum, Nkambe and Bamenda.

For the animation of local development, these divisions were imbued with divisional councils which were mergers of existing native authorities into larger political units. With this, Kom and Wum together with other native authorities were merged and administered from Wum by the divisional council. This union remained intact until 1964 when it was split into the Kom-Bum and Wum Central Council areas. Fundong became part of Kom-Bum Council and Wum, the Wum Central Council.<sup>3</sup> It was the Wum and Kom -Bum local authorities that had to harness the potential of these areas to promote economic and social developments. One of the sectors delved into was the construction of markets and by 1965 this had taken effervescence and though visible in all the major towns of these local governments, those of Fundong and Wum became remarkable not only within Wum Central and Kom-Bum Council areas but also beyond when compared to others in West Cameroon.

Before 1965, local governments had engaged in the construction of markets that were to serve the Wum and Fundong areas or communities. For instance, as early as 1949, efforts were made in the construction of the Befang market, in the Wum Central Council area, and this became an important meeting point for the people of Beba, Befang and Esimbi clans as well as those from Wum (Ja/g (1968)4, 13 – 14, National Archives Buea (NAB)). People who visited this market did not only come from the Befang, Beba, Esimbi and Wum areas but also from all over the Bamenda Province and Mamfe Division in the Cameroons Province to purchase and sell goods. Most importantly, the construction of this market by local government was to harness the oil palm sector that was vibrant in the area. It also aimed at granting impetus to the palm kernel trade that was an attraction to traders from outside the division. Its construction was therefore a booster to economic development especially in the oil palm sector and food crops that were produced in the Wum, Beba, Befang and Esimbi areas.

Another market was also built at Weh. In view of the construction of the Weh-Njinikom road, it was believed that trade will increase in this junction town that linked up the Wum, Bum and Kom clans as well as the Fungom palm belt, Esu and the settlements across the Katsina River. The Befang, Wum and Belo markets were also of interest and by 1956, they went operational and stalls were given out to traders. Such was also present in Esu and Mmen. Hence, by 1965, the markets of Fundong, Njinikom, Weh, Belo, Esu, Mmen, Fonfukka, Befang and Wum were established and fees and rates raised from these markets became important sources of revenue to the councils (Qb/c(1966)1. No. CI 1019: 3, NAB; Qb/c (1966)2, No. CI 1022: 6, NAB; Ja/b (1965)3: NP, NAB; and Ja/g(1968)5: 115, NAB). Before 1965, insignificant rates were charged by local government authorities and it was rare to find disagreements between traders and officials. However, the introduction of rates and fees in 1965 laid the foundations of discord and these frosty relations became the borne of contention that ushered the local governments into a unified Cameroon in 1972. These disagreements have continued unabated in the territory as conflicts between traders and users of markets are common leading to incessant outbursts over the years.

### **Disagreement between Traders and Local Government Authorities**

Markets which were constructed to encourage trade and commerce became important sources of revenue as rents and fees were charged and paid by those who occupied and made use of these structures. These were introduced in 1965 in the Fundong market by the Kom-Bum Council. Temporary Stalls or open sheds were charged 1200 francs (frs) and occupants of permanent or lock up stalls had to pay 1500frs monthly. Plots that were occupied in the market by traders also provided funds as charges instituted ranged between 250frs to 650frs. An area covering about twenty five feet procured 250 frs. Those occupying areas larger than these also paid bigger sums. For instance, a space of between twenty five and fifty, fifty and seventy five, seventy and one hundred feet received 300frs, 450frs and 650frs respectively. These rates were raised in 1969 and stood at 300frs, 450frs and 900frs and 1200frs in that order. Transferring any stall from one owner to the other attracted a fee of one hundred francs before this could take effect or the new proprietor recognised as the rightful owner by Local Government officials. Mobile traders or those who roamed around the market without permanent spots or sites paid ten francs per day. Meanwhile in the Wum Central Council, fees and rents were also collected from the markets in the area and in 1968, an open or temporary stall was rented for 1200frs and a permanent or lock up stall was charged 1500frs in the Wum market. Occasionally used stalls were levied fifty

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<sup>3</sup> See Protus Mbeum Tem. 2012. Political Dissent and Autonomy in Wum Local Government, Southern (West) Cameroons, 1957 – 1968, *Lagos Historical Review*, Volume 12, pp. 83-102 and also Protus Mbeum Tem. 2012. Political Dissent and Autonomy in Wum Local Government, Southern (West) Cameroons, 1957 – 1968, *Lagos Historical Review*, Volume 12, pp. 83-102, for details on the evolution of the political organisation of councils in the Wum and Fundong (Kom) areas during the colonial and immediate post independence period.

francs per day. The transferable fee was one hundred francs and fee for casual or mobile traders was ten francs daily (Ja/g(1968)4. No. CI 551, 15, NAB).

These new rates were frowned upon by traders in the Fundong and Wum markets. In the Fundong Market, for example, traders disregarded these new rates and argued that these were unlawful. Though the land was owned by the Kom-Bum Council, some sheds or stalls were not constructed by it. Plots had been given out to traders for the construction of sheds and stalls and it was absurd that the authorities be demanding fees or charging rents on those that were not constructed by them. They argued that this was contrary to the law and Kom-Bum Council was acting *ultra vires* to the 1961 Market Adoptive Rules (Qb/c (1966)1. No. CI 1019, 25, NAB). According to these rules, local governments was given the power to create markets and construct stalls but could only institute charges or rents on sheds or stalls constructed by them.

This was equally true for traders in the Wum market who argued that some of the stalls were built by them without any aid from the council. Others were started by the council but completed by them (traders) and all they received were congratulating messages from the authorities. They further argued that, trade in the area was not profitable as the people still practiced and believed so much in trade by barter. Hence, the importance of a market in the council area was not yet felt. This left them with very low profits. Besides, their stalls were secured by their own paid night watchman amounting to as much as 4500frs as contributions to the scheme per trader annually. Added to these amounts, was the income tax of 3600frs. To them, the area was poor when compared to other council areas imbued with cash crops and other marketable commodities. As such they called on the council authorities not to compare and institute rates that were obtainable in Kumba, Mezam and Bui Divisions that were relatively viable when compared to the Wum Council area (Ja/g(1966)8, 96 – 97, NAB). The deaf ears given to traders' worries and the inability of the Wum and Kom-Bum Councils to address the problem of exorbitant fees and rates, raised by traders, warranted the intervention of the Central authorities (the West Cameroon Government).

#### Intervention of Central Authorities and Resolution of the Conflict

With the problem of fees and rates persisting between traders and local government authorities, traders implored and solicited the intervention of the Government West Cameroon to bring their local Government authorities to order. It was as a result of protest from traders that the Secretary of State for Interior for West Cameroon reacted and argued that the activities of local authorities in that direction were illegal. The Ministry of Interior stepped in and initiated some modifications on the amounts charged to traders in 1970. The new rates that were charged are presented on table 1.

**Table 1: Stall Fees Modified by the Ministry of Interior, 1970**

Size of Stall	Old Fees in Francs cfa	Modified Amounts in Francs cfa
Temporary Stall up to 25 feet (ft)	150	50
Temporary Stall between 25 and 50ft	300	100
Temporary Stall between 50 and 75ft	450	250
Temporary Stall between 75 and 100ft	900	500
Permanent Stalls	1200	700

Source: Compiled by Author with information from File No. Qb/c(1966)1. No. CI 1019,

Fundong Market: Kom Bum Council, National Archives Buea.

As seen on table 1, the Ministry reduced the amounts charged by the Kom-Bum local government considerably to the satisfaction of traders in the Fundong market. The transfer fee was maintained at one hundred francs and those selling food as well as mobile traders paid ten francs daily as market fees.

In the Wum area, just like the case of the Kom-Bum Council area, pressure from the Ministry of Interior also led to the revision and amendment of market rates/charges in the Wum market in 1970. Open stalls per day were 200frs and 500frs for permanent or lock up stall per month and the transferable fee was half the cost of total stall fees paid annually. These went operational in 1970 but met with stiff resistance from traders. They still held firmly to the above mentioned arguments and persisted for further reduction. They thus petitioned the Ministry of Interior for more reduction on the fees and charges though this was not heeded to and the debacle between traders and local government authorities continued unabated in the area of study and had to be grapple with by the Government of the Reunited Republic of Cameroon after the unification of Cameroon in 1972.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The 1972 referendum in Cameroon saw the termination of the Cameroon Federation and the centralisation of power in the territory. West Cameroon lost its autonomy. Local Governments which hitherto enjoyed some amount of autonomy were also affected considerably with the enactment of the 1974 law on the decentralisation of power to Councils in Cameroon. The financial autonomy enjoyed by Councils in West Cameroon was eclipsed and the Ministry of Interior or

## CONCLUSION

The paper holds that the introduction of market rates and fees which took effect in the Fundong and Wum Markets from 1965 became a source of conflict between traders and local government authorities. Rates and fees were collected from traders occupying stalls as well as unconstructed spaces or plots in the markets. Fees were also drawn from transfers of these spaces or stalls from one owner to the other and also from the activities of mobile traders. The imposition of these rates and fees were resisted by traders who argued that these were too high even though these were constructed or completed by them. It is because of the intransigence of local governments' authorities that the traders solicited the support of the West Cameroon government. In response, their worries were taken care of by the West Cameroon Government as its Secretary of State for Interior supported their claims and argued that these fees and rates were illegal. The central government yielded to the demands of traders and thus instituted new rates to the satisfaction of traders in the Fundong Market and the reverse was true for those in the Wum Market. The friction between traders and authorities of the Wum Central Council continued unabated and the government of the United Republic of Cameroon had to grapple with the problem after 1972. It is hoped that if government authorities in Cameroon can be proactive in responding to conflicts arising from the institution of charges and fees between local governments and traders, the scenario that was present in the immediate post independence period and has remained persistent will be a thing of the past and markets will play excellent roles in promoting the development of local communities and also enhance social interactions and cohesion within their municipalities.

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Territorial Administration and Finance became the supreme authorities in determining rates and fees that had to be collected by these bodies.