

## Review Article

## Ecumenical Mission for Peace and Development Foundation (Emped-Foundation) In Conflict Resolution in the North West Region of Cameroon: Contribution and Challenges 1996-2007

René Ngek Monteh, PhD

University of Yaounde Cameroon

\*Corresponding Author  
René Ngek Monteh, PhD

**Abstract:** Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are an aspect of civil society, without government representation, that embarks on conflict reduction, welfare scheme, empowerment and employment. It has been argued that they play an important role in conflict resolution through their ability to build inter-communal links, facilitate reconciliation and address the root causes of conflicts. However, despite some efforts by traditional authorities and institutions, government, corporate bodies, civil society, national and international commissions to reduce situations of conflict in the North West Region of Cameroon, the region is still not peaceful and as such for sustainable development is slowed down. Although scholars (as well as practitioners) have been eager to stress the accomplishments of NGOs in conflict resolution, the actual impact that NGO peace-building activities can have on the broader conflict context, beyond the direct effects they have on the study local, has not been thoroughly evaluated. This paper thus aims at an in-depth description of the activities of Ecumenical Mission for Peace and Development Foundation (EMPED-Foundation) in the peace building process in some selected cases in the study local, the challenges it faces and also proffers a way forward to reduce conflict situations in the area. Content analysis has been adopted in the collection and processing of data. Our materials embody both primary and secondary data collected from private archives, interviews, books, journals, articles and academic works.

**Keywords:** NGOs, EMPED-Foundation, Conflict Resolution, Contribution and Challenges, North West Region.

### INTRODUCTION

In Cameroon, NGOs became popular with the liberalisation of associations and civil rights organisations by law no. 90/053 of 19<sup>th</sup> December 1990. However, before this period, HELVETAS, the Swiss Association for International Cooperation (SAIC) which was formerly known as SATA (Swiss Association for Technical Assistance) had started its development cooperation in the former West Cameroon federated state as early as 1962. HELVETAS during its forty-five years of activity in Cameroon was mostly involved in the provision of portable water in rural communities, rehabilitation of farm-to-market roads, bridges, community centres and other infrastructural buildings in Cameroon.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> HELVETAS Cameroon on <http://www.helvetas/cameroon/wEnglish/about/history>, accessed on 14 March 2011.

Quick Response Code



Journal homepage:

<http://www.easpublisher.com/easjhcs/>

Article History

Received: 15.04.2019

Accepted: 28.04.2019

Published: 23.05.2019

**Copyright © 2019 The Author(s):** This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

DOI: 10.36349/easjhcs.2019.v01i03.003

this part of the country. Later, the department lost its power, became weak and inefficient when it was integrated into the central government in Yaounde.<sup>2</sup>

After handing over most of the institution's projects and activities to local bodies, HELVETAS concentrated its interventions and assistance (mainly the water sector) in the North West Region and transferred the programme Director's office to Bamenda. New partnerships came up first with some NGOs and local councils. This led to the new council support programme, which in recent times became very successful and strengthened the ownership of the water project communities. HELVETAS eventually ended its activities in Cameroon in 2007 on a satisfactory note.<sup>3</sup>

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWFN) carried out numerous protection and conservative projects in the various regions with the Korup National Park project in Ndiang and Manyu Divisions in the South West Region being the most outstanding project sites. Other NGOs like the Centre for the Environmental and Rural Transformation (CERT), the Society for the Initiatives and Rural Development in Environmental Protection (SIRDEP), the Friends of Nature Club Association (FNCA) among others greatly enhanced the rural community on environmental protection issues and their related advantage as well as improved their standards of living.<sup>4</sup>

Improving the living standards of Cameroonians also became the preoccupation of some NGOs like the Heifer Project International (HPI) Cameroon. It was involved in the promotion of snail farming, which is a delicacy especially in the South West Region of Cameroon. This led to an increase in the availability and improvement in snail farming. In the domain of livestock and poultry, it introduced pigs, rabbits and goat projects in the country especially in the Littoral, West, North West, and the Adamawa Regions of Cameroon. Over 103 animals were placed at the disposal of farmers and five (05) farmers received training in five (05) different communities of the country on how to rear these animals. In the North West Region itself, a lot was done especially in Bui and Donga-Mantung Divisions where groups of disabled persons have been receiving income from fowls introduced to them by the HPI-Cameroon.<sup>5</sup> From the above presentation, we can say with some degree of certainty that the advent of NGOs in Cameroon have remained an indispensable tool for the socio-economic development in the areas they operate. It is against this background that this paper sets out to evaluate the activities of the Ecumenical Mission for Peace and Development Foundation abbreviated (EMPED-Foundation) in the domain of peace building in the North West Region of Cameroon.

### **The Advent and Organisation of EMPED-Foundation**

The Ecumenical Mission for Peace and Development Foundation abbreviated (EMPED-Foundation) is a non-governmental ecumenical and nonpartisan organisation created in 1996 and legalised on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1997 (Ref. No. 1076/VOL. 7/PPD)<sup>6</sup> in Mezam Division, North West Region of Cameroon. Initially, the NGO was named Ecumenical Youth Peace Initiative Commission (EYPIC). In 2003 the founders headed by the former Executive Director Rev. Nja'ah Peter Toh then decided to give the organisation a new name and vision. The Ecumenical Youth Initiative Commission, (EYPIC) was formed after a five-day seminar (May 26<sup>th</sup> -30<sup>th</sup> 1996) at the Presbyterian Church Centre, Mankon Bamenda. The seminar was organised by the All Africa Conference of Churches (ACC), under the auspices of the West Africa Youth Moderator, Pastor Nja'ah Peter Toh. The theme of the seminar was, Justice Peace and Conflict Resolution.<sup>7</sup>

The main objective of EMPED-Foundation was to promote ecumenical projects involving members of both religious and secular communities for justice, peace and reconciliation. This organisation was specialised in human rights, conflict resolution, peace-building, advocacy, gender, HIV/AIDS mainstreaming, and developmental empowerment. The motto of the organisation was drawn from the Bible in the book of Isaiah, which says "Come let's settle the matter" (Isaiah 1:18a). Membership was opened to individuals and corporate bodies involved in the promotion of justice, peace and reconciliation.<sup>8</sup> Each member enjoyed rights to all services offered by the organisation.

The internal organisation of EMPED-Foundation was made up of the General Assembly, the Executive Committee, the Directorate, and the various departments. These departments included the Communication, Audit, Ecumenical Relations, Justice and Peace, Gender and Aids, Research, Education and Training and Lobbying and Advocacy. Each department had its secretariat and field coordinators.

---

<sup>2</sup>M. BolakFunteh, 2005, "Non-Governmental Organisations in Conflict Resolution in the North West Province, 1990-2004", DEA Dissertation in History, University of Yaounde I, p.8.

<sup>3</sup> HELVETAS Cameroon.

<sup>4</sup>Funteh, "Non-Governmental Organisations and Conflict," p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Henry Njakoi, Annual report on Heifer Project international's Sharing Livestock, Serving Cameroon for the Heifer project International – Cameroon for the year 2000-2001, pp.12-24.

<sup>6</sup> EYPIC's Peace Training Manual, 1997, p.1.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Helen Toh Nja'ah, Aged 32, EMPED-Foundation Project Coordinator, 9 August 2009.

<sup>8</sup> EMPED-Foundation Annual Report for the Period July to December 2007, p.1.

The General Assembly was the supreme organ and custodian of the organisation, followed by the board of directors with audit departments under the board. There was a Directorate of the organisation controlled by the Executive Director instead of a secretary general as in the previous years. The organisation had seven specialised committees to reflect the new version of the organisation. This include, Micro-finance, Education and Training, Finance and Administration, Human Rights, Peace, Gender and HIV/AIDS Public relation and field coordinators. The constitution and internal rules and regulations were revised to meet up the new version of the organisation. The financial management of the organisation was based on projects execution. The organisation's finances were withdrawn when a project was to be executed after all cost analysis had been made. There were three signatories to the Organisation's account. They were: the Accountant, Project Coordinator, and the Secretary.<sup>9</sup>

The General Assembly was the supreme authority and custodian of the organisation. It supervised the activities of the executive and evaluated their performance as guided by the constitution. The total number of members of the General Assembly stood at 68. Each member contributed ten thousands francs (10,000) CFA annually for the running of the organisation.<sup>10</sup>

The executive committee was enlarged from 6 to 13 members on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 1997. It was chaired by the president of the organisation and met twice a year. Below the executive committee was the Directorate, which supervised the activities of the committees and sent reports to the board. At the base were field coordinators found in every division of the region. These field coordinators reported to the head office on a monthly basis.<sup>11</sup>

### **EMPED-Foundation Strategies in Conflict Resolution in the North West Region**

In order to achieve its goals, EMPED-Foundation worked in close collaboration with members of the North West Human Right Forum that is to say, Human Rights Defense Group (HRDG), Human Rights Clinic and Education Center (HURCLEC), Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT), Global Communication Consultancy (GCC), Community Human Rights and Advocacy Centre (CHRAC), Volunteer for Prison Inmates (VPI), International Club for Peace Research (ICPR), Human Rights and Advocacy (CHRAPA), Cameroon University Women Association (CAMUA), the Fomuyen Foundation (TFF), North West NGO Forum and the Commonwealth Civil Society in Cameroon. Collaboration with these organisations took the form of joint meetings and discussions on Human Right issues and exchange of resource persons and material when need be.<sup>12</sup>In this regard, its projects were executed through the following committees: Justice and Peace committee, Conflict Resolution Committee, Research and Studies Committee, Education and Training Committee, Ecumenical and Religious Studies Committee, Women Coordination Committee, Climate and Environment Committee and the Monitoring and Implementation Committee.

The first strategy that EMPED-Foundation employed to resolve conflicts was "conflict profile analysis". This involved organizing seminars and workshops to identify the root causes of conflicts and their consequences. This stage was then followed by the "peace profile analysis". At this level, the organisation looked at the possible avenues for restoring peace through the peace structures of each party. This entailed using structures such as the traditional councils, chiefs, quarter heads and regulatory societies.<sup>13</sup> In each community, therefore, an analysis of the manner in which they had been resolving conflicts within the communities established so as to help the people use these same structures and strategies in resolving the conflict in question.

The second strategy involved going down to the conflict area itself. This was intended to sensitise the people on the need to live as brothers and sisters and the need to give peace a chance. The conflicting parties were encouraged to promote dialogue. The campaign of giving peace a chance was mostly directed to the chiefs, traditional rulers and leaders who were the most listened to. EMPED-Foundation did this by organizing training seminars to train traditional authorities, traditional councilors, media, Common Initiative Groups (CIGs), farmers and graziers on the knowledge and skills in non-violent transformation of conflicts. It also encouraged the formation of peace structures to promote and enhanced post conflict peace-building. This was the breakthrough point for EMPED-Foundation because every peace process began with the willingness of both parties to bury their differences and live in peace.<sup>14</sup>

In a similar approach, EMPED-Foundation also made great use of Peace Volunteer Collaborators (PVC). These were individuals with moral standing chosen among the conflicting parties by the parties concerned to serve as peace

---

<sup>9</sup> EMPED-Foundation Project Proposals submitted to HELVETAS Cameroon and Bread for the World, for the year 2002, p.3.

<sup>10</sup> EMPED-Foundation Project Proposals, p.3.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with, Sylvester Muchu, 38, Interim Executive Director EMPED-Foundation, Bamenda, 23 June 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Helen TohNja'ah.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Helen TohNja'ah.

volunteers. The first stage in this process was to ensure that the PVC's were willing to accept and work for peace. Having achieved this, seminars and workshops were organised. Through them they were trained on the various methods of resolving conflicts. At the end of the training sessions, the PVC's were expected to resolve minor cases of conflict within their communities. Only complex cases were reported to the organisation.<sup>15</sup> By doing this, EMPED-Foundation gave a chance not only to the parties involved to talk out the main issues, but also included them in capacity and peace-building processes. They were also encouraged to organise and coordinate sensitisation campaigns within their communities and to exchange experiences with other parties in conflict.<sup>16</sup> After this, follow-up meetings were organised to encourage and ensure that the PVC carried on with the sensitisation.

EMPED-Foundation also produced a peace training manual to facilitate the sensitisation and education of people and communities. This became one of its most used and valued documents in the field of conflict resolution. The latest manual was a sixty-nine (69) page document divided into nine chapters. The first chapter dealt with operational principles, the second treated the approaches to training philosophy and the third was focused on Christian education for Justice and Peace. The fourth chapter focused on leadership development, the fifth on group theory and group processes and the sixth was on how to identify and handle difficult behaviour in a group. Chapter seven handled peace and peace-building processes while chapter eight was based on conflict resolution. The ninth and last chapter dealt with data collection and interview techniques. This manual went a long way to educate the population on the necessity of living together and the benefits of settling conflicts peacefully.

### **The Role of EMPED-Foundation in Conflict Resolution in the North West Region**

The Ecumenical Mission for Peace and Development Foundation contributed its own quota in promoting the culture of peace in the North West Region of Cameroon. This was demonstrated by its constant intervention in conflicts in the North West Region especially those related to land and boundaries. Some of the areas where EMPED-Foundation intervened include the Baligham/Awing land and boundary conflict, the Balikumbat/Bafanji Land and boundary conflict, and the recent Balinyonga/Bawock land conflict of 2007. Prominent among its areas of intervention was the farmer-grazier conflict in Wum.

EMPED-Foundation has been working in Aghem-Wum Central for so many years, including the most recent work on the Farmer/Grazer dispute where this organization organized meetings, training workshops on equitable distribution of farming and grazing land to the disputants in that locality. The organization carries out peace advocacy as an alternative to litigation. EMPED-Foundation works in closed collaboration with members of the North West human Right forum, that is, Human Right Defense Group (HRDG), Human Right Clinic and Education Center (HURCLEC), Action by Christian for the Abolition of torture (ACAT), Global Communication Consultancy (GCC), Community human Rights and Advocacy Centre (CHRAC), Volunteer for Prison Inmates (VPI), International Club For peace Research (ICPR), Human Right and Advocacy (CHRAPA), Cameroon University Women Association (CAMUA), the Fomuyen Foundation (TFF), North West NGO Forum (NWADO) and the Commonwealth Civil Society in Cameroon. The collaboration with these organization is at the level of joint meetings and discussions on Human Right issues and exchange of resource persons and material when need arises.<sup>17</sup>

EMPED-Foundation worked with "Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund" from 1999 to 2001. This donor withdrew her activities in Cameroon. HELVETAS Cameroon sponsored EMPED's activities from 1998 to 2002, when they suddenly stopped without prior-notice. However, in spite of all these, they made contact with Canadian Pro-Democracy who accepted to sponsor some of their projects. They have so far sponsored two seminars on Early Warning Signals in the North and South West Regions and are currently consulting with them on what area of intervention they will want EMPED to come in. As we write, the discussions have not ended. So far, the Canadian have sponsored five sub-projects in Menchum Division on consolidation of peace efforts and good governance.<sup>18</sup>

In the early 2000, requests for intervention from various target communities enabled EMPED-Foundation to organise contact tours, sensitisation, discussion sessions, and community profile studies in Wum community. This helped in the proper identification and analysis of the problems with the target population in their various sectors. These people included the youths, men, women, Fulanis, traditional authorities amongst others. Such requests, visits and analysis of community profiles helped EMPED-Foundation to identify training needs and to enhance knowledge of *Fons*, traditional and municipal councillors in Wum on Non-Violent Transformation of Conflict. This identification helped EMPED-Foundation to plan and execute the trainings with the beneficiaries who were mostly men, youths and few women in attendance. Concerning the Aghem, EMPED-Foundation worked with the "Kefa'ah" in Bu and "Ndofumbwei" in Wum.

---

<sup>15</sup> EMPED-Foundation Peace Training Manual, printed by ANGWECAMS, 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with, Rev Nja'ah Peter Toh, Executive Director EMPED-Foundation, Bamenda, 18 May 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Found in, [www.emped-foundation.itgo.com](http://www.emped-foundation.itgo.com), consulted on, 17 May 2009.

These were female peace-building groups through which EMPED-Foundation encouraged women to participate massively in the peace-building process. The participation of Muslims from Upkwa Camp was very high in all the training and monitoring activities.<sup>19</sup>

It was on the bases of the above background that EMPED by early 2005 mobilised her staffs to carry out series of meetings and seminars in Wum with the sole objective of assisting the Cameroon government to handle the agro-pastoral problem in Wum sub-division. To that effect, and as part of capacity building for ethics of consolidation of the peace-building, a four-day seminar workshop was organised in Wum, on the theme “Hands across the borders”. The aim of the workshop was to promote peace between farmers and grazers in Menchum Division. Participants came from the administration, farmers, grazers, municipal councillors, Peace volunteer collaborators (PVC’s), traditional rulers and the *Ardos*. The seminar took place at the Wum Rural Council Hall from 28 February to 3 March 2005. The pre-planning (contact sensitisation) meetings communications ran from 22 to 25 February 2005 with all the above personalities assisting in the planning and implementation.<sup>20</sup> Plate 1 summaries some of the workshops organised by EMPED-Foundation in March 2005.

**Plate 1**



The crisis between the farmers and the graziers had been protracted for about forty-one (41) years. Although many attempts had been made by the administration, implementation of decision arrived at has always been the problem. From the above initiative of EMPED, the Divisional Officer for Wum, present at the seminar, appreciated the efforts of

<sup>19</sup> EMPED-Foundation Periodic Reports on the pending issues in Wum central, 28<sup>th</sup> July, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Madam TohNja’ah Helen, Bamenda, 21 June 2008.

the EMPED-Foundation for their timely intervention. He blamed the farmers for their impatience to adhere to his administrative plan of action and blamed the chiefs for bad faith in not attending meetings when invited. To the graziers, he equally blamed them for failing to implement the Koumpa Issa's report on time.<sup>21</sup> The Deputy Mayor for Wum was also present and extends her words of welcome and assurance of support on the decision arrived at.

From discussion held in the workshop, it was confirmed that there was a problem between the farmers and the graziers in Wum Central. However, the question was not on the departure of the Mbororos or graziers, but the need for cattle to graze only on areas earlier mentioned. On the other hand, the parties in conflict accepted to resolve the conflict peacefully. They also expressed their worries and fears in regards to the attitudes of the administrators, traditional rulers such as the *Fons* and *ArDOS* as well as farmers and some graziers but supported the initiatives of EMPED. In order to facilitate the process of a peaceful resolution, Group-work was organised. The work was sub divided into three groups. The *Fons*, Farmers and Graziers who drew up and presented a plan of action that was adopted in a plenary sessions that followed. After the workshop, a commission was set up to follow up allocation of land to the latter. This exercise took the commission members to Kesu: Mebu'uh/Mbulom, Waindu and Zonghofu. The commission started on Saturday 5 March and ended on the 10 March 2005.

The job that was executed very successfully was as a result of a plan of action drawn by participants during the seminar that a commission was set to implement resolutions of the Governor Koumpa Issa. From the above act, the Governor's report confirmed the allocation of land to both parties in contest. However, after the above fieldwork, there was an evaluation of work on the 11 March 2005 in the Wum Council Hall by the Commissioned members.

It is however regrettable that despite all the efforts and assistance granted by EMPED, implementing these decisions in the area had never been serious, and this explains the constant attacks by both parties until the year 2007 when constant seminars were held organised by EMPED with the attention of government officials. These seminars provided a breeding ground for peace amongst the parties concerned. Government Officials (SDO, DO and the Divisional Delegate of Agriculture Wum-Menchum Division) were invited to the opening day of a seminar workshop on Mixed farming and conflict Resolution for NGOs and CIGs organised by EMPED-Foundation. This time, the venue of the workshop was at Morning Star Hotel and the forum began on the 6 to the 10 March 2007.<sup>22</sup>

Monitoring was effectively done in Wum Central as there was enough time for this. From our informants, the extra expenditures that were incurred during the death of the Executive Director for his funeral arrangements, tremendously affected the running budget of the organization. It was also noticed that since this heartbreaking news, a good number of projects within and without Wum were left untouched as a result of financial crisis in the entire organization. Some of the key donors such as the Canadian Pro-Democracy were no longer answering the needs of this organization. Whatever the situation, it goes without saying that this NGO contributed a lot in peace building in Wum Central during the last phase of the farmer/grazier conflict.<sup>23</sup>

The social and economic context of the project changed greatly both positively and negatively. Positively, most of the disputes were settled in traditional councils instead of law courts as, most graziers preferred amicable settlement through compensation of crop damaged. For example, the case of Ko'oh *Fondom* in Bu most cases are settled by the *Kwifon* (*ngoumba*), in Wum three (3) big grazier Pa Ita, Pa Ewi and Pa Agem are practicing mixed farming as a tool to resolve conflicts. In Upkwa, graziers have intensified paddock/oxen farming and also most Fulanis now train their children in Aghem Language as a means to integrate. Interaction between farmers and graziers is cordial for instance the people in Aghem noticed peaceful farming in 2007 and no cases have been registered with the administration. There have been equally increases in crop yield the same year (2007).<sup>24</sup>

During this period, the Administration started land demarcation process and had given back pieces of land seized from individuals. This enabled villagers such as Pa Ita to regain his land at Mbienjam. There was also high awareness on the importance of peace. For example, there had been the training of three (3) peace structures by the trained participants to replace an auto defence group, settle matters and report on conflicts and peace issues. There exist a greater dialogue between farmers and graziers. Adversely, women's participation in the project dropped in 2007 from 75% to 35%. The reason being that most women were now very satisfied with the state of things and considered any further meetings as men's affairs. Also the administration was still very slow and lacked funds to hasten land demarcation process.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> (EMPED), Minutes from the Seminar organized by EMPED in Wum, drafted on the 2 March 2005.

<sup>22</sup> (EMPED), Records of the Pending Issues in Wum Central, by EMPED-Foundation, March, 2007, p.5.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Madam TohNja'ah Helen.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Muchu Sylvester, Bamenda, 23 June 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Muchu Sylvester.

The effect was that, EMPED through training and mediation procedure was generally accepted, recognized and embraced in the disputing communities. Also there was great impact in the areas where EMPED-Foundation had worked such as in Wum, Zhoa and Benakuma. These communities are now able to identify their problems and amicably resolve them by the use of the alternatives to dispute resolution. From the trainings, the Aghem communities were also able to make use of the traditional councils in resolving issues instead of law courts. Furthermore, the trained participants were able to prevent occurrences of violent confrontations as a result of their trainings. There were also trained PVCs and Peace Cluster Groups trained by EMPED-Foundation who work tirelessly in their respective communities in resolving and mediating conflicts.

Apart from intervening in the farmer and grazier conflicts, EMPED-Foundation also did a lot across the region to promote the culture of peace in the North West Region. EMPED-Foundation organised a seminar on “justice, peace and conflict resolution” from the 26 to the 30 May in Bamenda sponsored by the AACC. Again from the 10 to the 11 February 1997, an international seminar on justice peace and conflict resolution II: the case of the North West was organised and sponsored by the AACC foreign affairs desk.

EMPED-Foundation successfully organised a conflict resolution visit to the palaces of Finge, Bambui, Bafanji, and Balikumbat beginning from the 10 to the 14 June 1996 during the violent conflicts. It greatly assisted in the mediation exercise leading to the current peaceful situation in the villages. In September 1996, EMPED-Foundation helped to diffuse tension between Ngyen-Mbo and Mankon, and also Ngyen-Mbo and Bali-Nyonga. This intervention prevented tension that was building up towards war between the communities.

EMPED-Foundation organised a conflict mediation exercise and resolved the conflict in Bu and Mbenkas. The workshop was at Bu village from the 21 to the 24 April 1999 under the theme “Living Together with one Another”, the case of Bu and Mbenkas. This was later on followed by a one-day workshop in Mbenkas on the 15 May 1999 and a two day workshop in Baiso from the 15 to the 16 June 1999. From March to September 2001, a series of mediation missions were carried out between the disputing communities of Baligham and Awing who went to war in April 2000. The result was reconciliation and end of hostilities. From June to August 2002, EMPED-Foundation carried out contact visits to Angong village, which was followed by the organisation of a seminar for the training of PVCs. In the same year, it continued with the diffusion of tension among the disputing villages of Binka, Binshua and Mbot all in the North West Region.<sup>26</sup>

It will sound utopian to say these numerous achievements went without difficulties. The next section thus discusses the challenges faced by EMPED-Foundation during his peace attempts in the North West Region.

### **Difficulties Faced by EMPED-Foundation**

EMPED-Foundation equally faced series of problems as they fought and worked for the restoration of peace in their area of duty. These problems vary from internal to external crisis collectively discussed in this section of the paper.

The sustainability of EMPED-Foundation is thanks greatly to external donors. Conflicts between Mbororos and non-Mbororos over the right to ownership of land increased with population growth and some powerful corrupt individuals who were above the justice system in Cameroon coupled with the frequent transfer of enrolled government officials retard project activities. The inability of EMPED-Foundation to extend the paralegal services to other parts of the region due to inadequate funding constitutes one of the major challenges. This equally explains why EMPED-Foundation activities were concerned on few cases of conflict resolution in the region. In this regard, many people still questioned their “*raison d’être*” since their activities in some cases like in Balikumbat was not completed. Notwithstanding, the role played by EMPED-Foundation in conflict resolution in the areas are still visible.<sup>27</sup> It was remarked that, some of these organizations lacked follow-up procedures and one wonders if they are not just money-making since they get funds mostly from foreign sponsors. Some of these organizations start a process and then disappear. One cannot trace their where about.

In this light, the execution of EMPD projects as a whole went through as planned, though the organization was struck with the death of the Executive Director Rev. Chief Nja’ah Peter Toh on 26 July 2007. This brought a temporal rupture to the activities thus calling for re-planning of activities in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the ongoing project. His death left a

---

<sup>26</sup> EMPED-Foundation Periodic Reports, 2005, pp.5-7.

<sup>27</sup> R. Ngek Monteh, “Conflicts and conflict resolutions in the Bamenda Grassfields under Colonial and Post-colonial Administration: Land and Boundary Situation 1889-2005”, D.E.A, Dissertation in History, University of Ngaoundere, 2007, p.56.

vacuum in the fast implementation strategies of the NGO since his successor Muchu Sylvester (the younger brother) could not face the challenges left by the predecessor.<sup>28</sup>

Delays in the disbursement of funds by donors also played negatively on the activities of EMPED-Foundation in the region. They complained that sponsors made things difficult for them by not releasing fund in time. This delay coupled with bureaucratic red-tape made matters worse.<sup>29</sup> In a conflict situation, there is need to act fast and prevent crisis from reaching the threshold of war impact. Since NGOs depended much on sponsors and foreign donors, some found themselves in a helpless situation when their sponsors or donors did not act in time for them to intervene in a conflict situation. At times, the sponsors came with stringent demands which some NGOs could not meet. Richard T. Ndi the executive Director of Ecumenical Service for Peace (*SeP*), confirmed this and revealed that at times they were helpless in conflict situations when their sponsors delayed in responding to them.<sup>30</sup> In order to avoid such embarrassments NGOs should reduce their overdependence on donors and turn to local resource mobilisation. This makes people at times to wonder if these organizations are not just money making institutions since they get funds mostly from foreign sponsors.

The lack of collaboration was not only noticed among NGOs in the area of conflict resolution. There was also lack of collaboration from conflicting parties. The reluctance of conflicting parties to accept NGOs as mediators in conflict situation was not an easy matter to overcome by these NGOs. This is also because the advent of NGOs in the region was a recent phenomenon. They only surfaced in greater numbers in the region in the late 1990s. Hence, knowledge about them among local communities was modest. Before then the state had always been considered as the sole custodian of peace and arbitrator in inter-community conflicts. Communities in the region just like in other regions of the country always looked up to the state as the lone mediator in conflicts especially those related to land and boundaries. Local communities and conflicting parties generally minimised and mistrusted the NGOs because knowledge about NGOs as partners in conflict resolution was very limited. Since most of the NGOs in conflict resolution were based at the regional headquarter, Bamenda, little was known about them in rural communities. Most of them came in to salvage crisis situations in an atmosphere where there was a lot of tension. This resulted to scepticism as people were very sceptical about talking to “strangers” on issues they considered too pertinent and could not be understood and handled by a third party. This was especially when they doubted the origins of these NGOs. Some natives feared that the information collected by these NGOs could be used against them.<sup>31</sup> This challenge made the collection of data, diagnosis, analysis, dialogue and the peaceful resolution of the conflicts very difficult by EMPED-Foundation.

Another aspect of non-collaboration was the refusal by both aggressors to admit their faults and to pay compensation to the aggrieved. EMPED-Foundation in conflict resolution often found itself caught in this web. As mediators, they always had to be impartial and tolerant. They had to take time to listen to both parties without necessarily whipping up sentiments or ascribing blames. In a conflict situation, there are often two parties: the aggressor and the victim. Impartiality was one of the cardinal factors in conflict resolution because its absence could fan rather than extinguish conflicts. In most of the land and boundary conflicts handled by EMPED-Foundation, this issue always came up. As such, they were accused of taking side. This accusation sometimes came from both parties in conflict, especially from the victims thereby rendering them incredible.<sup>32</sup>

In a conflict situation, the need to listen to the parties involved is indispensable. People in conflict situations in the North West Region spoke with a lot of emotions due to the effects of the conflict on them. It was therefore very difficult at times for field staff to discern the truth. Some even told lies in order to win the sympathy of mediators.<sup>33</sup> This was one of the major problems faced by EMPED-Foundation in Balikumbat and Wum Central respectively. Such situations made the process of conflict resolution difficult as more time was needed to listen to all parties before proper diagnosis of the situation. The parties involved usually wanted the outcome to be in their favour and at times felt frustrated when their part of the story did not seem to find favour with the mediators.

Some EMPED-Foundation Officials made us to understand that some administrative authorities often looked at these organizations as a threat to them because they often exposed their corrupt practices and delayance in the treatment of files. The Executive Secretary of EMPED-Foundation, Sylvester Muchu testified to the fact that some DO's refused to sign authorisations and attestations of recognition to permit them carry out their activities. Some of these corrupt officials

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Ndi Richard, 41, Director Ecumenical Service for Peace (*SeP*), Bamenda, 17 May 2007.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Ndi Richard.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Rev. Nja'ah Peter Toh.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Rev. Nja'ah Peter Toh.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Mohammed BawuroAbubakar, Bamenda, 20 May 2007.



asked for envelopes before authorising peace-building seminars in their areas of jurisdiction.<sup>34</sup> One of such cases cited by our informant was the refusal by state authorities to issue them letters of recognition and competence to the British High Commission in Cameroon, which was willing to sponsor activities of EMPED-Foundation in the region. According to our informant, no reason was given for the DO's refusal and several attempts to find out always ended in vain.<sup>35</sup> This kind of attitude, which we found common with Cameroonian state administrators, is totally unacceptable and requires urgent redress so that they can liaise with NGOs in finding lasting solutions to some of the ravaging conflicts in the region in particular and the country as a whole.

EMPED-Foundation with other NGOs in the North West Region were very competitive due to the fact that they faced competition from one another involved in conflict resolution. Some of these NGOs included the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV), Ozone Friendly People (OFP) and the Agro-forestry Promoters (AFP). In order to gain credibility from foreign donors and the local community, they scrambled over conflict areas. This made it difficult for new and younger NGOs to keep pace with older ones, talk less of meeting their objectives. This mad rush led to unhealthy practices such as blackmail and influence peddling, which often left several victims. A case in point was the Balikumbat-Bafanji conflict of 1998 where EMPED-Foundation, *SeP* and other NGOs laid claims to have been the main actors responsible for the restoration of peace in the area. The natives argued that this was usually done at the tail end of violence when both communities were already at peace. This is usually the time when a stream of NGOs flood the villages concerned for the peace-building phase. TohNja'ah Helen testified to this claim in the following words.

That is what happened in the Balikumbat-Bafanji conflict, which we have been handling for a long time. One NGO, which I will not like to mention the name, came in at the tail end, tipped the traditional rulers to recognise their presence, and by so doing were claiming credit for work they never did. We were shocked when we were received with a lukewarm attitude when we got back for follow up.<sup>36</sup>

Fon Nana Wanda III of Bawock cited another case of dishonesty among NGOs. He revealed that a certain NGO, which came under the pretext of providing assistance, conducted a couple of interviews, took some photos and video images of him and his people. The NGO then sold the images to a foreign TV station (name withheld) for huge sums of money. This kind of atmosphere resulted to lack of trust, inefficiency and poor output. Some communities in the region were sceptical of NGOs because of such dishonest attitude. Such situations put to question the credibility of EMPED-Foundation in particular and NGOs operating in the region in general. NGOs were thus at loggerhead with each other in the quest for recognition in the field and with donors. NGOs who promoted this kind of unhealthy competition discredited the work of other NGOs and the civil society in the region.<sup>37</sup> Those who worked hard with all sincerity had a difficult time trying to win the confidence of communities in the region while impostors went away with the booty. This tampered with the objectives and credibility of EMPED-Foundation.

The overdependence of Cameroonians on government as the sole referee in conflicts also made it difficult for EMPED-Foundation to operate smoothly. This was visible in the fact that in almost every conflict related to land, the people always rushed to the Divisional Officers for arbitration.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, some of the conflicts were either partially handled or neglected altogether by the administrators. Sama Benjamin argues that this was because the administration is not always there to solve problems.<sup>39</sup> According to him, when people are able to solve their problems amongst themselves, they help the administration to do its job. People therefore need to reduce their over dependence on the government and belief in themselves and NGOs which are out to help them. In this line, NGOs in collaboration with the local administration need to establish well-rooted community based structures that can promote the settling of conflicts at home and community level.

To conclude, issues of insecurity and poor roads in the field was another challenge faced by EMPED-Foundation. Since most of the conflicts in the region were violent, there was always the issue of insecurity. Conflicting parties were often armed and very sceptical when they saw anybody they did not recognise and felt could be a threat to

---

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Sylvester Muchu.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Sylvester Muchu.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Helen TohNja'ah.

<sup>37</sup> E. Neba, Ndenecho, 2009, "NGO Input and Stakeholder Participation in Natural Resource Management: Example of North West Cameroon", *International NGO Journal* Vol. 4 (3), pp. 050-056, Available online at <http://www.academicjournals.org/INGOJ>, ISSN 1993-8225 © 2009 Academic Journals, consulted on 12 November 2009.

<sup>38</sup> NsoFon, Robert, and Musa Ndamba, "Mboscuda's Access to Justice and Promotion of Land Rights for the Mbororos of the North West of Cameroon", Unpublished Assay, April 2008, pp.13-17.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Sama Benjamin.

them. Most often, the state did not provide the necessary security for such missions and neither did the office of EMPED-Foundation to its staff deployed in these conflict zones.<sup>40</sup> With such an atmosphere of insecurity, workers and volunteers found it very difficult to do their job.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It would be unfair to talk about conflict resolution in the North West Region without mentioning the activities of EMPED-Foundation an outstanding NGOs who has worked for peace building in the region. Though the advent of EMPED-Foundation is recent, it has proven to be requisite in the areas they intervened. In this paper, we have discussed the contributions made by EMPED-Foundation in conflict resolution in many areas of the region but the cases of the localities of Wum and Balikumbat sub-divisions were exceptional. However, most of these conflicts were related to access to land and boundary and were not properly handled by individual, state authorities and traditional authorities and institutions. This explains then the “*raison d’être*” of EMPED-Foundation in context noted for conflicts episodes. As a result of the presence and constant intervention of EMPED-Foundation in conflict resolution in the areas discussed in this paper, relative calm returned to most of the conflict “hot spots” in the region. The frequency of conflicts have also reduced thanks to the sensitisation done by EMPED-Foundation in the region on how to resolve conflict through dialogue and avoid waging war on each other. Training and capacity building techniques on how to resolve conflicts in their early stages were widely used. The outcome of such trainings was that most of those who were trained used the knowledge and skills they had inquired to resolve conflicts within their communities at their early stages. Nevertheless, these achievements were without difficulties confronted by EMPED-Foundation. These difficulties discussed in this paper ranges from both internal and external crisis. This explains the need for recommendations to be address to for a good functioning.

While concluding, it will be necessary to outline some recommendations for EMPED-Foundation and other NGOs operating on similar grounds to meet up with their goals and gain local and international credit. In this light, they should avoid being ambiguous and set attainable goals and objectives that can be achieved in real time with the available resources. On the other hand, they should also invest more on capacity building to equip their personnel with the required skills. Also, diversification of sources of resources should be encouraged among them. This will help in long-term sustainability. More so, EMPED-Foundation should also take advantage of globalisation by networking and interacting with NGOs from other areas in the world in order to broaden their knowledge and techniques. Other recommendation virtues for NGOs are in line with accountability and transparency. Many donors need to be sure that their donations achieve the desired objectives. In this regard, donors should introduce follow up measures to ensure accountability from the NGOs that benefit from them. By so doing NGOs will be forced to be more objective and accountable. EMPED-Foundation like other NGOs should sensitise the populations of the various areas in which they operate to enable them know about their activities and their readiness to assist them.

## SOURCES CONSULTED

1. Bolak Funteh, M. (2005). “Non-Governmental Organisations in Conflict Resolution in the North West Province, 1990-2004”, DEA Dissertation in History, University of Yaounde I.
2. Cameroon for the Heifer project International. (2000-2001). Cameroon for the year.
3. EMPED-Foundation Annual Report for the Period July to December 2007.
4. EMPED-Foundation Peace Training Manual, printed by ANGWECAMS. (1997). in, [www.emped-foundation.itgo.com](http://www.emped-foundation.itgo.com), consulted on, 17 May 2009.
5. EMPED-Foundation Periodic Reports. (2005, 28<sup>th</sup> July). On the pending issues in Wum central.
6. EMPED-Foundation. (2005, 2 March). Minutes from the Seminar organized by EMPED in Wum, draft.
7. EMPED-Foundation. (2007, March). Records of the Pending Issues in Wum Central, by EMPED-Foundation.
8. HELVETAS Cameroon. (2011, 14 March). on <http://www.helvetas/cameroon/wEnglish/about/history>, accessed on.
9. Henry Njakoi, Annual report on Heifer Project international’s Sharing Livestock, Serving
10. Neba Ndenecho, E. (2009). “NGO Input and Stakeholder Participation in Natural Resource Management: Example of North West Cameroon”, International NGO Journal 4 (3), pp. 050-056, Available online at <http://www.academicjournals.org/INGOJ>, ISSN 1993–8225 © 2009 Academic Journals, consulted on 12 November 2009.
11. Ngek Monteh, R. (2007). “Conflicts and conflict resolutions in the BamendaGrassfields under Colonial and Post-colonial Administration: Land and Boundary Situation 1889-2005”, D.E.A, Dissertation in History, University of Ngaoundere.
12. Nso Fon, R., & Ndamba, M. (2008, April). “Mboscuda’s Access to Justice and Promotion of Land Rights for the Mbororos of the North West of Cameroon”, Unpublished Assay.

---

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Sama Benjamin.