

ARTICLE

On Policy

Sur la Politique

By The Nkafu Policy Institute

February 2017 Expert



The Anglophone Uprising:
Historic Opportunity to Re-assess Current Institutions
for an Inclusive Leadership in Cameroon.

The Anglophone Uprising: Historic Opportunity to Re-assess Current Institutions for an Inclusive Leadership in Cameroon.

“A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance...” (Jawaharlal Nehru, to the Indian Constituent Assembly, New Delhi, August 14, 1947)



CHRISTIAN PENDA EKOKA
 Consultant en Economie de développement
 Cameroun

The current crisis in our Anglophone regions of the Northwest and Southwest regions seem to give credence to the above statement by the Indian nationalist, Jawaharwal Nehru

some 70 years ago. This paper however argues that the recent uprisings in Bamenda and Buea are more than an Anglophone problem, but the symptoms of a national malaise which need a

more comprehensive and truthful dialogue that will cover the media, the economy and the state structures. It is therefore a defining moment in nation that should be taken at the floods.

Anglophone Problem or National Malaise

The issues raised by our compatriots from the Southwest and Northwest regions are not just Anglophone claims, they are also Francophone claims, and therefore our national claims for several reasons.

Firstly, when the knell tolls in Bamenda, Garoua, Maroua, Bertoua, Bafoussam or anywhere in Cameroon, “...never send to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee” as the American writer, Hemingway remarked about the death or suffering of a human being as part of mankind. This sense of common destiny should bind all Cameroonians together, as parts of the same nation.

Secondly, more than an Anglophone problem, recent uprisings in Bamenda and Buea are indicators of a more profound national malaise, resulting from the institutional leadership and governance architecture of our country that was flawed from its original design. In the light of its experiments for the past 50 years, our institutional framework for the management of public affairs appears as not meant to respond to the people’s needs and aspirations.

What is called the Anglophone problem is a specific aspect of a

more fundamental national problem that could be defined as a genetic default of a public governance system that is not responsive to the Cameroonian people’s concerns and needs, Anglophones and Francophones as well.

It could be likened to the human body where an infection of the entire body, and its proper treatment would require to tackle the root cause of the disease, which has dragged on for so many years with obvious consequences. The persistence of the disease, not to say its aggravation, should have been a wake-up call for the authorities, but our state-system was not designed with such a preventive built-in control mechanism to timely alert its managers about its dysfunction and eventually its near collapse, making it almost irremediable. Thus the general awareness of the institutions or state-owned corporations’ illness at its terminal stage.

Otherwise, how can an effective public governance system not be alerted promptly about the hurdles of its citizens on the road between Douala and Bamenda, or Yaounde and Bamenda and act accordingly? How many lives should be lost

on our roads – and especially on the main ones – before a system understands the emergency of the situation? How many lives should be lost in hospitals before the rehabilitation of the healthcare system? How many mothers and babies a country should lose before its consciousness wakes up to the crisis?

The governance malaise could therefore be seen in the poor access of the population to basic infrastructure services such as potable water and sanitation, electricity, transportation, healthcare, education, housing, ill performing state-owned corporations chronically sucking subsidies and never self-sustaining; moribund function of several public institutions and enterprises (e.g. Social and Economic Council, National Investment Corporation, National Hydrocarbons Corporation, Douala Stocks Exchange), etc.

To better understand the genetic or endogenous nature of the disease, one could observe that for the past 30 years, President Biya, Cameroon’s Head of State (HOS), has continuously and unsuccessfully denounced in the public service those vices and scandals that impede our

development, including inter alia corruption, bureaucratic red tape, embezzlement of public funds, administration bottlenecks, unfriendly business environment deterring investments. In fact, over the years, the spread of the vices has become viral, with an upsurge of discri-

mination, injustice and economic inequality. Despite the frequent presidential warnings and criticism of the civil service, the persistence of the same problems over the years and the government's inability to address and tackle them has only made the malaise structu-

ral. It has become a DNA-like weaknesses of the system's public governance design, a sort of built-in genetic default that prevents the body's system to perform at its best; and a default that can only be corrected by modifying the public governance system's DNA.

No Piecemeal but Comprehensive, Truthful Dialogue

Whatever its outcome, the current negotiations initiated by the government will only address some facets of the problem. With regard to the structural nature and scope of the malaise that involves all national stakeholders – political, civil, religious, etc. there is a need to adopt long-term, broad perspectives for sustainable and lasting solutions. This demands a comprehensive, constructive and holistic approach. Otherwise it will bounce back again. “Law and order” is not a substitute for effective responses to people's claims and concerns that can only be attained through a responsible and constructive dialogue, underpinned by good faith and open mind of the parties involved, in search of consensually and mutually agreed – and not imposed – solutions. In this context, it should be clearly acknowledged that the

case of the Supreme Court Judge, Paul Ayah and others, will do disservice to the cause of our democracy. We should therefore stand up for a state that protects its citizens' rights and freedoms of expression, and not a one that terrorizes them.

Any piecemeal approach means not doing so, and will result in omitting the most serious questions, such as: how best to organize a balanced distribution of political power for inclusive wealth? How best to design a system of transparent democratic governance that promotes development? How to organize a political system that ensures an efficient allocation of resources, whereby the Public Service officials or managers are accountable before the people? How to build a nation whose main goal is to ensure freedoms and rights of the citizens in their pursuit of hap-

piness? How to design and organize a Public Service that is devoted to the service of the community and not become its predator?

Besides, one important observation deserves notice: the so-called Anglophone claims or complaints are no more coming from the Founding Fathers, but from their children and especially their grandchildren. This means the collective memory is now the fuel of anger and frustration. Looking at 50 years back, they had the impression that the Fouban Conference on reunification was a travesty, whereby one party was duped by the other. Thus again our call for a transparent, comprehensive and truthful healing process, heavily involving the young generations, who make up 80% of the population, as about 20 million Cameroonians are under age 30.

The Role of the Media

The media is an indispensable instrument that should remain free and independent for the effective accomplishment of its role in the society, and not become a tool of manipulation by or propaganda for any special interest group's benefit, at the expense of the general interest. As the watchdog for an effective democratic and transparent society, its role should be

to provide the citizens with facts and information to keep them politically vigilant and alert about any threat that may arise against their freedoms and rights. In so doing, the media should be aware of the various threats to which it is exposed, inter alia corruption and different negative pressure that would prevent it from effectively fulfilling its duty.

The media should avoid become propaganda agents for some special interest groups, which would force them to disinformation and intoxication, for instance indexing the Anglophone as a bundle of Vikings ready to massacre the Francophone, with the obvious consequences of nurturing inter-community hatred and tribalism.

The Case of the Economy

At the outbreak of the Cameroonian economic crisis in the mid-1980s, various audits attributed its root cause to the nature of the welfare-state, that had distorted the efficient and competitive allocation of resources, resulting in the economic recession, banking sector's crisis (huge volume of toxic assets and credit crunch), across the board collapse of state-owned and para-statal corporations. These events led to massive job losses and triggered an unprecedented impoverishment phenomenon across country. For almost 20 years Cameroon embarked on a Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) under the auspices of the Bretton Woods' institutions. It is

only sad to notice that after so much sacrifice and sweat by the population, Cameroon is almost back to square zero, due to poor implementation of the structural reforms recommended by the SAP.

Over the period of more than 30 years, from 1984 to date, the annual growth rate of Cameroon has averaged circa 2 percent in real terms, as compared to a population growth rate of about 2.5 percent; the per capita GDP growth has hence remained stagnant if not shrunken. Adjusting the Boko Haram effect on growth and income distribution, the pattern of poverty curve has worsened over the last ten years, with worst incidence in the rural

areas and Northern regions.

The perennial nature of these problems such as poor performance in development achievements, despite the partial public debt cancellation in the context of the Highly Indebted and Poor Countries Initiative (HIPIC), in 2006, has pushed many observers to conclude that the underlying causes of the "disease" are structural and endogenous, and stem from a root vice in the system's public governance architecture.

Risky State structures

The historical development of our state structure was underpinned by President Ahidjo's grand design of a highly centralized state, almost akin to a totalitarian state, which explains many of its current poor performances on social, economic and political fronts. If a state is not designed to acknowledge and preserve the basic human rights of its citizens, how would it promote and protect the specific and historical rights of the Anglophone?

The whole process of state formation was flawed from the origin, with the clear design to emasculate people's rights to emancipation. The event of Reunification was only a step within the grand design. It resulted into a vampire-like state wherein a small bunch of parasite citizens, suck the blood and sweat of the others; a system by which a small fraction of predators could accumulate large amount of wealth without strive and toil; that favors a welfare-state dependency instead of empowering individuals to forge the destiny of their choice. The main features of this formation process include:

- The political process underlying the dynamics from a multi-party system to one party

regime;

- The change from a federal state to a unitary state, in fact a totalitarian state;

- A massive concentration of powers in the hands of one person, the Head of State, without check and balance mechanisms, namely as a result of expunging legislative and judiciary's independent powers;

- A perpetuation of the colonial administration (Bureaucracy) that was not intended for development, but for the confinement and the containment of the people; enslaving citizens in a so-called "Law and Order" scheme;

- A highly centralized government system that is navel-centered and therefore unable to identify the environment's threats and opportunities;

- A top-down decision making process, characterized by frequent bloating, lacking flexibility and reactivity to operate structural reforms, implement projects and address the global developmental challenges;

- A public service in which officials wield enormous powers without being accountable to the people;

The above dynamic associated risks include the isolation of the system's center that becomes hostage of some special interest groups, nepotism and corruption, crony capitalism and market inefficiency, and lack of transparent decision-making process, mainly in the public contracts' bidding process.

The adverse consequences for the society include sluggish and non-inclusive growth, public leadership distancing itself from people's needs and expectations, collapse of public corporations, slowness in public reforms and projects' implementation, (e.g. decentralization law enacted since 1996); high rate of public funds embezzlement and wastage, poor access to basic infrastructure services, high unemployment rate, poor private investment records, aggravation of impoverishment, uneven regional development, poverty aggravated, zombie and vassal citizens, loss of trust in the state by the youth culminating in loss of hope, self-pride and self-esteem, increase in tribalism, loss of solidarity and citizenry bindings, defeatism, fatalism and resignation among young generations.

In a compelling book "Why Nations Fail", the authors,,

Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, respectively professor of economics at MIT and of government at Harvard, delved into more than three centuries of development history to understand why certain nations grow rich and others remain poor. The outcome of this research shows a strong correlation between the political power distribution and the prosperity

dynamics in societies. They argued that:

“Countries such as Great Britain and the United States became rich because their citizens overthrew the elites who controlled power and created a society where political rights were much broadly distributed, where government was accountable and responsive to citizens,

where, and where the great mass of people could take advantage of economic opportunities.... People fought for and won more political rights and they used them to expand their economic opportunities. The result was a fundamental different political and economic trajectory, culminating in the Industrial Revolution”

On Federalism and Secession

In a highly decentralized or federal-like society, the likelihood is higher to find a more balanced distribution of power that empowers regions, local communities and individuals to gain control over their destiny. Federalism does not mean Anglophone or secession. It is a form of state organization, and it is a way of public governance, which has proved its effectiveness as a development accelerator in several countries including USA, Canada, Germany, Australia and several other countries. Let us not confuse people’s mind, federalism does not challenge or question the

founding fathers’ pledge of ‘Unity in diversity’, on the contrary the prevailing highly centralized government does, as attested by its dangerous resulting consequences. The often heard outcry “Le Cameroun est un et indivisible” can only be justified in case of secessionist claims.

Only highly decentralized or federal-like systems of governance are genuinely inclined to empower people and local communities to become the main agent of their development, to be the major stakeholders of their life.

Constitutions are not inscribed on stone; the only permanent thing in this world is constant global changes, which continuously challenge our pattern of life, and it may compel a country to adapt its organization for the betterment of its citizens. Over the last 30 years, our world has witnessed the cases of former Soviet Union, Germany, Sene-Gambia, Brexit...Many countries are currently under similar pressure including UK. Anticipation and pro-activeness is the best guide to avoid brutal and undesired consequences akin to these patterns of evolution.

The Defining Moment for our Destiny

In 1947, at the dawn of the independence of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister

of this great country, addressing the Indian Constituent Assembly, told his fellow countrymen

that:
“Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the

time comes when we shall redeem our pledge....At the stroke of the midnight hour, while the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance..."

This is our moment of utterance and reckoning. This is a defining moment for our country. Let us frankly face the issues, and not deny it, or procrastinate for lasting and sustainable response. We owe it to young and future generations. We should seize the recent events in Bamenda and Buea as a "blessing in disguise", as an opportunity to re-assess our State's performance, with the aim of building a time-proof effective institutional public affairs' infrastructure. Such an institutional infrastructure will make our country free of violence and free of corruption. It will align the state's structure with the vision of the Founding Fathers

for "Unity in Diversity".

With regard to our poor past and present performance in matters of economic and social progress, we should not be afraid to question our present pattern of public governance, or our way of leadership with the aim to improve them and make them much more responsive to the needs of the people. In light of the above, our State, in its prevailing form and structure, appears as more of a liability than an asset. Hence the need for a critical and true assessment of our public affairs, leadership, and governance.

With regard to the high and frequent level of corruption of certain officials, we should not be afraid to discuss ways and means to uphold the public high office-holders accountable before the people.

Let us undertake to build a nation that provides all of its children with equal opportunity to fulfill their dreams and aspirations, to realize their own talents; a nation that indiscrimi-

nately empowers its citizens, regions and local communities to fully participate in their development process; a nation that gives hope to its young members; that restores their confidence in the State as an impartial institution, guarantor of the people's security and justice; that engenders audacious and self-confident entrepreneurs, fully empowered to participate in mankind's venture of value creation, in every avenue of life, be it technology, entrepreneurship, energy, water, urbanization, agriculture, manufacturing, biotechnology, physics, information and environment, technology, arts, etc. Last but not least, let us undertake to build an inclusive nation, based on principles of equality in rights and freedoms for all, for only free minds can develop. That will be our best legacy for future generations. By achieving it, the generations to come 50 years hence, will be proud of us.

The Anglophone Uprising: Historic Opportunity to Re-assess Current Institutions for an Inclusive Leadership in Cameroon.

By Christian Penda Ekoka,

Technical Advisor, Office of the President Republic of Cameroon

Nkafu Policy Institute is a Cameroonian
Think Tank at the Denis & Lenora Foretia Foundation
Design: Foretia Foundation
Visit our website: www.foretiafoundation.org



Catalyzing Africa's Economic Transformation