

## Socio-Economic Welfare Measures of Penitentiary Inmates in the Bamenda Central Prison (Cameroon), 1992-2013: A Historical Assessment

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**Abstract:** *The welfare and rehabilitation of inmates constitutes a fundamental right which has been greatly slowed down due to insufficient means and neglect. Inmate care does not only require state intervention but also non-governmental organizations, civil society actors, the international community, individuals and the community. In a bid to elicit inmates to appropriate skills and entrepreneurial capacities relevant for their eventual re-insertion into the community, the government and creative agencies in a collective enterprise federated strategies to reach that end. This paper examines the government efforts alongside that of creative agencies in leveraging inmates from their erstwhile 'disconnected' public life to active agents of socio-economic development. It posits that, government endeavors to address the welfare needs of inmates were lofty but half-hearted. The investigation made appeal to primary and secondary data which were coordinated and analyzed thematically following the qualitative research method. The findings revealed that in consonance with national and international prescriptions, the Cameroon government provided some measure of welfare assistance to inmates. It also emerged that the increasing number of inmates became over bearing on the resources that the State was allocating for penitentiary welfare. It was also uncovered that in order to mitigate the pressure on the government, inmates improvised and exhibited sterling creativity that reduced the precarious welfare conditions. In the same vein charitable social holds complemented the humanitarian assistance to the inmates. From the bases of these findings, the study concludes that the need to provide socio-economic welfare assistance to prison inmates was an inalienable right prescribed by the State and contained in international instruments. It further sums up that the provision of welfare demands was a collective enterprise that had the State as the principal regulator.*

**Key words:** Bamenda, Welfare, Prisons, Inmates, Inventiveness, Socio-Economic

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Bamenda town is found in the Bamenda plateau of the Western Grass fields of Cameroon. It is a well-defined geographical area that shares boundaries with other areas such as Nsongwa, Banjaand Nkwen and serves as the administrative headquarter of the North West Region of Cameroon. It is a junction town which leads to all divisions of the North West Region as it is the gate way into the region. It was the first settlement (capital) of the German colonial administration in 1902 after the defeat of the Mankon people in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The Bamenda Central Prison is found in Bamenda, Mezam Division of the North West Region of Cameroon, what was formerly called the Western Grasslands.<sup>2</sup> The prison was reorganized and re-established by the British colonial administration in 1924.<sup>3</sup> They took over the German jail house that was known as "prison" created in the early 1900s. The government of the Republic of Cameroon enacted decisions concerning the safety, healthcare, and general welfare of detainees but insufficiency in funding downplayed the intent of the government vis a vis the population that the prison played host to. Consequently, the prison became overcharged to a

<sup>1</sup> A. Sammy Besong "Prostitution in Bamenda: A Trade and a Coping Strategy for Some Women", *Asian Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities* Vol. 9(2) Aug-Nov (2020):51.

<sup>2</sup> P.N.Nkwi and J.P. Warnier, *Elements for a History of Western Grassfields* (Yaounde: Publication of the Department of Sociology, the University of Yaounde, 1982),6.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Lukong and Antoinette Yuh, "How Does the Law Protect the Prisoner: A Review of the Conformity of the Bamenda Central Prison to International Standards", *African Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 18, No.3, 2017, 121.

point whereby, government funding could not meet the ever growing demands of inmates. Within the ambit of this paper, the Bamenda Central Prison is one of Cameroons prisons that had passed through stages of a single jail house (prison), production prison, and principal prison and also had gained the status of a Central Prison as found in Decree No 92/052 of 27 March 1992 instituting prison Administration in Cameroon.<sup>4</sup>The decision to engage inmates into activities was found in the United Nation's Standard Minimum Rules (SMRs) in articles, 15, 16, 20, 21, 22, 37, 39, 40, 60, 71, 72, 77, 79 and 81<sup>5</sup>and decree n°92/052 of 27 March 1992 instituting prison administration in Cameroon.<sup>6</sup>This was viewed as a “pro-democratic” action to facilitate the transformation of inmates which was vital to the society and the nation at large. Generally speaking, these efforts were aimed at reducing crimes and correct prisoners before their re-insertion into society. Consequent to this standard of using prisons as correctional bases for inmates, the state responded in different ways to align with the philosophy of preparing inmates for socio-economic re-insertion. It was in the context of these insufficiencies that inmates developed creative agencies to improve on their welfare. Besides, the limitations of the state as a strategic social welfare service provider gave space to some non-state actors to step in to contribute towards the moral, physical and financial rehabilitation of prisoners as well as facilitate their re-integration into society. The thrust of the paper therefore, is to identify and assess the extent to which the combination of government actions, ingenuity of inmates and non-state organizations contributed to the project of providing the prisons with the rudiments for prospective socio-economic integration of inmates into society after serving their prison terms.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Welfare according to this paper refers to measures put in place by the state to assist inmates in their financial, moral as well as medical needs.<sup>7</sup> Prison according to Chris Tapscott, is a correctional institution used to detain persons who were in lawful custody of the government with the focus on reorienting them towards rehabilitation.<sup>8</sup>A prison is a penal establishment for the detention of persons in custody awaiting trial, persons sentenced by the courts and persons being kept under surveillance.<sup>9</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, a Russian novelist as cited by T. Christopher, further opines that “a prison is a place where people who have committed crimes could pay their debts to society”.<sup>10</sup>Goffman argued on his part that a prison represents a miniature of a self- contained society and is aplace where there is temporal loss of rights to will money and vote.<sup>11</sup>Byers posit that, prison is a walled institution for the transformation of inmates. He went further to describe it as a healing arena and laboratory for prisoner's diagnoses and treatment to check their wrong doing.<sup>12</sup>

Inmate, for the purpose on this paper, is any “person whose liberty is restricted as a result of incarceration with the criminal justice system in locked up detention facility such as prison”<sup>13</sup>. This is a person whose confinement is as a result of civil proceedings designed to protect the individual from harming self or others and in compliance for transformation by virtue of his or her restricted liberty.<sup>14</sup> This is to say while confined; a moral change was embedded in the detainee to make him useful in the society after release. Meanwhile, socio-economic activities are concerned with the interactions

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<sup>4</sup> Decree No 92/052 of 27 March 1992 Instituting Prison Administration in Cameroon, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners Adopted by the First United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of offenders, held at Geneva in 1955, and approved by the Economic and Social Council by its resolutions 663C(XXIV) of 31 July 1957 and 2076 (LXII) of 13 May 1977, 3-12.

<sup>6</sup> Decree No 92/052 of March 1992 Instituting Prison Administration in Cameroon was a presidential decree signed to reorganize the penal establishments in the Republic of Cameroon.

<sup>7</sup> A, Sammy Besong, “Social and Economic Activities of Bamenda Central Prison Inmates 1924-2013” (Masters Dissertation in History, the University of Bamenda, 2018), 75.

<sup>8</sup>Tapscott, Chris. “Challenges to Effective Prison Governance in South Africa” *Journal on law, Democracy and Development*, Vol. 10, No, (2006): 12.

<sup>9</sup> Decree No 92/052 of 27 March 1992 Instituting Prison Administration in Cameroon, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Tah, *A Christian Response to the Prisons* (Bamenda: National Printing Press Bamenda, 2012), 24.

<sup>11</sup> Ervin Goffman, *Asylum: Essays on the Conditions of the Social situation of Mental Patients and other Inmates*(USA: Anchor Books, 1961),12.

<sup>12</sup> Byers P.Joseph, “Prison Reform” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, Vol. 6/ Issue 6(1916):4.

<sup>13</sup> Degree No.92/052 of 27 March 1992, 2.

<sup>14</sup>Besong, “Social and Economic Activities”, 6.

between social and economic activities within the prison environment and adapted to the society for the improvement of inmate's welfare.

Inventiveness as used in this paper relates to thoughts<sup>15</sup>, behavioral inputs as well as agents and efforts put in place by individuals (or groups) which takes keen interest in the plight of inmates in prisons and work towards their amelioration.<sup>16</sup>

It should however be noted that welfare initiatives were not only the preserve of the government but also that of other non-state actors; notably, Non Governmental Organizations(NGOs),Common Initiative Groups(CIGs) and individual enterprise of internees. These detainees experienced and lived with challenges that historically shaped their responses to situations towards their transformation, social rehabilitation and reintegration into the society after their prison duration.<sup>17</sup> This reinforces Foucault's view that punishing the body was not in vogue but that transformation and re-insertion of inmates into society should be the principles of prisons.<sup>18</sup>This paper queues up with the main articulation that prison welfare was a collective enterprise with collaborative measures by static and non static actors with the main goal of ensuring mind transformation rather than punishing the body. The paper will discuss the bases for welfare, efforts of the government and creative agencies and end with the ramifications.

### **2.1. Bases for Inmate Activities**

As a requirement presented by the penitentiary administration in the Standard Minimum Rules (SMRs),<sup>19</sup> physical education (PE) was necessary for the health of the inmates to keep them healthy and productive. They had to generate income for the institution through work party and hired labour. Two thirds of the proceeds from labour went to the government treasury and one third to build the reserve funds of the prisoners, who performed such labour given to them after their release.<sup>20</sup> It was thus a requirement of the 1992 penitentiary law for each prison in Cameroon to set aside periods for physical exercise, recreation and socio-cultural activities for the welfare of the inmates. This was also in line with article 21 (b) of Standard Minimum Rules (SMRs) which states that "young prisoners and others of suitable age and physique, shall receive physical training and recreational training during the period of exercise".<sup>21</sup>Eagerness and curiosity to learn something to transform the lives of inmates drove many into these activities. Some simply wished to learn and gain fresh experiences from other internees. These prisoners took advantage of the Bamenda Central prison milieu as a melting pot for wide ranging productive activities. A fair proportion of the inmates said they had certain innate skills and aptitudes which they hoped to express while in prison.<sup>22</sup> Others by their pre-detention character could not stay indolent without carrying out some meaningful activities. Many, given the limited access to social facilities and economic support structures, had to carryout activities as a coping strategy to self-support and empowerment. The inmates developed a strong desire to reduce the incidence of unsustainable beggarly<sup>23</sup> practices that kept a section of them on a survival margin.

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Widlok, "From individual act to social agency in San trance rituals" in *African Dynamics Strength Beyond Structure. Social and Historical Trajectories of Agency in Africa*, DeBruijn Miriam, Van Dijk Rijk, Gewald Jan-Bart (eds) (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2007), 163.

<sup>16</sup>Besong "Social and Economic Activities of Bamenda Central Prison inmates, 3.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>18</sup> Foucault Michel, *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison*(New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 3-5.

<sup>19</sup> See Decree No 92/052 of 27 March 1992 Instituting Prison Administration in Cameroon, Part IV, Chapter I, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Decree No 92/052 of 27 March 1992 Instituting Prison Administration in Cameroon, 13.

<sup>21</sup>Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, 3.

<sup>22</sup>Besong "Social and Economic Activities", 54.

<sup>23</sup>Begging became a tradition in the prison especially from 1990s when the prison conditions were difficult accompanied by overcrowding. Most inmates begged from visitors to survive. Money raised from begging at times was just enough to have a plate of food from the prison established eating houses owned by prisoners. Such money was also used to purchase drugs whenever the inmate was sick.

The fact that idleness in the prison was considered a serious offense under article 44 of the 1992 penitentiary law, forced most prisoners to engage in activities in order to escape from the heavy hand of the law.<sup>24</sup> The prison administration urged all inmates to get busy in order not to breed laziness. Furthermore, in order to enforce social rehabilitation on the inmates, there was need for the incarcerated to be provided safe moral mentality and build their emotions and attitudes to embrace life in the future. Through these transformative programmes, offenders were to get psycho-social restorative attitudes after release.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, in order to make prison punitive measures less pronounced, prisoners were engaged in prison activities that brought vital changes in their lives. This was the case with the Improvement of Detention Conditions and Respect for Human Rights (PACDET II).<sup>26</sup> It was a European Union Cooperation Programme which supported the government of Cameroon and prisons in particular with farm inputs and finance. During the second phase of the Improvement of Detention Conditions and Respect for Human Rights programme, phase two, the Bamenda Central Prison (BCP) received chicks as a donation to start up a poultry farm in 2008.<sup>27</sup>

The initiation of socio-economic activities in the BCP was well intentioned to raise state revenue through prison labour. According to decree No. 92/052 of 27 March 1992, articles 51, 52, 53 and 54<sup>28</sup> states that revenue was to be raised by each prison, through the sales of artistic products, provision of labour and sale of agro pastoral products such as chicken, pigs and rabbits. This was also intended to make inmates productive citizens so as to contribute to national development while in prison and after their release. Most of them wanted to learn a trade in order to survive their prison terms, irrespective of age, family background and religion.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the need to produce vibrant and economically dependent inmates given the economic situation of the country and the area concerned. Moreso, to give inmates a business in the future, guarantee self-employment and empower them to realize self-reliant dreams, inspired them to engage in activities such as shoe production, carving, dress manufacture, and many others.

### **3. GOVERNMENT EFFORTS AND PRISONERS INVENTIVENESS**

The treatment of prisoners in the BCP was part of government's duty to conform with the Standard Minimum Rules (SMR) for the treatment of inmates. According to Article 29 of decree No 92/052; "prisoners are entitled to a daily ration which must be balanced and sufficient to prevent under-nourishment and to provide energy necessary for them to carryout work they are compelled to do".<sup>30</sup> Feeding of the detainees has been the sole responsibility of the penitentiary administration. Food items usually came from the prison farms as well as from the community through purchase. Food was prepared and served to inmates with due consideration of their wellness and at times customs and religious background. Feeding was done once a day and in most cases irregular. This began in 1972 when the two prison systems (the West Cameroon and East Cameroon penitentiary system) merged. According to a reference note No A.14/vol.2/1363/PS/112, prison feeding was to move from thrice to one meal (ration) a day.<sup>31</sup> The food was not served on time, poorly prepared and also not served to the satisfaction of inmates. The SMR did not require anything out of decree No 92/052 on feeding of detainees but prisoners complained about the persistent disregard of nutritional balance in their daily

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<sup>24</sup>Decree No. 92/052 of 27 March 1992, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Kim Workman, "Rethinking Crime and Punishment: Prisoner Reintegration in New Zealand the 3<sup>rd</sup> Restorative Practices, International annual Conference, 23-27 November 2011, Amora Hotel, Wellington, New Zealand, 2011), 12.

<sup>26</sup>PACDET was the Improvement of Detention Conditions and Respect for Human Rights. It was a European Union Cooperation programme which supported the government of Cameroon and the prisons in particular with farm products such as seedlings, seeds, table birds(chicks) as well as other support. The Bamenda Prison under this programme in 2008 had cabbage seedlings and 225 table birds for the development of a poultry farm.

<sup>27</sup>Ebenezer Tamfu "Partnership Contribution Towards the Rehabilitation of Inmates: A case of the Yaounde Central Prison. (Dissertation National school of Penitentiary Administration Buea, 2012), 32.

<sup>28</sup>Decree No. 92/052 of 27 March Instituting, 13.

<sup>29</sup> [http://www. Cam-info.net /article/Bamenda-central-prison-517-inmates-exhorted to learn-trade](http://www.Cam-info.net/article/Bamenda-central-prison-517-inmates-exhorted-to-learn-trade) 1682.html.accessed20/11/2016.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup>A Sammy Besong, "Prison transformation and rehabilitation in erstwhile British Southern Cameroons, 1922-1992" (Forthcoming PhD thesis, in History the University of Bamenda, 2021), 340.

food intakes.<sup>32</sup> Meals such as cocoyam, plantains and other starchy food were quite regular, provoking some inmates as the case was in 1943, to petition that the prison administration should move them to Nigeria for a diet mutation.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, food provisioning did not respect the minimum breakfast-lunch-diner course protocol. It was once a day, irrespective of how food-needy the inmates were.<sup>34</sup> Given the precarious eating routine, many inmates resorted to cooking their own food in order to meet their own taste and diet needs.<sup>35</sup> This switch over was facilitated by the liberal attitude of the prison administration. Prisoners had to subsidize their feeding by buying their own food, meat, fish and vegetables.<sup>37</sup> Some families supplied food to their loved ones in prison.<sup>38</sup> Food supplies also came from NGOs, and friends of the prison.<sup>39</sup> For example the Catholic Mission Archdiocese of Bamenda through the Catholic Women, the Christian Women Fellowship, the Christian Men Fellowship, Paris Mutuel Urbaine Camerounaise (PMUC) and individuals like Francis Yong, a Bamenda based business magnet and Mayor Vincent Ndumu who donated food to the prison in 2012. Tamfu argued that the feeding budget for Cameroon's prisons by 2008 which stood at 2,050,967,000 was too small and eventually reduced to 1,460, 271,000 in 2012.<sup>40</sup> This gave an average of 250FCFA as estimated to be consumed by inmates per day for food.<sup>41</sup> Inmates developed begging as a survival strategy along the corridors of the prison just like the street children of Klemat Quarter in Chad.<sup>42</sup> Inmates who begged were described by Meyomesse, as "penguins" as they begged and lived on remains from trash cans in Kondengui Prison waiting for meal time because they could not sustain the feeding style of a meal per day.<sup>43</sup> In order to ameliorate the poor feeding situation, some inmates went an extra mile to initiate mini restaurant businesses.<sup>44</sup> This new development gradually but systematically gained stability from the 1980s and continued right up to 2013. The inmates profited from the liberal philosophy of some Prison Superintendents like Mr. Leonard T. Ngong, who had great plans to locally improve on the welfare of inmates.<sup>45</sup> Thus, some prisoners found the restaurant business in prison as a viable opportunity to earn a living.<sup>46</sup>

In a bid for the government to allow prisoners to become financially independent or raise money for themselves, article 51(1) of decree No 92/052 stated that "prison labour may be made available to the public service to private undertakings and to individuals and shall be authorized by the superintendent".<sup>47</sup> It further detailed that the labour was to be paid and proceeds of every prisoner's work shall be divided into parts; two-thirds paid to the government treasury and a third saved against the prisoner's name which was paid to the prisoner upon release.<sup>48</sup> Zanche A. when released in 2013

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<sup>32</sup> Mukong, *Prisoner Without a Crime* (Yaounde: Alfresco Books, 1985), 38.

<sup>33</sup> RAB, File 545/22/3 Director of Medical and sanitary services to Cameroon January 1922.

<sup>34</sup> Keneth L. and Antoinette Y., 'How does the law protect the prisoner: A Review of the conformity of the Bamenda Central Prison to International Standard' *Africa- Journal of social sciences* Vol. 8, No.3 (2017): 124.

<sup>35</sup> A. N. T. Mbu, *The Mill of Justice* (Yaounde: CEPER, 1986), 330.

<sup>36</sup> Enoh Meyomesse, "my time in Kondengui Prison (translated by Amy Reid) pen-org> enoh-meyomes-my time kondengui prison accessed 12/03/20017.

<sup>37</sup> Decree No 92/052 of 27 March 1992, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Nyo' Wakai, *Inside The Fence: Reminiscences as a Detainee* (Bamenda: Patron Publishing House, 2000), 28.

<sup>39</sup> Christian Henrichson and Ruth Delay, *The Price of Prisons: What Incarceration Cost Tax Payers* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2012), 4.

<sup>40</sup> Tamfu, "Partnership Contribution", 25.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Mirjam de Bruijn "Agency in and from the margins: Street Children and Youths in N'djamina Chad" in *African Dynamics Strength Beyond Structure Social and Historical Trajectories of Agency in Africa*, Mirjam de Bruijn, Rijk Van Dijk and Jan-Bart (eds) (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2007), 71.

<sup>43</sup> Meyomesse "my time in Kondengui Prison" (translated by Amy Reid) pen-org> enoh-meyomes-my time kondengui prison accessed 12/03/20017.

<sup>44</sup> The African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights, "Report to the Government of the Republic of Cameroon on the visit to the Special Rapporteur on Prisons and conditions of Detention in Africa from 2 to 15 September 2002" (Banjul: Gambia, 2002), 17.

<sup>45</sup> Besong "Social and Economic Activities", 113.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Jacob Mokom, Joseph Ngang and Eyombo Epalle are some examples of inmates who operated restaurants in the BCP.

<sup>47</sup> Decree No 92/052 of 27 March 1992 Instituting, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

was given the sum of thirty thousand as what was saved against his name from the work he did.<sup>49</sup> The government was in this way trying to rehabilitate the inmate into the life society after release, so that the money made through labour would be able to allow the prisoner to live an honest life out of prison. Such work performed could as well help the prisoner earn a decent living. Inmates who were eligible to move out of prison were hired for different activities; one of such was to split wood; clean the surrounding of private houses; washing and pressing of dresses.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, inmates with specialized skills engaged themselves in domains like building construction, bricks molding (especially sun dried), car repairs and electrical maintenance.<sup>51</sup> Some acted as domestic cooks and domestic cooks were not allowed in the 1990s for women because of complaints of sexual harassments on women who were cooks and baby sitters.<sup>52</sup> This generally was in line with Rule No. 71 article (4) of the SMR on prisons which stated that, “work provided shall ...increase the prisoners ability to earn an honest living after release”.<sup>53</sup> The foregoing situation allowed the inmates to be connected to offices, individuals and organizations through other agencies that helped these inmates with permanent jobs such as house helps or servants, general cleaners, motor mechanics shoe menders after their release. Ashumbe recounted that, most inmates through their dynamism and contacts stayed busy and carried on different maintenance works in offices in the BCP.<sup>54</sup>

As stipulated in decree No. 92/052 of 27 March 1992, in its article 30; “prisoners were to have coverlets, beds, mattress and a bolster”.<sup>55</sup> According to Kelvin Lukong, for the most part inmates were not privileged to be provided with the facilities stipulated by the regulations in force.<sup>56</sup> In a bid to address the problem, inmates purchased these items themselves. Alternatively or complementarily, they received donations of the materials from some Faith-Based Organizations like the Roman Catholic Mission, Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, Cameroon Baptist Convention and Full Gospel. Support in this direction also came from civil society and human rights organizations as well as charitable associations. According to Foucault, such assistance was embellished in conversion and moralization as he quoted the example of charity associations of Paris parishes.<sup>57</sup> It was same role played by these religious groups in the Bamenda Central Prison. Besides the provision of bedding facilities, the inmates especially females did not have the opportunity to be provided sanitary materials for healthy hygienic practice. This usually made some of them to use other in-hygenic methods for that purpose. Visitors, church groups, women associations and NGOs most often came to the rescue of female inmates by donating toiletries and sanitary materials. Although the inmates for the most part got external support, they also lived with adaptable and flexible agencies to appropriate skills and techniques that could enable them auto-manage their hygiene needs. The overcrowding cells in BCP especially from 1990 and the situation in 1997, with over 800 inmates accounted for the bugs, and lice which were common parasites that affected prisoners.<sup>58</sup> A good number of prisoners also suffered from different categories of contagious skin diseases.<sup>59</sup> According to Asaah, “inmates who had procured their beddings and had a culture of basic hygiene occasionally changed their beddings and bought disinfectants to disinfect the cells.”<sup>60</sup> After sustained sensitization by the state,

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<sup>49</sup>James Epoh., 40 years, Superintendent of Prison and interim revenue collector of BCP, interviewed at Bamenda Up Station, 31/05/2017.

<sup>50</sup> Peter AlumbaKumase, 83 years old, retired chief warder and one time warder in charge of the BCP farm, interviewed at Ndamukong street Bamenda, 09/01/2021.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Ashumbe, 52 years old, chief of service for socio-cultural, sporting and leisure activities in BCP, interviewed in Bamenda, 14/12/2017.

<sup>52</sup> Gustav Enoh, 59 years ex-convict interviewed at Nkwen Bayelle III, 11/10/2016.

<sup>53</sup> Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, 11.

<sup>54</sup> Richard Ashumbe, 52 years old, chief of service for socio-cultural, sporting and leisure activities in BCP, interviewed in Bamenda, 14/12/2017.

<sup>55</sup> Decree No 92/052 of 27 March 1992 Instituting, 8.

<sup>56</sup> Kelvin Lukong 43 years condemned convict interviewed in BCP, 13/11/2016.

<sup>57</sup> Foucault Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 212.

<sup>58</sup> Bamenda Central Prison records from January to February 1997 from the Records Office.

<sup>59</sup> Besong, “Social and Economic Activities”, 171.

<sup>60</sup> Henry AsaahNgu, 42 years, Superintendent BCP interviewed at Bamenda Central Prison 12/04/2017.

through medics, on the need to maintain proper sanitary and hygienic measures, changes began emerging as some inmates were given the possibility to attend training seminars for detergent production. Religious groups such as the Catholic Women Association(CWA) from the Roman Catholic Mission and Christian Women Fellowship(CWF) of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon organized such trainings in different occasions in the prison in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010.<sup>61</sup>

Closely associated with the sanitary and hygienic conditions of the inmates was their health plight. This was in accordance with the UN SMR articles 22-26 and article 3 of the updated blueprint for the management of prisons in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>62</sup> The BCP had an infirmary with a prison nurse who was responsible to the basic health needs of inmates.<sup>63</sup> The infirmary ran on essential (mainly over the counter) medications to cater for common illnesses like malaria, gastritis, common cold, fever and scabies, which has been prevalent since 1953.<sup>64</sup> Mimbe postulates that, the health facilities of the prison could not meet the growing health needs and complexities of inmates.<sup>65</sup> Given that, it was not always too obvious to get the necessary health clearance for medical referrals to hospitals in and around the city of Bamenda. Inmates resorted to soliciting for family medical assistance.<sup>66</sup> In some extreme cases, those with serious health challenges had to constantly invite or call their personal doctors to attend to them. Ngoh posits that in the 1930s most prisoners died in British Southern Cameroons due to poor health.<sup>67</sup> And the end of year report of 1930 had it that some prisoners died due to change of season.<sup>68</sup> Some inmates, to allay their health worries, readily resorted to traditional pharmacotherapy (produced by them)<sup>69</sup> to help suppress certain malaise such as running stomach.<sup>70</sup> Inmates adapted to certain behaviours and assisted each other in times of need though medications were often provided by the various agencies to the prison. For example the German NGO, Gesellschaft fur Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) which was a German international technical cooperation agency in 2006 came to the aid of prisoners with drugs to attend to patients with HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis.<sup>71</sup>

Although stated in article 61 of the 1992 prison decree that prison institutions should dedicate time for physical exercises, recreation and cultural exercises in order to relieve tension and create social cohesion, the government did not adequately respond to this call to duty. Sporting space and facilities were inadequate to permit inmates exercise themselves as indicated in SMRs in its article 21(1).<sup>72</sup> Sportswears, balls and other recreational kits were lacking as well, and some inmates devised other makeshift facilities and equipment for individually or collectively doing exercises. Meanwhile, social agencies also came in with support through donation of basic sporting materials like football and handball, goal posts, nets, and skipping cords. The Catholic Mission made a volleyball and basketball court for the BCP inmates.<sup>73</sup> Most often, during prison competitions, well-off inmates bought jerseys

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<sup>61</sup> Susan Mbonta, 56 years, ex offender from BCP interviewed at Bojong- Mendankwe, 12/05/2016.

<sup>62</sup> United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules) an updated blueprint for prison management in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, 8.

<sup>63</sup> Mimbe Suzanne Genevieve, "L'incarcération Féminine à la Prison Centrale de Bamenda de 1973-2010 : Essai D'Analyse Historique" (mémoire du diplôme des professeur de l'enseignement secondaire 2<sup>e</sup> grade en histoire, Université de Bamenda, 2013), 43. (Dissertation in an award of DIPES II in History, the University of Bamenda, 2013).

<sup>64</sup> Information on the Cameroons Under the United Kingdom Administration, 1953, 80.

<sup>65</sup> Genevieve, "L'incarcération Féminine à la Prison Centrale de Bamenda", 88.

<sup>66</sup> James Epoh, 40 years, Superintendent of Prison and interim revenue collector of BCP, interviewed at Bamenda Up Station, 31/05/2017.

<sup>67</sup> V. J Ngoh, *Cameroon 1884-1985: A Hundred Years of History* (Yaounde: Navi Group Publication, 1987), 169.

<sup>68</sup> RAB, Bamenda Division Annual Report 1930, 42.

<sup>69</sup> Albert Ticha, 39 years convict BCP in discussion in the author at BCP 08/04/2017.

<sup>70</sup> Wakai, *Inside the Fence*, 50.

<sup>71</sup> Genevieve, "L'Incarcération Féminine à La Prison Centrale De Bamenda", 91.

<sup>72</sup> Standard Minimum Rules for the treatment of Prisoners..., 3.

<sup>73</sup> Reverend Father Joachim 60 years Catholic Prison Chaplain interviewed at BCP 10/03/2017

for their teams like the case of Eyombo Epalle in 2009.<sup>74</sup> Some sport lovers and philanthropists of the region like “Bobe” Francis Yongalso brought sporting equipment for the inmates from 2010-2012.<sup>75</sup>

The promotion of culture through prison activities was enshrined in article 61 of the 1992 decree on prison administration in Cameroon as well as the article 27 of the 1996 constitution respecting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>76</sup>. It was in tune with these prescriptions that the prison administration created avenues for cultural manifestations. Such an enterprise required not only the will but the minimum facilities to convey culture. According to Ashumbe, though cultural activities were organized, they were not usually accompanied by the necessary logistic support.<sup>77</sup> He went further to say that inmates at times improvised musical animation by using their washing buckets as drums for drumming and their hands to clap rhythmically to the songs they sang.<sup>78</sup> Agreeing with Ashumbe, Besong posits that, some inmates, produced disguising costumes for such manifestations.<sup>79</sup> Lukong Kelvin, an inmate who had spent twenty seven years in the prison was particularly distinguished for producing masquerades for cultural parades.<sup>80</sup> Cultural dances were most often part of the program planned for the reception of personalities. The dance groups cut across the diverse cultures of inmates. The displays were also opportunities for the inmates to make some money from the freewill gestures of visitors.<sup>81</sup>

Pertaining to the field of education, article 62 of Decree No 92/052 of 27 March 1992, stated that “all prisons were to organize classes for minors and adults and to furnish inmates with books and manuals”.<sup>82</sup> It was a lofty idea by the government and the BCP in accordance with prescriptions of the penitentiary law operated a Juvenile Reformatory School (JRS) in conformity with the SMR article 77 which stated that “the education of illiterates and young prisoners shall be compulsory and special attention shall be paid to it by the administration”.<sup>83</sup> This was to give learning opportunities to inmates who by virtue of their incarceration, were disconnected from schooling or who had never been privileged in their early lives to attend schools.<sup>84</sup> Whereas there was a lot of good will on the part of the State to run the prison school, its functioning was handicapped by certain shortcomings: the school was poorly equipped with just a few desks in the various levels; inadequacies in didactic materials and teaching personnel. Faced with this predicament, some non-state charitable groups came in to support the education initiative.<sup>85</sup> Since the prison did not operate an adult section, interested learners were sponsored by church groups at Government Bilingual High School Mendankwe were escorted by a warder by a warder and for those who were at the verge of being released went out just like the other inmates who went out and returned to prison before lock up.<sup>86</sup> Besides taking charge of tuition, the church and religious groups, assisted in equipping a small library in the prison. Book donations came from different sources, one of which was the Roman Catholic Mission.<sup>87</sup> Like many

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<sup>74</sup>Richard Ashumbe, 52years old, chief of service for socio-cultural, sporting and leisure activities in BCP,interviewed in Bamenda, 14/12/2017.

<sup>75</sup> Idem

<sup>76</sup>Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon, 18 April 2008 to amend and supplement some provisions of 18 January 1996 to amend the 1972 constitution, 38.

<sup>77</sup> Richard Ashumbe, 52years old, chief of service for socio-cultural, sporting and leisure activities in BCP,interviewed in Bamenda, 14/12/2017.

<sup>78</sup> Idem

<sup>79</sup>Besong, “Social and Economic Activities”, 126.

<sup>80</sup> Kelvin Lukong 43 years condemned convict interviewed at BCP, 13/11/2016.

<sup>81</sup>Widlok Thomas, “From Individual act to social agency in San Trance rituals in *African Dynamic Strength Beyond Structure, Social and Historical Trajectory of Agency in Africa*,Mirjam de Bruijn, Rijk Van Dijk and Jan-Bart Gewald (eds) (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2007), 165.

<sup>82</sup> Decree No 92/052 of 27 March 1992, 15.

<sup>83</sup> Standard Minimum Rules, article 77(1 and 2), 11.

<sup>84</sup> Report on Education in prison: Recommendation No R(89)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on education in prison adopted by the committee of Ministers on 13 October 1998 at the 429<sup>th</sup> meeting of Ministers’ Deputies Strasbourg, 1990, 30.

<sup>85</sup>Besong, “Social and Economic Activities”, 84.

<sup>86</sup> Helen N. Fontembo “Prison conditions in Cameroon: the Narrative of Female Inmates (PhD Thesis in sociology, University of South Africa, 2013), 160.

<sup>87</sup> Reverend Father Joachim 60 years Catholic Prison Chaplain interviewed at BCP 10/03/2017.



other prison libraries, BCP library was very small with a few books and scarcely visited by inmates but for a few with a reading culture.

Arts and craft was part of government efforts to initiate and promote cultural values among the inmates. It also served as a means to raise revenue for the prisons, as stipulated in article 54 of the 1992 prison law; “every prison shall have facilities for revenue collection”,<sup>88</sup> and laid emphasis on agro-pastoral and artistic products.<sup>89</sup> It was a good idea to induce inmates into being creative in their reformation process and eventual rehabilitation. In spite of its importance, this issue was, the means to support the inmates by the government were limited. Even with the limited resources, Prison officials were assigned to follow up activities of inmates as a means to prepare them towards re-insertion.<sup>90</sup> Individual interests and decisions informed the variety of the craft and aesthetic works produced by the inmates.<sup>91</sup> Prisoners’ ingenuity was embedded in some of the products made, such as traditional dresses, pullovers, cross-stitched fabrics, bags, bangles, caps and carved objects(See plate 1).

**Plate I:** A display of the type of craft and items produced by BCP inmates



**Source:** Pictures taken from the album of Promise Tafon chief of service for discipline

BCP, during a prison visit in 2013.

Plate A displays traditional dresses produced by inmates in the year 2000. Meanwhile plate B, C and D also show the various types of bags produced. Plate E for its part is a pointer to the different types of caps, bangles, bamboo chairs produced by inmates of the BCP.

Africans by nature were creative and indigenous with distinctive characters that were transferred into work of craft. Craftsmanship was an independent interest as well as flexible agency and was a new

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<sup>88</sup> Decree No 92/052 of 27<sup>th</sup> March 1992, 13.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid

<sup>90</sup> Decree No 2010/365 of 29<sup>th</sup> November 2010 Bearing the special status of workers of Penitentiary Administration: Translated by GMPS Eyunghikeh P A, 28.

<sup>91</sup> Moyo N. Otrude, “The Dynamics of families, their work and provisioning strategies in the changing economies in the urban township of Bulawayo Zimbabwe in African Dynamics Strength Beyond Structure Social and Historical Trajectories of Agencies in Africa Mirjam de BuijnRijk Van Dijk and Jam-Bart Gewald(eds) (Lieden: Brill Publisher 2007), 195.

paradigm set by inmates of the BCP especially from the late 1980s. Through funding by sponsors and individuals, craftwork was done by inmates at their different corners. Some ex-offenders who learned these creative ideas from the BCP, took the skills to their different localities after release especially those who were exposed to craftwork. According to Etaka, prison craftworks were seen in prison offices, markets around like the Bamenda Central Market, Nkwen, Ntarikonas well as Bamenda food market.<sup>92</sup> Some artisanal shops around the town of Bamenda also exhibited and sold BCP craftworks. To accomplish the craft productions, inmates benefited from the largesse of agencies like the Center for Human Right and Peace Advocacy (CHRAPA) and other philanthropic organizations who donated some working materials. Corroborating such social gestures Henry AsaahNgu said that:

If philanthropic groups did not come in to assist the inmates in their pursuit to progress in their craft items by donating generously, materials plus finance, we would not have had some of the beautiful works of art as we find in the prison over the years.<sup>93</sup>

This was a clear indication that the state measures to optimize the welfare of inmate in the BCP had limitations which were readily attenuated by the actions of charitable groups and NGOs.

In their exercise of agency, inmates at times went directly to the superintendent of the prison to solicit for assistance. In some occasions, they made appeals to NGOs that responded favorably. Such actions cultivated love for creativity among inmates who greatly reduced indolence.<sup>94</sup>

#### **4. RAMIFICATION**

Following article 37 of Decree N<sup>o</sup> 92/052 of 27 March 1992, visits from relatives and friends helped inmates to tie social connections. Equally, BCP gave room for NGOs and other groups like the Red Cross and Center for Human Rights and Peace Advocacy (CHRAPA), the National commission for Human Rights and Freedom, judicial professionals such as North West Lawyers to be implicated in the welfare of inmates.<sup>95</sup> A social networking was created within the prisons environ among inmates especially during socio-cultural events and it promoted and consolidated unity.<sup>96</sup> The collective engagements of NGOs and other humanitarian organizations modestly contributed in reducing the challenges that most of the inmates encountered as far as their socio-economic welfare was concern.

According to Bafuh, schooling as part of measures to keep pace with the self-social development in accordance with article 62 of decree No 92/052 and in keeping with rule No59 of the UN Standard Minimum Rules (SMR) paid off.<sup>97</sup> Some prisoners obtained certificates like the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC). Though it was a process enabled by the government, its vulgarization was mostly done by social aid agencies like the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF), Justice for Peace Commission (JPC), and Faith Based Organizations (FBO) such as Catholic Health Association (OCASC).<sup>98</sup> Some good-will individuals also donated didactic materials like books, pens and chalk to the Juvenile Reformatory School and the library.<sup>99</sup> Table 1 presents a statistical picture of the FSLC success rate from 2009-2013 in the Bamenda Central prison.

**Table 1.** *FSLC Registration and Results from 2009-2013*

<b>Year of Examination</b>	<b>No. sat</b>	<b>No. passed</b>	<b>Percentage passed</b>
2009	8	5	62.5
2010	10	10	100
2011	8	8	100

<sup>92</sup>Enow M. Etaka, 31 years, social worker with BCP under CHRAPA interviewed at Nkwen, Bamenda, 1/09/2016.

<sup>93</sup>Henry AsaahNgu, 42 years, Superintendent BCP interviewed at Bamenda Central Prison, 12/04/2017.

<sup>94</sup>H.B Gelatt, *Creative Decision Making: Using Positive Uncertainty* (USA: Crisp Publication, 1991), 70.

<sup>95</sup> Kenneth Lukong and Nde T. Peter, "Prisons and Prisoners' Rights and obligations: An Overview of the Bamenda Central Prison in Cameroon" *African Journal of Social Sciences* Vol. 8, No 3, (2017): 23.

<sup>96</sup> Gustav Enoh, 59 years ex-convict interviewed at Nkwen, Bayelle III, 11/10/2016.

<sup>97</sup>Vitalis Bafuh, 42 years, director of Bamenda Central Prison, Juvenile Reformatory School interviewed at BCP, 13/02/2017.

<sup>98</sup> Reverend Father Joachim 60 years Catholic Prison Chaplain interviewed at BCP 10/03/2017.

<sup>99</sup>Fontebo, "Prison Conditions in Cameroon", 251.

**Socio-Economic Welfare Measures of Penitentiary Inmates in the Bamenda Central Prison (Cameroon), 1992-2013: A Historical Assessment**

2012	11	11	100
2013	8	8	100

**Source:** *Compiled from the Department of Juvenile Reformation School of BCP, 13 February 2017.*

Table I shows results from 2009 to 2013 of pupils (juvenile inmates) who wrote and made it at the FSLC. Apart from 2009 whereby the success rate was as low as 62%, the other years registered a 100% score. The poor performance in 2009 is consequent to the fact that, many juveniles were released and some of those who registered, barely three in number refused to take the examination. To avoid such incidents, the school and prison administration took necessary measures such as not releasing inmates (juveniles) who were registered for FSLC, and informing the parents of such candidates about the examinations so they could take those already released to the examination centers when the examination was to take place. The administration also in the following years sensitized the inmates (juveniles) on the need to study as part of their reformation and preparation for re-insertion into the society. Moreover, private agencies were constantly coming to the aid of the school with material and financial assistance.<sup>100</sup>

The promotion of cultural activities in the prison though largely shouldered by inmates, was a unique opportunity to expose and initiate many into cultural rites and a way of preserving the culture of the North West Region. It also gave opportunity for some cultures to be exported to other regions of Cameroon and showcased to other non-Grassfield inmates. Released non Grassfield inmates took the cultural aspects learned to their areas of origin and those in prison copied what was the practice of the inmates from the Grassfield. Other agencies that supported the initiative of the government through material and financial support only went a long way to ensure continuity and valorize the customs and tradition of the area.<sup>101</sup>

In spite of limited government support, inmates and even ex-offenders, gained economic independence through temporary jobs such as builders, plumbers and agricultural technicians. An example was K.Ngwa, who was skilled in electrical installations.<sup>102</sup> According to a respondent, he gained clearance from the prison administration and began taking micro contracts to electrify newly constructed houses around the prison precinct.<sup>103</sup> Besong corroborates this fact by saying that, he travelled out of the town of Bamenda under the supervision of Richard Agbor, a prison warder, for similar job prescriptions.<sup>104</sup> Eyombo Epale, Jacob Mokom, Joseph Ngam, Albert Ticha, Bandi Buba and others used their sense of initiatives during their stay in prison to distinguish themselves as economic entrepreneurs.<sup>105</sup> According to Ashumbe, the above mentioned inmates developed petty businesses in prison and employed some inmates who were paid either by providing them with food or basic financial recompenses.<sup>106</sup> Many ex-offenders developed businesses in the region, such as Gustav Enoh who opened a garage at Banja Street, Nathaniel Suh also had a garage at Ntarikon, Emmanuel Ngehfo operated a provision store in Nkwen, Bamenda.<sup>107</sup> Given the increasing waves of multi-dimensional globalization, the BCP inmates took opportunities that presented themselves through the intervention of non-governmental organizations. Religious groups and individuals almost on permanent bases got involved in the functioning and development of the prison with different packages of support.<sup>108</sup> Other bodies through cooperation between Cameroon and the European Union (EU) in a second phase of *programs d'Amelioration des Condition de Detention et Respect des Droits de L'Hommes dans les prison au Cameroun*” PACDET II (Improvement of Detention Condition and Respect for Human Rights helped the prison with a poultry farm of about 225 table birds in 2008.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>100</sup>Vitalis Bafuh, 42 years, Director of Bamenda Central Prison, Juvenile Reformatory School interviewed at BCP, 13/02/2017.

<sup>101</sup>Besong, “Social and Economic Activities”, 50.

<sup>102</sup>Ebenezer NjieTamfu, 40 years Registrar in charge of records in BCP, interviewed at BCP, 12/03/2021.

<sup>103</sup> Eric Chofor, 51 years, inmate sentenced for life imprisonment at the BCP, interviewed at BCP, 12/03/2021.

<sup>104</sup>Besong, “Social and Economic Activities”, 178.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid

<sup>106</sup> Richard Ashumbe, 52 years old, chief of service for socio-cultural, sporting and leisure activities in BCP, interviewed in Bamenda, 14/12/2017.

<sup>107</sup>Gustav Enoh. 59 years ex-convict in discussion with author at Nkwen, Bayelle III, 11/10/2016.

<sup>108</sup> Ebenezer NjieTamfu, 40 years Registrar in charge of records in BCP, interviewed at BCP, 12/03/2021.

<sup>109</sup> Ebenezer Tamfu “Partnership Contribution towards the rehabilitation of inmates”, 35.

Within a short period, many inmates who were trained took the opportunity to keep a few birds for themselves.<sup>110</sup>The Institute for Agricultural Research and Development (IRAD) and Heifer Project International (HPI) gave technical assistance to inmates of the BCP by training inmates on the art of keeping cattle, rabbits and pigs. A veterinarian followed up the training of inmates.<sup>111</sup>Some inmates specialized in animal breeding immediately distinguished themselves by raising a few animals in the prison purposely for domestic consumption and sale.<sup>112</sup>

## **5. CONCLUSION**

As a confinement center for convicts to live their verdicts of guilt on crimes committed, the Bamenda Central Prison was besides its punitive mission a place where consideration was given to the welfare of inmates. This was inspired by some international and national legal instruments on human rights preservation and penitentiary welfare. The Cameroon government through the services of the Prison's administration committed attention to the provision of minimum welfare standards for inmates. By the 1990s, the Prison had been overpopulated and brought pressure to bear on the existing logistics. This paper argued that for the most part, government intervention in Prison management was to initiate inmates into activities that could train and psycho-socially transform them to lead relevant lives after detention. In spite of some considerable efforts, the state ran short of meeting the ever-increasing welfare demands of inmates. To mitigate government insufficiencies, inmates improvised flexible survival strategies to enhance social and economic welfare. These initiatives for their own part could not be maximally attained because of inadequate technical, material and financial resources. It was principally to palliate the limitations of the state, assist the inmates to meet their desired goals and more importantly, fulfill their charitable and humanitarian missions that several non-state actors; NGOs, religious groups and philanthropists threw their weight of support to maximize measures geared at improving the welfare of prisoners at the Bamenda Central Prison. It therefore became evident through the concerted efforts of government, inmates and NGOs that the task of transforming and rehabilitating prisoners was a collective enterprise, and not a burden to be shouldered exclusively by government.

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