

Agricultural Training Institutions in the North West Region of Cameroon, 1968-2016: Impediments

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Abstract: At independence, an important economic vision of Cameroon was to achieve food self-sufficiency. To accomplish this, government took several measures including quality training of agricultural personnel. In respect to this, there was the establishment of agricultural training institutions by the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon and the state in the Northwest Region of Cameroon to fulfill this vision. The programs of these institutions evolved over time to meet up with changing agricultural dynamics of the country. Despite this lofty vision, Cameroon did not satisfactorily achieve or realize food self-sufficiency as envisioned although giant strives were made and relied on huge importation of food stuff in spite of its agricultural potential. This paper therefore drawing from primary and secondary evidences and employing the descriptive and analytical approach, sets out to investigate the constraints that were faced by the agricultural training institutions which limited the extent of the realization of the vision of the schools. The investigations revealed that, geographical, socio-cultural, economic and institutional constraints worked together to limit the functioning of these agricultural training schools.

Keywords: Impediments, Constraints, Agricultural Training, North West Region, Cameroon, Skills Development

1. INTRODUCTION

After independence, the North West Region of Cameroon quickly became host to ambitious Agricultural Training Institutions. The establishment of these schools was strictly in line with the desire to provide an enabling environment for the realization of Cameroon's post-independence economic vision of achieving food self-sufficiency. For over five decades of the functioning of these schools, this vision was not satisfactorily realized as the country continued to import alarming quantities of food. This could partly be explained by the fact that, from creation, the agricultural training schools in the North West Region of Cameroon faced numerous challenges which hampered the smooth functioning of the activities of the schools and thus the realization of the vision for their establishment. In this respect, the principal question addressed in this paper is: what were the constraints to the activities and functioning of Agricultural Training institutions in the North West Region of Cameroon from 1968-2016? The paper therefore examines the constraints to the activities of Agricultural Training Institutions in the Northwest Region of Cameroon and argues that the activities and functioning of these institutions were blurred by a catalogue of institutional, political, economic, sociocultural and geographical constraints. The paper also observes that, irrespective of these challenges, the various stake holders involved in the running of the schools did not relent to push through with the activities of the schools.

2. BRIEF BACKGROUND

The Northwest Region of Cameroon is one of the ten administrative regions of the Republic of Cameroon. The region lies between latitudes 5°43' and 7°9' North of the equator and longitude 9°13' and 11°13' East. It is bordered to the North and West by the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to the South by the Southwest Region, to the Southeast by the West Region and to the Northeast by the

Adamawa Region of the Republic of Cameroon.¹ The Region occupies a surface area of 17.300km square.² The Region is divided into seven administrative divisions and thirty-four subdivisions.³ Historically, this region was part of British Cameroons that was under British colonial administration following the Anglo-French partition of Cameroon after the First World War and went forward to achieve independence by reunification with the Republic of Cameroon on 1st October 1961. The North West Region of Cameroon was inhabited by indigenous population that can be classified into several ethnic groups. These peoples could broadly be classified into Semi Bantu and Fulanies of Fulbe.⁴ The region was inhabited ethnic groups with centralized political organisations which included, Tikars, Aghem, Tadjon and Ndop fondoms. According to Ngoh, “the origin of most of these kingdoms shows a pattern of movement following Fulani raids from North Cameroon. Except for the Bali who are Chamba descend, the rest of the kingdoms are of Tikar origin.”⁵

When Southern Cameroon achieved independence on 1st October 1961 by joining the Republic of Cameroon, a federal system of government comprising two states, the state of East Cameroon (former French Cameroon) and the state of West Cameroon (former Southern Cameroons) was adopted for the new country⁶ under the leadership of president Ahmadou Ahidjo as President and J.N. Foncha as vice president.⁷ By 1972, the form of state was changed to a unitary state consisting of 7 provinces with former West Cameroon divided into two provinces the North West and South West provinces.⁸ In 1983, the numbers of provinces in Cameroon were increased to 10 and in 2008; administrative provinces in Cameroon were transformed into administrative Regions. From the 1960s, the North West Region of Cameroon was host to a number of Agricultural training institutions whose establishment was in-line with the economic vision of Cameroon after Independence.

This article focuses on the Presbyterian Rural Training Centre (PRTC) in Mfonta and six government training centres consisting of; the National Cooperative College Bamenda (NCCB), the National Centre for Animal Husbandry Veterinary and Halieutic Training (CNFZVH) Jakiri, the Community Development Specialisation Training School (CDSTS) Santa, the Regional College of Agriculture (RCA) Bambili, the Technical School of Agriculture (TSA) in Nkambe and Bambili. The PRTC Mfonta was created in 1968. The purpose of creation was to provide practical training in agriculture to farmers who were capable of combining farming and stock breeding; to introduce plough farming, give farmers professional skills by which they could earn a livelihood. The Centre was also to give assistance to farmer trainees and other farmers who applied for it; launching their farms to encourage their efforts and to offer them every possible assistance, consultations, periodic visits, preparing bulletins, refresher courses just to name but these few.⁹ The Centre was created and ran by the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon that took over from the Basel Mission. The authorities of the new body understood the essence to pursue Basel Mission’s legacy of bringing the gospel to Cameroonians in practical and physically beneficial ways.¹⁰ Given this context, officials of the PCC added to its administrative set up a new organ called Agricultural Board which was given the mandate to explore ways and means by which the PCC could effectively engage in agricultural ministry. This necessitated feasibility studies that caused the Church to create agricultural rural training centre among its priority economic endeavours. The new economic orientation was to create employment

¹ Gregory Nguh Muluh, Jude Ndzifon Kimengsi and Kester Ngwa Azibo, “Challenges and Prospects of Sustaining Donor Funded Projects in Rural Cameroon,” *Journal of Microfinance and Sustainable Development*, 11, 24, December 2019,3.

² National Institute of Statistics of Cameroon, Regional Agency for the Northwest, Statistical Yearbook of the Northwest Region 2014, December 2015, 2.

³ Ibid.

⁴ J.O. Fields, *Introducing the Southern Cameroons: A Symposium of the Southern Portion of the Mandated Territory of the Cameroons under United Kingdom Administration* (Lagos: Federal Information Service, 1961), 17.

⁵ Victor Julius Ngoh, *History of Cameroon Since 1800* (Limbe: Presbook, 2002), 7.

⁶ Ibid, 230.

⁷ V. G. Fanso, *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges: From Prehistoric Times to the 19th Century, Vol. I* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1989), 160.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ PCCAB, File no 631, Project Description, Rural Training Centre, 1966, 1.

¹⁰ J.N. Dah, *Africa Response to Christian Presence* (Limbe: Presbook, 1986), 63.

opportunities for the people in the areas already reached by the PCC. From this new vision perspective, emerged the two-rural training centres: PRTC Mfonta and PRTC Kumba. In January 1970, PRTC Mfonta opened its doors to the first batch of farmers who were interested in the modern ways of agriculture.

The government owned schools had various dates of creation. The CNFZVH Jakiri was created in 1973 by a Presidential decree to train Veterinary Superintendents, Assistant Veterinary Superintendents, Veterinary Agents and Animal Industries Technicians.¹¹ The word halieutic was added to the name of the school in 2012 because of the training of fisheries and aquaculture technicians.¹² Graduates from the school were absorbed by the government to work in the Ministry of Livestock Fisheries and Animal Industries (MINEPIA) and by 1989, direct recruitment from the school was stopped by government because of the effects of the economic crisis in Cameroon and graduates became self-employed or employed by private enterprises or recruited by the government when need be through the Ministry of Public Service. In 2012, the MINEPIA under C2D-AFOP programme improved the school programme to train job creators and not job seekers like in the old programme where the focus was to train civil servants to be used by MINEPIA. An Agro-pastoral Counselor advisor programme was included who graduated with a Higher National Diploma (HND).¹³

The NCC Bamenda on its part started in 1970 as the West African Centre for training Cooperators for the cooperative movement.¹⁴ In 1980, two Presidential decrees reorganized the school and created the NCC Bamenda giving it the status of a training school in the Ministry of Agriculture.¹⁵ The institution started with the training of Cooperative Inspectors of Cycles B and C of the Public Service. The economic effects of the late 1980s made the government to stop the recruitment of graduates from the school which made the enrolment of the school to drop drastically. To reorient the training programme to suit self-employment upon graduation, the state through the AFOP programme introduced the training of Agro-pastoral Entrepreneurs from 2010 in the school with graduates graduating with an HND in Agro-pastoral Entrepreneurship.¹⁶

The CDSTS Santa was created by Presidential decree no. 80/375 of 11th September 1980 with a mission to train community development agents on community development and other complimentary disciplines such as agriculture.¹⁷ At creation, the trained community development agents were recruited directly into the public service by the government upon graduation where they served as front line development staff. The effects of the economic crisis stopped direct recruitment of graduates from the school. The AFOP programme was introduced in the school in 2012 to reorient the curriculum to train job creators and not job seekers. As such, the school trained senior technicians in Agro-Pastoral Counselling.¹⁸

Both the RCA Bambili and TSA Bambili were created in 1980 by Presidential decree for the training of personnel of rural production. Prior to their creation, the institution was called the National College of Agriculture (NCA) which originated from the former school of agriculture as an affiliate of the Cameroon College of Arts, Science and Technology (CCAST) Bambili as far back as 1962.¹⁹ Agriculture was the “technology” aspect of CCAST Bambili. In 1972, the technology aspect was transformed into the NCA Bambili training agricultural technicians of category BI and assistant agricultural technicians of category C of the public service.²⁰ In 1980, the NCA was transformed into Regional College of Agriculture and Technical School of Agriculture complex under one administration. Meanwhile the RCA trained senior agricultural technicians of category B2 and B1, the

¹¹ CNFZVH Jakiri Five Year School Project for 2016, 9.

¹² Interview with Victor Nfor, 46 Years, Deputy Director CNFZVH Jakiri, Mile 3 Nkwen-Bamenda, 4th November 2021.

¹³ *Idem*.

¹⁴ National Cooperative College Bamenda Sustainable Five-Year Development Project, 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁶ Interview with Labrang Musa Nfor nee NjahBibah Numah, 48 years, Former Director of the National Cooperative College Bamenda, Yaounde, 12th December 2021.

¹⁷ CDSTS Santa School Project Report for 2013, 21.

¹⁸ Interview with Walter Tebong Ndah, 57 years, Director CDSTS Santa, Santa, 23rd November 2022.

¹⁹ RCA Bambili School Project for 2017-2021, 8.

²⁰ TSA School Project for 2012-2016, 34.

TSA trained assistant technicians of category C of the public service.²¹ In 1983, the administration of both schools was separated. Another TSA was created in Nkambe in 1984 to play the same role as that of Bambili. Trainees from the schools were automatically employed by the government until 1989 when the government stopped direct employment of graduates from the schools because of the economic crisis in Cameroon. The activities of the schools were also halted from 1989 to 1991 because many students were no more interested to be trained without the hope of being employed by the government. Enrolment however increased after 2012 when the institutions were integrated into the AFOP programme which transformed the curriculum of the schools to suit the new orientation of self-employment.²²

3. INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS

The infrastructures in some of the schools were inadequate thereby acting as a hindrance to the smooth running of the activities of the schools.²³ The Community Development Specialisation Training School (CDSTS) Santa inherited the old colonial buildings of the former barracks in Santa as the school campus. These old buildings were used as classrooms which were inappropriate and inadequate because they could not contain more than 20 trainees as their sizes were small.²⁴ The school therefore lacked adequate classrooms until when the school hall was constructed and partitioned with plywood as classrooms which were inadequate for proper implementation of training. The old buildings were also used as dormitories for students but were also inadequate thereby forcing some of the students to look for houses off campus far away from the school. The school does not have a staffroom since creation where trainers could relax before going back to class nor a library, a computer lab and a laboratory to carry out research.²⁵

The infrastructures of the schools were not only inadequate but the ones that were there were in a state of dilapidation.²⁶ The roofs of some of the schools were leaking during the rainy season because the roofs were old like that of the CDSTS Santa and that of the National Cooperative College (NCC) Bamenda. The NCC Bamenda had buildings that were dilapidated requiring an overall rehabilitation in the aspects of electrical, plumbing, the roof, window protectors and doors. The furniture for students out of 150 wooden tables only 50 was good and out of 150 wooden chairs 30 were bad by 2016. Out of the three dormitories in the school, two were good while one was bad. Only 20 beds, 19 foam mattresses were in a fairly good state thereby reducing the number of students living in the dormitories.²⁷

Another institutional constraint was shortage of qualified teachers for the training schools.²⁸ It was, and it is a major challenge of agricultural training in the region. A permanent system for training agricultural teachers was not established nor was the conditions of work conducive to attract the best candidates for this field. Most of the practicing teachers had no formal pedagogical training other than short in-service seminars.²⁹ There is therefore need to establish an agricultural teacher training course in the region leading to a teaching certificate for students recruited from among the staff of the ministries and agencies involved in agriculture. In addition, there was a steady decrease in the staff strength of the schools due to progressive retirement of personnel of the Ministry for example in 1995, the staff of CNFZVH stood at 25 personnel but decreased to 8 personnel in 2016 because of progressive retirement of personnel who were not replaced.³⁰ The few personnel available also had poor understanding of the new training approach. In RCA Bambili for example, out of 12 members of the pedagogic team, only 5 were trained in the new pedagogic approach and declination of the reference document into training sequences and pedagogic animation guide.³¹

²¹ Ibid.

²² Interview with Vitalis Billa, 35 Years, Director RCA Bambili, Bambili, 20th October 2021.

²³ Interview with Walter Tebong Ndah.

²⁴ *Idem*.

²⁵ *Idem*.

²⁶ Interview with Labrang MusaNfor.

²⁷ National Cooperative College Bamenda Sustainable Development Project Report for 2012-2016, 20.

²⁸ Interview with Vitalis Billa.

²⁹ *Idem*

³⁰ CNFZVH Jakiri School Project Report for 2018, 87.

³¹ RCA Bambili School Project Report for 2018, 16.

Also, Trainers faced the problem of heavy work load brought by the new pedagogic approach from AFOP which increased their work load.³² This extra work load was translated by: weekly pedagogic meetings involving the preparation of sequence sheets and pedagogic animation guides upstream, intensive research related to course preparation and development of pedagogic animation tools, collaboration with tutors and resource persons which became increasingly intense (identification, negotiation, advocacy, training).³³ Coupled with the heavy work load was the difficulty faced by trainers to understand and translate some training topics especially for English speaking trainers who work with documents written in French. The English translation at times distorted the original meaning of the topic.³⁴

With the new training approach from AFOP, trainers faced the constraint to define and adjust the course content to the pedagogic objectives.³⁵ The new training program was done on the basis of a reference document that précised pedagogic objective and the indications of content in terms of points of attention or key themes to be addressed. It was up to the trainer to define in terms of constraints and available resources the content and appropriate pedagogic methods for achieving the desired pedagogic goals. This constituted a challenge for trainers since they were used to an already established training programs, précised objectives, chapters to be addressed and pedagogic orientations clearly defined in the former by MINADER.³⁶

The schools faced the constraint of connecting and involving resource persons in training with the new approach from AFOP.³⁷ Within the framework of the implementation of the new approach, the intervention of resource persons was expected on topics for which the pedagogic team lacked skills or competence. The schools faced the following difficulties to involve resource persons in the training: resistance of some trainers vis-a-vis the prevailing pedagogic reforms, scarcity of resource persons for some training topics and limited resources provided for resource persons by the program.³⁸

The inability to effectively support the Professional Settlement of Trained Youths from the schools was another problem that affected the agricultural training schools in the Northwest Region.³⁹ Before 1990, graduates from PRTC Mfonta were assisted with a loan to set up their farms and pay later. Some who involved in the rearing of pigs and in fish farming were provided with a piglet or fingerlings respectively with the intention that they will pass on a piglet to another graduate when their pig put to birth or fingerlings when their fish matured and hatched. This acted as a medium to set up graduates from the school towards self-employment.⁴⁰ The government schools had direct employment into the public service upon graduation before 1989.⁴¹ By 1990, with the effects of the economic crisis and the structural adjustment programmes of the IMF and World Bank, PRTC was unable to continue with the settlement of graduates through loans and the government stopped direct recruitment of graduates there by making graduates to remain without jobs or to look for other means to establish themselves which at times was difficult to raise the funds as most banks needed a collateral security before a loan was contracted.⁴² Even in 2012 when AFOP introduced a new training programme aimed at preparing youths towards self-employment in agriculture upon graduation by

³² Interview with Alexander Ndoh Mufur, 59 years, Former Director of the Technical College of Agriculture Bambili, Mile 4 Nkwen-Bamenda, 13th December 2022.

³³ Interview with Roger Banla Ndzi, 35 years, Chief of Studies Technical School of Agriculture Bambili, Bambili, 20th November 2022.

³⁴ Interview with George Niba, 47 years, Trainer CNFZVH Jakiri, Mile 3 Nkwen-Bamenda, 27th July 2022.

³⁵ Guillaume Hensel Fongang Fouepe and Martial Franck Takamgang, "From Technical Education to Vocational Training in Agriculture: The Change of Paradigm Lived by Trainers of Schools Under Ministries in charge of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry in Cameroon," *International Journal of Current Advanced Research*, 5, 12, (December 2016), 1598.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, 1599.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ RCA Bambili Archive, Minutes of the School Management Board Meeting held on the 18th of January 2016.

⁴⁰ PRTC Mfonta Archive, Evaluation Report for 1997, 10.

⁴¹ School Project Proposal of RCA Bambili Report to AFOP, 2013, 11.

⁴² Interview with Standley Ambe.

giving them loans, the programme is yet to fully implement it as they complain of budget constraints.⁴³

Also, financial difficulty was another institutional constraint faced by the agricultural training schools.⁴⁴ Finances are very important when it comes to the running of any training centre. Without money training in the agricultural schools was bound to crumble. The financial resources of PRTC Mfonta originated from two main areas; internal sources (rents, workshop hosting fees and cattle production) and funding bodies (Bread for the world from Germany, mission 21 from Switzerland and the Methodist relief development fund from the United Kingdom.⁴⁵ In 2006, these funding bodies left thereby leaving the centre with no major donor which had a negative effect on its activities. The PCC which owns the centre did not assist the centre financially but was involved only in policy matters on agriculture thereby leading to the termination of many activities and training programmes of the centre.⁴⁶ For the government agricultural training schools, their sources of income came from government credits, tuition fees, boarding and caution fees and sales from the farm. At times the government credits came in late and at times inadequate to run activities of the schools.⁴⁷ Money realized from the schools also were inadequate thereby making the schools stagnant and not venture into new programmes. Although by 2012 all the schools were involved in the AFOP programme sponsorship, the finances were at times inadequate.⁴⁸

The schools as well faced the constraint of inadequate means of transport.⁴⁹ The schools either lacked or had inadequate means of transportation. This posed as a problem transporting students and staff especially during internships or for field trips. The CDSTS Santa did not have a bus but an old land rover which could not transport more than five students in case of an internship because it was bad.⁵⁰ RCA, Bambili, PRTC Mfonta, NCC Bamenda and TSA Nkambe did not have a bus while CNFZVH owned a 30 seater bus but inadequate to transport more than 30 students for an internship or a field trip out of the region.⁵¹ The schools therefore relied on transportation agencies to transport students to and from internship, seminars or field trips out of the school.⁵²

In addition, most of the mechanization facilities of the training schools were either insufficient or nonexistent.⁵³ This was a serious constraint for a country striving towards second generation agriculture and carrying out training without practical knowledge of the use of mechanization facilities. The CDSTS Santa for example does not own a tractor for practical training and the cultivation of the school farm thereby limiting the practical knowledge of the students and the amount of land cultivated by the school.⁵⁴ The RCA Bambili owned just one that got bad and was not repaired. Although it was replaced by 2016 it was however insufficient for the number of students to use for practical.⁵⁵ The TSA Nkambe also had just one tractor which was old and constantly breaks down for months before it is repaired⁵⁶ while TSA Bambili do not have any but uses that of RCA Bambili for practical lessons on farm mechanisation.⁵⁷ Most of the farm cultivation in the school farms was done by the students with the use of hoes and cutlasses.⁵⁸ None of the schools owned agricultural mechanization facilities like seed drill, combine harvester etcetera there by making the training in agricultural mechanization lacking or insufficient. Access to these mechanization facilities

⁴³ Interview with Vitalis Billa.

⁴⁴ *Idem.*

⁴⁵ PRTCAB, Impact Assessment of PRTC Mfonta Evaluation Report, 2001.

⁴⁶ PRTCAB Mfonta, Presbyterian Rural Training Centre Mfonta Project Document, 2010.

⁴⁷ Interview with Vitalis Billa.

⁴⁸ *Idem.*

⁴⁹ Interview with Walter Ndah.

⁵⁰ *Idem.*

⁵¹ Interview with Victor Nfor.

⁵² Interview with Vitalis Billa.

⁵³ Interview with Walter Ndah.

⁵⁴ *Idem.*

⁵⁵ Interview with Vitalis Billa.

⁵⁶ Interview with Remy Nfor, 35 years, Director Technical School of Agriculture Nkambe, Nkambe, 23rd June 2021.

⁵⁷ Interview with Augustin Tiotsa, 55 years, Director Technical School of Agriculture Bambili, on Phone, 18th March 2022.

⁵⁸ Interview with Brigitte Bih Fru, 36 years, Ex-Trainee of RCA Bambili, Mile Six Mankon, 12th April 2022.

were absent in the North West Region which acted as a hindrance to graduates creating or expanding the cultivation of large acres of land which limits agricultural production and yield.⁵⁹

The schools lacked proper storage and processing facilities to preserve and store agricultural products.⁶⁰ The schools lacked warehouses, cold stores and other modern storage facilities to preserve its perishable products. Processing facilities like modern machines were also absent thereby leading to low level of transformation. This was a problem since most of the things produced were at times sold immediately at very low prices due to lack of processing facilities to process agricultural products thereby making graduates of the schools involved in the cultivation of market gardening products to rely on luck for their products as prices dropped as low as 1000FCFA for a basket of tomatoes.⁶¹ Farmers were therefore forced to sell at such a price because it was perishable and because they did not have adequate storage and processing facilities.

4. POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS

The agricultural training schools faced the problem of insecurity as most of them were not fenced.⁶² The porous nature of the campuses opened them to trespassing by motorbike riders, pedestrians and stray animals. Security lighting within the schools was completely absent.⁶³ This was coupled with the fact that the night watch men employed by the schools were inadequate. The security post of the forces of law and order were located far off from the schools which, at times, when alerted for intervention in the schools when the need arose, it took a lot of time for them to get to the scene.⁶⁴ In the academic year 2007/2008, the RCA Bambili had just one-night watch for the entire school which was too large for him to manage.⁶⁵ These encouraged thieves to break into the schools at night. For example in 2008, thieves break into the offices of the Deputy Director and made away with a projector and the sum of 120,000FCFA Francs and that of documentation carrying a Pentium one computer and a sum of 80,000 CFA Francs.⁶⁶ From 2016 with the beginning of what became known as the Anglophone Crisis, most of the schools were shut down caused by armed gunmen who advocated for school boycott. The situation was too severe that by 2018, the National Cooperative College left its campus and relocated to a dilapidated building at the Regional Delegation of MINADER at up station for safety of students and trainers.⁶⁷

The area where some of the schools were located experienced land conflicts which at times disrupted the activities of the school. PRTC Mfonta, for example, experienced the Bambui–Bafut protracted land dispute since 1968 which affected the centre negatively.⁶⁸ The piece of land where the centre is found was over the years been a source of constant conflict between the two villages. As peace strategies, the piece of land was given to a neutral body the PRTC Mfonta.⁶⁹ Since then, the centre was constantly in court because the two villages continued to claim ownership over the piece of land. As of 2006, the land remained a problem in PRTC Mfonta with four lawsuits with the Bafut community intruding into most of the land. This made officials of the centre to spend time and money on the law suits relating to the land thereby affecting the centre negatively since much time was spent handling court problem rather than concentrating on training and other programmes.⁷⁰ The conflict also created a situation of insecurity as most people and students for fear of being attacked and

⁵⁹ Interview with Standley Ambe.

⁶⁰ Interview with Julita Kinzenwa Kifem, 46 years, Graduate from RCA Bambili, Mile 4 Nkwen-Bamenda, 20th April 2022.

⁶¹ *Idem*.

⁶² Interview with Labrang Musa.

⁶³ *Idem*.

⁶⁴ Interview with Walter Ndah.

⁶⁵ Annual Report of Activities for 2007/2008 Academic year of RCA Bambili, 3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 26.

⁶⁷ Interview with Labrang Musa.

⁶⁸ Noela Fuh Manka'a Nwiselie, "The Presbyterian Rural Training Center Mfonta 1968-2010: An Historical Appraisal," (DIPES II Dissertation in History, ENS Bambili, 2016), 77.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*.

kidnapped on the land abandoned school and their projects thereby halting activities of the school. However, notwithstanding the conflict, PRTC Mfonta remained the legal owner of the land.⁷¹

The liberalization of the economy of Cameroon in the 1990s led to the creation of many privately owned agricultural training schools in the region that offered similar training.⁷² The National Polytechnic University Institute Bamenda was created in 1996 in the region and one of its schools is the school of Agriculture and veterinary science and the school of Agriculture and veterinary science and the Bamenda University of science and Technology which was created in 1995 and went operational in 1998 had a faculty of Agriculture and Rural Development.⁷³ Although PRTC Mfonta admitted students with the First School Leaving Certificate and the government owned schools from the Ordinary Level, the privately-owned universities however reduced their intake at the second cycle with those admitted with the Advanced level. These schools therefore brought unhealthy competition which reduced the intake in the latter.

5. GEOGRAPHICAL CONSTRAINTS

The crops on the school farms of the students were at times affected by pests and diseases.⁷⁴ This was due mostly to the lack of means to purchase insecticides. Pests included nematodes the larval stage of a moth and the okra beetles. The blight disease on the famous “*Igbo*” cocoyam, the green mites on cassava the mosaic disease, the cocoa and coffee blight disease which depleted the quality of crops harvested by farmers in the region.⁷⁵ However, with the agricultural knowledge acquired from the schools, farmers were able to reduce the effects of insects on plants by applying the following insecticides on plants, cymbush used to control insects on vegetables Nordox 50 used on coffee, cocoa and tomatoes, Primicide used on plantains and banana suckers, Herbextra for swamp rice and fungicide Dacobre 500 for all fungicides.⁷⁶ These insecticides were also sold by graduates of these agricultural schools in many parts of the region.

The region also experienced disease on animals. The swine fever for example affected and killed pigs especially in the rainy season. John Bosco Ngwa a graduate of CNFZVH Jakiri attests to the fact that he lost seven pigs in 2014 because of the swine fever which discouraged him from continuing with the rearing of pigs and moved down to Douala where he was employed to work in a ranch as manager.⁷⁷ In 2006, the region also experienced the bird flu pandemic which killed thousands of fowls in the region. Fowls that were not affected were sold at a very cheap price as people were afraid to buy a chicken for fear of health hazards. It was common to buy a chicken at the price of 1000FCFA and a tray of egg at 500FCFA.⁷⁸ This discouraged so many graduates from the schools and farmers in the region to continue or invest in such a venture thereby affecting negatively the relevance of the schools. Miriam Ngwa a graduate from CNFZVH Jakiri explained that to reduce the effects of animal diseases, she constantly vaccinated her animals and sold her mature pigs before the period of the swine fever and restricted visitors from moving closer to the pig sty when there was the outbreak of the swine fever disease.⁷⁹

Climate change was another serious problem affecting the activities of the schools. Precipitation decreased, and temperature rose which caused a decline in agricultural activities.⁸⁰ The rains came and stopped for sometimes after crops were planted thereby keeping farmers confused. Strong winds also at times pushed down the crops to the ground especially plantains and maize or even destroyed the

⁷¹ PRTCAB, Mfonta Impact Assessment of the Presbyterian Rural Training Centre Mfonta Evaluation Report, 2001, 8.

⁷² Interview with Alexander Ndoh Mufur.

⁷³ *Idem*.

⁷⁴ Interview with Dieudonne Nyongo Fointama, 49years, Trainer CDSTS Santa, Santa, 14th April 2022.

⁷⁵ *Idem*.

⁷⁶ *Idem*.

⁷⁷ Interview with John Bosco Ngwa, 38 years, Ex-trainee of CNFZVH Jakiri, Cow Street Bamenda, 28th December 2022.

⁷⁸ *Idem*.

⁷⁹ Interview with Miriam Bih Ngwa, 53 years, Ex-trainee of RCA Bambili, Ntarinkon -Bamenda, 23rd January 2023.

⁸⁰ Jude Ndzifon and Andin Quinter Botanga, “Crop-specific Response to Climate Variability and Agricultural Planning Implications in North West Cameroon,” *Journal of Geography, Environment and Earth Science*, 13, 2 (2017), 5.

flowered beans plants. Attempts to mitigate this problem was using fertilizer, improved seeds, irrigation technique and pesticides.⁸¹ However, although the Cameroon government through its delegations in charge of agriculture, forestry and that of the environment tried to mitigate the effects of climate change, it is still a major problem not only for the region but to the nation and the world.

6. ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS

The economic crisis that hit Cameroon in the 1980s had adverse effects on the agricultural training schools in the North West Region in particular and agriculture as a whole. As a result of the crisis and the Structural Adjustment Programme that recommended a huge retrenchment of Civil servants, the government as from 1989 stopped recruiting graduates directly for the public service.⁸² This discouraged candidates from enrolling into the government owned agricultural schools making admission of students into the schools to come to a temporal halt from 1989 and only resumed in 1991 with self-sponsored candidates.⁸³ Upon resumption in 1991, the number of students seeking admissions into the schools dropped drastically for example in RCA Bambili from 1991 to 1993, cycle B1 students were just five while cycle B2 stood at fifteen.⁸⁴ There was a degradation of existing infrastructures since they were not constantly used and there was a drop in Subvention from the government.

Another economic constraint was the increase in the prices of farm inputs in the market.⁸⁵ This was a very serious problem that affected graduates from these schools especially with the effects of the economic crisis that affected their activities negatively. Students from the government owned schools were no longer employed directly by the public service upon graduation and PRTC Mfonta as well was unable to grant out loans to graduates of the centre to set up their own farms.⁸⁶ This therefore meant that graduates from the schools were to set up their own farms or to look for jobs in NGOs or write a recruitment examination launched by the ministry of public service and administrative reforms. With the skyrocketing prices of farm inputs, it was difficult for most graduates to set up their farms as they were unable to acquire farm inputs because of high prices.⁸⁷

7. SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS

The agricultural training schools were mostly located in villages with traditional holidays which were non-working days.⁸⁸ These traditional holidays disrupted the practical agricultural activities of the schools especially those operating in the villages. In Bafut, for example, where PRTC Mfonta is found, the people consider their week to be eight days and out of the eight days farmers were deprived from farm work for four days as seen in table 1.

Table 1. *Traditional Holidays in Bafut*

	Traditional Holiday	Activity
1	Yieka	Farming was carried out
2	Ijong	Central market day where no farm work was done
3	Njwielah	Farming was carried out
4	Mbindo-oh	Farming was carried out
5	Mumetaa	No farming took place
6	Mutaneba	No farming took place
7	Nko' ofeku	Farming was carried out
8	Ntobali	Farming was carried out

Source: Emmanuel Ngwa Nebasina, “The Bafut chiefdom: A case study in Rural Geography” (post Graduate Dissertation in Geography, University of Yaounde, 1973), 114

⁸¹ Blast Naintoh Muh, Mabel Nechia Wantim and Samuel Ayonghe, “Assessing the Impact of Climate Change and Variability on Irish Potato (*Solanum Tuberosum*) Production from 1995-2015 in Tubah Sub Division, North West Region, Cameroon,” *Journal of the Cameroon Academy of Sciences*, 14, 2 (2018), 116.

⁸² RCA Bambili School Project Proposal to AFOP for 2013, 11.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Interview with Standley Ambe.

⁸⁶ Interview with Bridget Lum Che, 42 years, Ex-trainee PRTC Mfonta, Bambui, 30th August 2022.

⁸⁷ Interview with Grace Mambo Fru, 43 years, Ex-trainee of RCA Bambili, Ntarinkon -Bamenda, 12th August 2022.

⁸⁸ Interview with Walter Ndah.

From table 1, out of the eight days of a week in the Bafut society, farmers were deprived from farm work for four days considering that Christians and almost the rest of the population do not work on Sundays. This was detrimental to trainees from the school as it limited the number of days to work on their plots of farm.⁸⁹

Moreover, cultural belief systems as well was a constraint to the schools. Culturally, most rural dwellers in Cameroon and the Northwest Region in particular believe that one does not need to be trained to do agriculture.⁹⁰ This cultural ideology helped to reduce the number of students willing to study in the schools. Cultural belief also made it difficult for graduates appointed in the various agricultural delegations to execute their know-how because most farmers in the villages were conservatives.⁹¹ Most of the farmers were adamant to implement new technologies acquired from the schools and implemented by the MINADER and the MINEPIA or from NGOs.⁹² The “*ankara*” or slash and burn method destroyed soil nutrients thus reducing yields and most farmers in the region still practiced it irrespective of the sensitization against such practice by the delegations in charge of agriculture.⁹³

The schools also faced as constraint of insufficient supporting infrastructures needed for training.⁹⁴ In RCA Bambili, the source of water is not good for drinking as its catchment area is not regularly treated thereby making the water dirty. This posed as a problem as students and staff living on campus moved distances to acquire water for the house whole which at times took them to the main town Bamenda.⁹⁵ The NCCB was connected to the SNEC network but the water was insufficient as by 2016 the water network experienced shortage especially in the dry seasons which at times stayed for months without water running from their taps.⁹⁶ In the CDSTS Santa there was no portable water sufficient enough to cater for student’s needs in the dormitories and their farms as well as the Director’s house whole. Although the authority of the school tried solving the water scarcity by constructing a bore hole, it at times faced difficulties because of electricity low voltage or blackouts since it was operated using electricity.⁹⁷ The water pump engine also frequently went bad putting the school population on campus on difficulties of getting access to water.⁹⁸

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the constraints that limited the functioning of these agricultural schools in the North West Region of Cameroon, this article recommends that,

Existing structures of the schools should be revamped. Dilapidated structures like leaking roofs, broken benches, shattered poultry and piggery should be renovated to enable teaching and learning process move on smoothly. New structures should also be constructed in the schools to replace some of the very old structures that were not constructed for classrooms and dormitories like the CDSTS Santa whose classrooms and dormitory are inappropriate thereby reducing the number of trainees admitted into the school. Mechanization facilities should also be provided to the schools to train trainees on all the aspects of agricultural mechanization.

The state of Cameroon should also implement the teaching of agriculture as a subject in the Primary and secondary grammar schools. This will hopefully make students to have admiration for agriculture and will orientate them towards the field of agriculture upon leaving secondary school which will indirectly encourage them to enroll in the agricultural training schools in the region and increasing the number of trained farmers in the region to meet up with the challenges of second generation agriculture.

⁸⁹ Interview with Eveline Manka’a, 45 years, Ex-trainee PRTC Mfonta, Mforya-Bafut, 4th April 2023.

⁹⁰ Daniel Mbuh Tambi, “Agricultural Training and Impact on Food Crop Production in Cameroon,” *Journal of Socioeconomics and Development*, 2, 1, (2019), 3.

⁹¹ Interview with Beatrice Bihnwi, 48 years, Ex-trainee of RCA Bambili and Chief of Post for Akofunguba-Bafut, Ntarinkon-Bamenda, 21st July 2021.

⁹² *Idem*.

⁹³ *Idem*.

⁹⁴ Interview with Vitalis Billa.

⁹⁵ Interview with Leonard Loga Lam, 54 years, Former Director of RCA Bambili, on Phone, 23rd July 2021.

⁹⁶ Interview with Labrang Musa.

⁹⁷ Interview with Walter Ndah.

⁹⁸ *Idem*.

The budget allocated for the running of school activities should be increased so that no aspect of training should be left out because of budgetary constraints. A budget should be allocated by the government to set up trainees with upon graduation as loan. This should be done after a presentation of an agricultural project followed by strict supervision to make sure that the trainees do not deviate from the project presented for sponsorship or those who will collect the loan and try to leave the country. The money allocated also by AFOP to set up trainees after graduation should also be increased to cover all graduates trained by the programme and strict follow up too should be implemented to ensure that they invest on what was presented to AFOP for financing as some graduates present a project but receive the finances and engaged in a different venture not linked to agriculture like provision stores thereby not helping to reduce the problem of food insufficiency in the region and Cameroon.

Incubator should be purchased and installed in the schools so that chicken eggs can be hatched to provide constant supply of chicks to farmers at cheaper rates rather than waiting for chicks coming in from near-by Bafoussam or from CEDENO which at times are scarce putting those involved in poultry farming to be out of stock for months. It will also provide finances to help the schools run its activities.

9. CONCLUSION

This article examined the difficulties encountered by agricultural training institutions in the Northwest Region of Cameroon and revealed that, Agricultural Training institutions in the Northwest Region were confronted by a catalogue of challenges. In the first place, some of the institutions did not have consistent or stable sources of finances. The economic crises from the mid1980s, occasioned a downturn in the inflow of international financial aid from donor organisations as well as state subventions. Consequently, the activities of the beneficiary agricultural institutions such as PRTC Mfonta were adversely affected. The activities of the school however continued timidly until 2012 when the AFOP subventions were made available to the institutions. Other challenges included dilapidating infrastructure in training schools, shortage of qualified teachers, inadequate means of transport, insufficient water supply, insufficient mechanization facilities, land conflicts and insecurity. The article suggests recommendations which if taken into consideration, could go a long way to ameliorate the challenges faced by the schools and therefore facilitate their smooth functioning.

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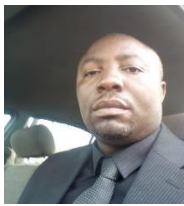
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