

Housing Scheme Developments and Social Amenities in Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) Plantations, 1947-1961: A Historical Analysis

Prof. Simon Tata Ngenge¹, Obi Godfred Ayuk²

¹Vice Dean, Faculty of Law and Political Science, The University of Bamenda, Cameroon

²History Department, Faculty of Arts, The University of Bamenda, Cameroon

Abstract: Plantation involvement in worker's care in the CDC in Cameroon was a phenomenon that practically began after the Second World War.ⁱ Management provision for workers' welfare in the broader sense was virtually non-existent in the German plantations before 1945. This neglect was in striking contrast to the care given to the security and recreation of the senior staff who were all or nearly all, expatriates. With the exception of a few bungalows laid down by the German planters, there were no recreational facilities of any kind provided by estates for workers in the German plantations in Cameroon. The absence of facilities in estate communities was of far more significance than any, comparable to lack of facilities attached to factories. This paper argues that the CDC implemented a policy that prompted the building of housing camps in the plantations. It examines the nature of houses and measures implemented to improve accommodation conditions of the workers. The housing facilities for labourers and administrative staff inherited by the Corporation were far below modern standardsⁱⁱ and even further below those, which the Corporation would have wished ultimately to institute throughout the estates. Apart from the Corporation's own desire in the matter of improving such facilities, the obligations placed upon it by law required the earliest possible remedial action. Consequently, plans were made for the improvement of accommodation housing, throughout the area covered by the estates and the institution of other social welfare services for the employees. How far the Corporation undertook the project of better housing for the labourers is the main concern of this paper. It further examines social amenities provided by the Corporation meant to better the welfare conditions of workers. However it is noted that the housing conditions and amenities were fairly inadequate.

Key Words: Housing Development, Plantation, Labourer, Welfare and Social Amenities

I. INTRODUCTION

The housing policy undertaken by the CDC was divided into three categories, comprising the construction of houses for the senior, intermediary and junior services. The positive structural changes witnessed in the camps carried out by management was a move towards the right direction. By law such work was taken as priority. On the other hand the provision of housing and other amenities for the workers of the Corporation generally was an important portion of the long term policy and obligations of the Corporation, but it

could not be undertaken on any large scale until such time as the Corporation earned moneys from its agricultural and other activities to pay for it. The big programme of African rehousing could not be effectively carried through without the assistance of technical officers from abroad, and they were offered reasonable housing accommodation before they could accept appointments in the Cameroons. In 1948 there was serious shortage of senior staff accommodation in certain areas, and further essential recruitment was falling behind because it was impossible to offer the apt accommodation to married couples, without which men could not willingly join the Corporation's service. It was necessary, therefore, that at that stage of the Corporation's housing development, high priority was given to senior staff housing, otherwise there could be little progress on the main schemes, estimated to cost over £2,000,000.ⁱⁱⁱ

The need to provide good quality houses, welfare and social facilities was fully appreciated by the Corporation. On this premise steps were taken to precede with the construction good houses at maximum speed, but this again was limited by the unavailability of qualified artisans. Installations were made at Bota for the granulation of stones, so that blocks may be made mechanically, while at Tiko machinery was ordered for the brickfield so to increase output mechanically. To facilitate and speed up construction of houses a sawmill and woodwork shop were implanted in Tiko. By summer of 1951 this new workshop was capable of providing prefabricated woodwork for buildings at a good speed. The plans for the replacement of the temporary labourers camps at Missellele estate by modern brick houses was completed in early 1951.^{iv} In Tiko a survey was made on the general plan for re-housing African employees at all levels. In line with this road map the first set of houses for clerks was completed in 1949. On account of house shortages, work on the plan for new housing scheme at Botawas deferred to 1950.

The Corporation was conscious of the need to provide modern houses for its resident labour force. With the exception of a few places where buildings of this sort were erected before World War 1, the construction of new houses was envisaged for the accommodation of 15,000 to

19,000 men. Such a programme could not possibly be accomplished in a short space of time as building materials were difficult to find in the Cameroons and the number of qualified artisans in the building trade was low.^vTo this effect a careful re-consideration was therefore given to review the new housing scheme. The following had to be taken to consideration, the appropriate priorities in the programme, the design of buildings to be erected and most important of all the source of obtaining money for such a large project, which costed over £2,000,000. In 1950 a number of prototype buildings were erected, from which was selected the types to be used for the various classes of employees. Arrangements were also made for the first portion of the work at Tiko and Bota, which was put out to contract as an experiment.

The subjects of improving housing and recreational facilities offered a wide range of possibilities. While permanent structures were erected by the Corporation for its labourers, steps were taken to design houses for the different categories of workers in the plantations. This was to meet the requirements of the different classes of its employees, and it was a recommendable effort to meet the aspirations of all employees.^{vi} Associated with the new designs for housing, was the planning of the layouts for the labourers' camps and the residential areas for the Junior and Senior staff. The intention was to provide adequate land for field sports as well as social halls and indoor recreational facilities and buildings, which could be used for education.

II. CONCEPTUAL ORIENTATION OF SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY IN PLANTATIONS

The concept of social welfare policy has been defined by many scholars, but traditional analysts have approached social policy institutionally, that is, by focusing on specific services such as housing, health, education, social security and better wages.^{vii} In the literature on the 'third world', there have been many studies on specific sectors, housing in particular, but few consider social welfare as a whole. Hence there has been no real consideration of a suitable definition of social policy or welfare in the context of the colonial societies. Furthermore, there has been a concentration on the public sector resulting in such definition as; "The policy of government with regard to action having a direct impact on the welfare of citizens by providing them with services of income".^{viii} Welfare is a broad concept referring to the state of living of an individual or a group, in a desirable relationship with the total environment: ecological, economic and social. The term 'welfare' includes both the social and economic contents of welfare.^{ix} Social welfare activity is primarily concerned with the solution of various problems of the weaker sections of society like prevention of destitution and poverty; it aims at social development by such means as social legislation, social reforms, social service, social work and social action. The objective of economic welfare is to promote

economic development by increasing production and productivity through equitable distribution. The economic welfare activities were such that could be brought directly or indirectly into relation with income earning.

Sharma defines economic welfare as that part of social welfare, which can be brought directly or indirectly into relation with the measuring need of money. According to him, "the economic welfare of a community of a given size is likely to be greater; the larger is the share that accrues to the poor".^x However, he admitted that economic welfare was not the index of total welfare. The word labour means any productive activity. Therefore in a broader sense, the phrase labour welfare means the adoption of measures to promote the physical, social, psychological and general wellbeing of the working population. Welfare work in any industry aims or should aim at improving for the working and living conditions of workers and their families. The concept of labour welfare activities, however, is flexible, elastic and differs from time to time, region to region, plantation to plantation and country to country. This depends upon the value system, level of education, social customs, degree of industrialization, and general standard of the socio-economic development of the people. Social welfare deals with the wellbeing of the entire society. It is not the same as standard of living but is more concerned with the quality of life and includes factors such as the quality of the environment (air, soil, and water), level of crime; extent of drug abuse, availability of essential social services as well as religious and spiritual aspects of life.^{xi} At the plantations, welfare will include better housing, wages, vocational training, equal remuneration, hours of work and overtime, welfare facilities and prevention of accidents.

III. NATURE OF CDC HOUSES IN THE PLANTATIONS

It is regretted that the type of housing, which existed on the estates was far from ideal. The Corporation undertook a rebuilding programme of improved types of houses in the labour camps and in the residential areas for its senior and junior staff. It took many years, however, before the rehousing of staff in up to date standard could be completely effected. A large majority of the labour force was housed in temporary wooden buildings, and this continued so long as rapid agricultural developments were being made. There was a limit to the rate, at which those wooden buildings could be replaced by permanent structures. Nevertheless, new camps of permanent constructions and of a very much improved type providing a total of ninety-six rooms were erected in 1947 and a much enlarged programme for further housing facilities was undertaken in 1948.^{xii}

IV. MASUE LABOUR CAMP CARRABOARD BUILDINGS TIKO (1949)



Source: CDC Annual Report for the Year 1950, 10

Instantaneous Difficulties

The Corporation was therefore faced with a most difficult problem. The existing craftspeople were not well trained, and the daily output per man was probably as low as anywhere in the world.^{xiii} The training of young men was therefore a matter of the greatest urgency, but any such scheme took time to produce results, and the output of the proposed training school, which was about to be built by government, could not have any noticeable bearing on the Corporation's building programme for a number of years. The importation of artisans from Nigeria helped to accelerate work, but this involved the provision of housing for these men, and in any case the large development plan in Nigeria absorbed all the skilled men available. There was also great resentment by the Cameroons people when labour was brought in from other places, and the importees did not settle down happily.^{xiv} Part of the answer to the above difficult problem was in the use of prefabricated building material, either of local manufacture or from factory production overseas. Investigations and experiments were carried out in this direction. Locally, tests were made with blocks composed of lateritic and other soils mixed with cement in quantities of one part cement to fifteen or eighteen parts. Improvements were made in the quality and quantity of burnt bricks, produced from local clay, while other experiments were carried out with blocks made from mixtures with a base of a light volcanic rock bound with cement and sand.

The experiments all gave good promise of providing building materials, although weathering tests over an appropriate period was carried out. They did not, however, contribute materially, at this stage, to the rate of building, as they required artisan workers for erection and carpenters and joiners for the doors, windows and roof structures. If, however, prefabricated doors, windows and roof structures could be obtained, it would have been possible that the erection of simple structures could be effectively accelerated in due course. Another line of investigation was in the purchase of prefabricated metal buildings or metal frames and roofs, to which curtain walls of local materials could be added after erection of the frame. Experiments were carried out in collaboration with the Bristol Aeroplane Company Ltd. for the provision of several experimental prototype buildings made of

aluminum frames and roofs with sheet aluminum sides lined with wall board and insulated with glass wool. Such buildings were more expensive than those built of traditional materials, but had the advantage of being erected quickly once the foundations have been provided. It appeared, however, that there was public health objection to double walls, and it was seen that sheet aluminum was sufficiently strong to withstand the wear and tear inseparable from occupation by labourers.^{xv} Another type of building, which was to be the subject of experiment as soon as deliveries were made, were structures consisting of steel columns carrying tubular steel double roof structures, covered with asbestos sheets. The walls were to be constructed locally. This type of building was undoubtedly useful for many purposes, but was not used for housing of labourers as it was not possible to divide it into rooms with adequate ventilation, as required by law. The other disadvantage was the limitation on the export of steel from the United Kingdom, which prevented such buildings from being available in adequate quantities

Undoubtedly, in due course, one or more successful methods emerged from these experiments, but in the interim it was unavoidable to continue using improved types of traditional buildings wherever the lack of accommodation required immediate housing for labour. Notwithstanding the difficulties explained, some progress with permanent structures made during the year, included new brick-built labourers' houses at Missellele, which were of various kinds. A plan was prepared for a completely New Layout in Tiko, covering up-to-date housing for administrative staff and unskilled labour force at all levels. This plan included proper spacing and the provision of recreational facilities, it was expected that the first phase of the plan will commence early in 1949. A similar plan was in preparation for Bota, where housing was difficult and left much to be desired. It was necessary in this case to erect temporary structures before demolition and rebuilding could commence.^{xvi} Building of new camps at Buea Farms was contemplated in the 1949 programme, but decisions regarding priorities for rehousing in other areas depended on policies as to plantings of permanent crops.

Junior Service and Labourer Housing

Expansion of operations necessitated increases in staff. The junior service and labour force rose to nearly 4,000 in 1951, requiring the erection of a good deal of temporary housing. The programme for erecting additional senior service houses at Bota and Tiko continued as departmental work and new houses were also built at Ekona. Revised plans for a simple form of senior service house were prepared and proved to be relatively easy for construction. This provided a comfortable and adequate quarter. The two schemes of permanent housing for labourers in Tiko and Bota in 1951 continued under contract with Costain (West Africa). These two contracts, amounted to 1,000 two-roomed houses. Plans were prepared for a further permanent labour housing layout at Missellele to replace the remainder of the temporary housing on that estate

and work was expected to be completed in 1952. Plans were also under consideration for the extension of permanent housing for labourers at Ekona and some thirty to forty intermediate service houses were completed towards the end of 1952 and early in 1953.^{xvii}

V. HOUSES OF LABOURERS AT THE NEW VILLAGE IN BOTA, 1951



Source: CDC Annual Report for the Year 1951, 8

Labour and Intermediate Housing

Rapid progress was made for the programme of the building of labour housing in 1951. The principal developments were in Tiko and Bota, where 2,000 rooms of permanent housing were erected under contract in the different camps. Renovations were carried out in many of the temporary buildings in various camps. In line with this policy a number of permanent or semi-permanent buildings were constructed in the outstations. The Corporation further programmed the construction of permanent houses for labourers at the new layout CDC Headquarters.^{xviii} The contract with Messrs Costain (West Africa) Ltd, which provided for the building of permanent houses for workers at Bota and Tiko, resulted to 1,403 two-roomed houses and twenty-four intermediate service houses completed by the end of the year. A revived standard design for workers housing to be built with timber departmentally by the engineering division was approved and construction commenced at Ekona and Tombel. The standard design consisted of concrete with timber superstructure and metal sheet roofs.^{xix}

VI. INTERMEDIATE SERVICE HOUSE BOTA, 1952



Source: CDC Annual Report for the Year 1952, 11

Again, 1953 was a year of expansion and development in the Corporation's activities, particularly in the development of housing. The principal capital works programme was a continuation of the construction of labour housing. Progress continued to be made in the provision of new and improved housing for all grades of the Corporation's staff. 800 rooms were constructed departmentally at various plantations during 1954, at an approximate cost of £100,000, whilst at Ekona, Messrs. Costain completed three intermediate staff quarters, twenty-one junior staff quarters and sixteen labour line rooms.^{xx} The Corporation's contract for permanent labour housing in the Bota and Tiko area were completed. This resulted in a further 1,346 single-room and 154 double-room quarters being commissioned during the year. Labour housing of a semi-permanent type mainly of timber construction was completed departmentally at N'Sonne Moliwe, Mabeta, Molyko, Meanja, Mukonje, Ekona and resulted in a further 1,200 rooms made available.^{xxi} The main labour line programme in 1955 was at Idenau, where permanent houses in block work with arcon roofs were constructed. The camps at Scipio, Rechsfluss and Sanje were completed ahead of schedule, a total of 460 rooms. Work commenced on the Bibundi camp of 180 rooms and by the end of the year some forty rooms were completed and ready for occupation.^{xxii} At N'sonne Moliwe 100 rooms were completed in semi-permanent construction and five junior service two-roomed houses were constructed and occupied. In the Bota area forty-nine aqua privies were constructed, eleven at Ekona, and in Tiko work was commenced on the construction of a further sixty.

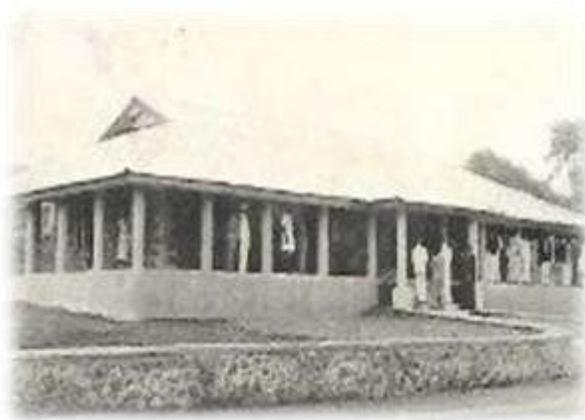
The year 1956 was that of great endeavour, and despite innumerable difficulties, the Corporation came through with considerable success. At the beginning of the year, it was anticipated that £1 million would be made available by the Federal Government as loan to carry out further development in accordance with the Corporation's long term programme. However, early in the year, the Corporation was informed that this sum would not come forth immediately pending on an inquiry into the federal structure and viability of the Corporation. Thus it became necessary to restrict very considerably the development programme and all capital works.^{xxiii} A semi-permanent camp at Bolifamba, comprising of 180 rooms, was completed early in the year. In addition, seventy-two Arcon-type labour lines were constructed at Bibundi. Nine intermediate service type quarters were constructed, five in Bota and four in Tiko. Conversion of intermediate service staff latrines to W.C.'s was carried out in Bota. Five aqua latrines, to replace pail closets, were constructed in Bota, four in the German labour line and one in the industrial area.^{xxiv} The following buildings were completed during the year; twelve car garages at new Head Office, modification of the cold store in Tiko, and the slaughter house in Victoria for Native Authority. Beside the construction of accommodation houses for labour the Corporation also carried out the construction of social,

educational and other welfare buildings all over the plantations of the Corporation.

Provision of Social amenities

In this domain reading rooms were added to the community hall at Bota Middle Farm Village and a new small social hall designed to be erected at Central Bota for the use of senior members or the junior service and the intermediate service staff. A Senior Service Club was erected at Bota adjoining a swimming pool. Work was commenced on a new workers' shop at the Bota Village. Plans were in hand for similar facilities to be provided in Tiko in 1952. A new workers' shop at Bota Middle Farm, was completed as part of the new village layout. A Senior Service Club was erected in Tiko and the intermediate service Staff Club at Bota was opened.^{xxv} The building of the community halls in Tiko and Ekona, which was commenced in 1954, was completed. The Senior Service Club at Ekona was officially opened the same year.

VII. CDC INTERMEDIATE SERVICE CLUB CENTRAL BOTA, 1952



Source: CDC Annual Report for the Year 1952, 13

Water and electricity supply

One of the most important works, which was undertaken in the near future was the improvement of existing and the installation of new water supplies. Drilling equipment was expected to be delivered early in 1948 but it was regrettable that after many months of careful enquiry, not a single quotation was obtained for well linings, which were so essential to the welfare of the workers. Difficulties were also being experienced in obtaining pipes and the immediate prospect, therefore, for improvement of piped water supplies was far from satisfactory. In 1950, improvements were made to the minor water supplies at Idenau and some of the smaller ones but the three major schemes in connection with water, which were dealt with during the year concerned were at Bota, Tiko and Missellele. At Bota it was found necessary to go further up the Limbe River to obtain a sufficient supply of water to cover anticipated future needs in the Bota area. A

scheme was prepared by the Corporation's Chief Engineer and his assistants and the necessary pipes were expected to be delivered during 1951. Pumping equipment, together with a suitable sized filtration and chlorination plant, was on order for delivery during 1951. The new scheme was in full operation early in 1952. Some assistance were given to the Victoria water requirements from this scheme.^{xxvi} A similar type of scheme was planned for Tiko, where water was taken from the Ndongo River. Here again, equipment and piping were ordered for delivery for the installation in 1952. A number of small schemes were installed to meet immediate requirements for water in the area. The third main scheme dealt with during the year was at Missellele to provide adequate water for general purposes. A dam was erected, pumping equipment ordered and the installation of a 3 in. main with settling tanks.^{xxvii}

The generation of electricity was bound up with the Government's proposals for the installation of a large hydroelectric plant at Njoke and negotiations took place with the government in regard to this matter. It seemed unlikely that power was to be available from this source for two or three years and in the interim it was essential that steps be taken to maintain supplies to the estates, particularly at Bota. With this end in view, arrangements were made with the government for the Corporation to install new diesel machinery at Bota, which was capable of supplying both the Corporation's requirements and the needs of the new installation for the general public in the town of Victoria. The Corporation was glad to be able to assist the people of the Cameroons in this way by providing the town of Victoria with the electric current until such time as the government scheme was in operation.^{xxviii} The Corporation operated several electric power plants, which were taken over with the estates, including three hydro-electric stations. Several new small generating plants were installed at outlying places during the year. An order was placed for three diesel-driven generators, each of 100 K.V.A (Kilo Voltage Ampere) capacity, to be installed at Bota. The installation of these plants were in progress and they provided current to the Corporation activities and housing in the Bota area until such time when the government hydro-electric scheme was installed to provide current for use in the town of Victoria. For the latter purpose the Nigerian Government Electricity Undertaking took power in bulk from the Corporation's plant at Bota and distributed it through the town. A large portion of the overhead wiring system and installations for Victoria was already completed. It was expected that the new Bota plant will be in operation in 1949.^{xxix} Negotiations with the electricity Corporation of Nigeria in connection with the future of supplies of electricity to the Corporation and the use of the Corporation's established hydro-electric stations continued but without any result. The power station at Bota, which was equipped with 3 high-speed diesel generating plants, continued to supply electricity to the Corporation's activities in Bota and to the town of Victoria. The demands on this station, however, increased beyond its capacity and as a

result were some difficulties in maintaining the machines at a level of efficiency.

The hydro-electric power station at Malele and at Leurmannfall on the Ekona Estate were completely overhauled during 1947 and put in a good state of efficiency although new parts were required for the Leurmannfall generators. Improvements and rehabilitation were also carried out in connection with the power station at Bota.

In the areas of recreation the plantation communities had facilities of playing games, organizecultural dances and intra-camp competitions. The organization of recreational activities was well established, with thirty-one playing fields, permanent community halls in the main camps and temporary ones in several others at good range and stock of equipment. The results of these activities culminated in the success of the teams in teams in 1955. That faithful year the CDC football team won the Commissioner's Cup and the United African Company's Cup. The awards for football and in the newly donated Courban Cup for Corporation teams only, forty-seven teams took part. In addition, the teams selected to play representative games against teams from other territories organised by the Southern Cameroons Amateur Football Association, were composed largely of football players from CDC.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Historically, the provision of housing had been used to control workers and also to advance the claims of CDC that the Corporation benefitted the whole society, with part of that

benefit accruing from the provision of houses at Corporation cost, and hence to justify low wages. The CDC succeeded to improve the housing conditions for senior service workers of the plantations. The quick decision taken by the Corporation after 1947 to renovate existing labourers houses and to construct new ones was a step towards the right direction but it failed to meet the aspiration of the labourers. This decision facilitated constant labour supply, without which the Corporation risked facing labour drought. Those who enjoyed this housing policy were not the labourers but rather the senior service workers who lived in big self-contained houses and chalets. The labourers were left to squeeze themselves into single camp rooms with their families often short of good basic amenities like potable water, electricity, good drainage and toilet systems. Beside the provision of accommodation houses, the CDC policy was meant also to provide recreational facilities to the workers. These facilities were meant to entertain the workers and make them feel at home after a strenuous day's job. The Corporation promoted sports and athletics and other activities such as film shows, which were projected by mobile caravans. Beside all these, the labour villages were provided with community halls for their meetings and markets where workers could buy foodstuff at 'reasonable' prices. Though the initial objective of the Corporation was to develop the social well-being of the workers, the policy was abandoned. Labourers were exploited as the senior service staff enjoyed all the benefits of the Corporation to the detriment of the labourers who toiled all day for the prosperity of the Corporation.

END NOTE

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^{iv}Cameroons Development Corporation, *Annual Report for the Year 1949* (Victoria: n.p. 1949), 14

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^{xvi}Ibid., 9

^{xvii}Ibid., 11.

^{xviii}Ibid., 16.

^{xix}Cameroons Development Corporation, *Annual Report for the Year 1952* (Victoria: n.p. 1952), 10..

^{xx}Cameroons Development Corporation, *Annual Report for the Year 1954* (Victoria: n.p. 1954), 14.

^{xxi}Ibid., 15

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^{xxiv} H. Labouchere and D. Skalidou, *‘Living and working conditions in the banana sector in the South West Cameroon.* (Research Report, 15/09/2012), 52.

^{xxv}Cameroons Development Corporation, *Annual Report for the Year 1952* (Victoria: n.p. 1952), 10.

^{xxvi}Cameroons Development Corporation, *Annual Report for the Year 1950* (Victoria: n.p. 1950), 13.

^{xxvii}Joshua Tata, Retired Tapper, Missellele, 15th August, 2017.

^{xxviii}Eddie Long, Retired CDC Senior Staff, IsokoloLimbe, 13th October, 2017.

^{xxix}Simon, Abanda Retired CDC engineering worker, Tiko, 12 November, 2017.