

# Communication in the British Colonial Bamenda Grassfields: Development of Post Offices and Postal Services

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**Abstract:** Communication remains a fundamental aspect of man's life, existence, interactions and evolution. This paper takes off from indigenous African communication (modes and mediums), to examine the enhancement of communication in the British Colonial Bamenda Grassfields. The study based on a vast array of archival and secondary sources, unveils the centrality of the need of a flexible and fluid communication channel in the implementation and effectiveness of the colonial machinery in the Bamenda Grassfields. The study also reveals the readiness and engagement of the indigenes in the development of post offices and postal services as it was a means through which they sustained contacts and affinities with their kith and kin whom most migrated to distant coastal towns in search of jobs and livelihood. The development of post offices and postal agencies was a very popularly welcomed initiative especially amongst the indigenes. One can therefore maintain that the development of post offices and postal services in the Bamenda Grassfields was thanks to the collective efforts of the colonial administration and the indigenes. This also laid the foundation for post-colonial communications services. In fact, most if not all of the vestiges of the British colonial administration in terms of communication channels and services in the Bamenda Grassfields were the first generation of post-independence postal operations and services.

**Key Words:** Bamenda Grassfields, Communication, Colonialism, Post Office, Postal Services.

## I. INTRODUCTION

On July 12, 1884, the Germans annexed the coast of Cameroon in what became known as the Germano-Duala treaty. After the annexation of the coast, the Germans embarked on a rapid expansion to consolidate and expand both their commercial and economic activities along the coastal areas. The Germans were unfamiliar with the interior especially the Bamenda Grassfields which hitherto the exploratory trips of Dr. Eugen Zintgraff from 1888 had not been visited by any German. In the hope to get to the Adamawa area, Zintgraff had to pass through the Bamenda Grassfields.<sup>1</sup> His trip started from Duala in 1888 and he arrived Bali in the Bamenada Grassfields in January 1889. Zintgraff was welcomed in Bali and during his stay there, he

contracted a blood pact with Fon Galega I of Bali-Nyonga. Due to the friendly attitude of the Bali and in the hope to establish direct trading contacts with the Germans, Zintgraff made Bali the headquarters of the future German administration of the Western Grassfields.<sup>2</sup> On August 23 1891, Zintgraff signed a treaty of protection with Fon Galega I of Bali-Nyonga and by consequence cemented the choice of Bali as the headquarters of the German administration in the Bamenda Grassfields. Despite the friendly and warmth connections which the Germans and the Bali had, the administrative station of the Germans was transferred from Bali to Bamenda in 1902 with the erection of a military fort. The central position of Bamenda eased the recruitment and protection of labour from the surrounding ethnic groups.<sup>3</sup> Again, the strategic position of the hill top with its steep descent into the valley down the low lands must have struck the German colonizers to build their military fortress on the promontory.<sup>4</sup> From the Bamenda military station, the Germans set out to subjugate all the villages and chiefdoms of the Bamenda Grassfields and by 1906, all the chiefdoms of the Bamenda Grassfields had been brought under German administration.<sup>5</sup>

Before delving into the crux of the subject, it is imperative to understand the ethnology of the Bamenda Grassfields. The Bamenda Grassfields is the present North West Region of Cameroon and counts over 30 ethnic groups and languages.<sup>6</sup> The term Bamenda Grassfields emanated during the German colonial administration due to the areas vast grassy nature and high altitudes and is constituted of principal ethnic groups; Tikar, Widekum, Chamba, Tiv and Mbembe. The Tikars are composed amongst other chiefdoms

<sup>1</sup> Walters Che-Mfombong, "Bamenda Division under British Administration 1916-1961: From Native Administration to Local Government", (MA Thesis in History, University of Yaounde), 1982, 37.

<sup>2</sup> E. M. Chilver, "Paramountcy and Protection in the Cameroon: the Bali and the Germans, 1889-1913", in Prosser Gifford and W M. Roger Louis(eds.), *Britain and Germany in Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 483.

<sup>3</sup> Che-Mfombong, "Bamenda Division under British Administration", 39.

<sup>4</sup> Adri Van den Berg, *Women in Bamenda: Survival Strategies and Survival to land* (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 1992), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Adig Mathias Azang and Nfi Joseph Lon, "Chiefs and the Crisis of Transition from German to British Administration in the Bamenda Grassland of Cameroon, 1916-1922", *International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences*, Vol. 4, No. 5, 2.

<sup>6</sup> V G Fanso *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges*, Vol.2 : Colonial and Post Colonial Times, (London: Macmillan, 1989).

of Kom, Nso, Mbiame, Bum, Bafut, Mbaw, Tang, Babungo, Bamessi, Bamali, Bamunka, Babanki, Fungom. The Widekum is constituted by; Essimbi, Meta, Beba-Befang, Ngemba, Ngie, Ngwo, Mankon, Mogamo, Chomba. Likewise, the Chamba include Bali-Nyonga, Bali-Kumbat, Bali-Gangsin, Bali-Gashu, Bali-Gham. While the Tiv is made of the Aghem Federation and the Mbembe's are composed of Mfumte, Misaje and Mbembe.<sup>7</sup> It was administered as part of the British Southern Cameroons following the partition of Cameroon after the defeat of the Germans in the First World War in 1916. The people of the Bamenda Grassfields share similar social and political institutions that knitted them into tight units and common descent in state formation. The geographical space they shared developed cultural uniformity which fostered inter-ethnic communication, trade and socio-cultural intercourse.<sup>8</sup>

Communication in pre-colonial Bamenda like in other parts of Cameroon was mostly through indigenous modes and mediums. The locals used talking drums that transmitted messages over long distances by the sounds they produced when beaten.<sup>9</sup> Town criers beat gongs, played flutes and trumpets in transmitting messages from the Fon or chief to his subjects and within the context of inter chiefdom relations, communication was mostly done through foot messengers.<sup>10</sup> The Tikars were associated more with town criers and talking drums. Most of the ethnic groups had two types of town criers; the Royal town criers who were answerable to the Fon (or chief), disseminated important information and announcements from the palace to the rest of the villages while the compound heads were the town criers of the commoners and they relayed the information to all the ends of the fendom or chiefdom.<sup>11</sup> Inter chiefdom communication in the Bamenda Grassfields was made possible through messengers or runners bearing messages and were variously known as *chindas* or *chisendos*.<sup>12</sup> These were some of the mediums of transmitting information or messages from the palace to the subjects or from community to community. It was on these African traditional mediums of communication that colonial communication operation was established. The establishment of the German colonial administration saw a change in the system of communication in relations to the sending and receiving messages. The

Germans introduced the postal system in Cameroon during the early years of their administration.<sup>13</sup> By the time they were ousted from Cameroon at the end of the First World War, postal services had been rendered in Bamenda, but no permanent post office structure was set up. The system made use of messengers and relay runners to transport mails. The mails often transported into or from the Bamenda Grassfields were mostly administrative mails to administrative authorities, fons and other colonial officials as they mostly served only administrative bodies during the early years of its establishment.<sup>14</sup>

Upon taking over the administration of the British Southern Cameroons after the First World War and for effective administration, the territory was split into divisions. The division were: Kumba, Victoria, Nkambe, Ossindinge (Mamfe), Dschng and Bamenda divisions and were administered by Divisional Officers (D.Os). The divisions were further divided into sub divisions under the tutelage of Assistant Divisional Officers (ADOs). The D.O was under the Resident in Buea who in turn was answerable to the Lieutenant Governor General in Enugu, Nigeria. Whilst the Lieutenant Governor General had the Governor General in Lagos as his direct boss and who received direct order from the Secretary of State for Colonies in London.<sup>15</sup> With the successful establishment of the colonial administration, there was the need for an effective communication system to ease the transmission of administrative orders, policies, decisions in the form of mails, letters, telegraphs, mobility of goods and persons into and from the Bamenda Grassfields. Regrettably, communication in the Bamenda Grassfields like in most parts of the Cameroon Province was rendered difficult by long and inaccessible distances to the interior, poor road network and under population in most parts of the territory which made the process of collecting and dispatching mails daunting.<sup>16</sup> To overcome these hurdles especially within the Bamenda Grassfields, the colonial administration made use of flag post mail relay runners, a system which had been introduced by the Germans.<sup>17</sup> Considering the importance of communication in administration and governance, communication was a very pivotal instrument within the colonial machinery as it was essential for the fluidity and flexibility of the colonial administration.<sup>18</sup> In light with the "Modernization" project of colonial policies, the introduction of new communication technologies was a means of rendering the interiors more accessible and making the "modern" state governance more efficient.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Paul Nchoji Nkwi, *Traditional Diplomacy: A Study of Inter Chiefdom Relations in the Western Grassfields, North West Province of Cameroon (Yaounde Cameroon: Department of Sociology, University of Yaounde)*, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Lon Nfi, "Colonial and Post-Colonial Migrations and *Le Vivre Ensemble* in the Cameroon Grassfields", *Sumerianz Journal*, Vol. 2, No 9, 2019, 155.

<sup>9</sup> Walter Gam Nkwi and Mirjam De Bruijn, "Human Telephone Lines": Flag Post Mail Relay Runners in British Southern Cameroon.(1916-1955) and the Establishment of Modern Communication network "*International Review of Social History* 59, Issue, 22, 2014, 212-213..

<sup>10</sup> Walter Gam Nkwi, "Communication in Africa: Talking Drums and Town Criers in Pre-Colonial and Colonial Bamenda Grassfields, Cameroon", *Saber and Scroll Journal*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, 2018, 17-18.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Nkwi and De Bruijn, "Human Telephone Lines", 218.

<sup>13</sup> R.J. Maddocks, *The Postal arrangement of the Anglo-French Cameroons Expeditionary force 1914-1916* (Shropshire: Herald printers, 1916), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Ngoran, "Communication in the Bamenda Grassfields", 67-68.

<sup>15</sup> NAB, File, no.cb (1917) 7, Report No. 3- 1917 Cameroon Province Annual Report for the Year ended December 1917.

<sup>16</sup> Nkwi and De Bruijn, "Human Telephone Lines", 212.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

The flag post mail runners transported mails from one to place to another and were the colonial administrative facilitators. This system constituted of “flag posts” huts with a flag on the huts. Each division had a particular flag colour which distinguished it and the mails from the other divisions. Ossidinge (Mamfe) used blue; Bamenda had white, blue and white for Kumba, while Buea and Victoria used red and white.<sup>20</sup> This was especially as the bulk of the population could not read nor write. As such, it was easier for the mail runners to dispatch and distribute the mailbags to their destination by their particular colours.<sup>21</sup> In a memorandum from the Resident of the British Southern Cameroons E.C. Duff to the Governor General in Lagos dated 5 December, 1916, he illustrated the inconveniences which the administration faced as far as communication and the dispatch of mails was concerned. The distance between the administrative headquarters and poor road network delayed the forwarding of mails. He went further to intimate that the quicker and only means of solving the problem was through the imposition of the flag post relay runners system.<sup>22</sup> The dispatch of mails was the principal means by which all the colonial actors or departments of the colonial machinery communicated. As such, flag post mail runners were indispensable. In 1916, the total value of mails from the Bamenda division was 23 % of the total budget of 10,280 pounds.<sup>23</sup> This implies that communication was very pivotal in the effective implementation of the colonial machinery. Communication operations and services in the Bameda Grassfields were dynamic and flexible as there was also the establishment of post offices and postal services that functioned alongside the flag post relay runners system and later on became the main communication channels.

## II. POST OFFICES AND POSTAL SERVICES

The next phase in enhancing communication was the transformation of flag post huts into permanent post houses.<sup>24</sup> The establishment of the relay runner system and the use of messengers set the platform for the appropriate use and functioning of the post and telegraph communication.<sup>25</sup> The postal system put in place by the colonial administration was the Royal Mail.<sup>26</sup> The first post office in Bamenda was set up to function as a sub post office. It was officially opened to the public on February 10, 1919.<sup>27</sup> This was just a temporary office and due to its temporal nature, the system was rendered

handicapped as it was unable to protect its instruments.<sup>28</sup> The construction of a semi-permanent post office in Bamenda was therefore started in 1924 and completed in 1925.<sup>29</sup> The office was located at the station hill in the old German fort and was constructed of mud and stones.<sup>30</sup> This building hosted the post office until 1956 when a new building was erected down town along the Commercial Avenue Street.<sup>31</sup> The post office operated two services; the mail service and the telegraphic service.

## III. MAIL SERVICES

The mail service was charged with the delivery of mails by any means of transportation; by foot mostly or with the use of bicycles. Mails for collection were dropped in pillar boxes stationed in different parts of the towns and were regularly collected by the post messengers. As time passed, the colonial officials encouraged the public to use the services of the post office in sending mails as income was generated for the running of the post office. Likewise, telegraphs were paid according to the number of words contained in the message transmitted.<sup>32</sup> The means of transporting mails was dynamic as time evolved. By November 1, 1944 for instance, mails from Mamfe to Bamenda were transported by lorry once a week instead of runner messengers.<sup>33</sup> By 1950, four wheel Austin lorry mail vans were introduced and they operated a three times weekly delivery of mails from major towns like Buea, Victoria, Tiko, Kumba, Mamfe and Bamenda, Nkambe, Wum, while at times it was twice a week due to the bad of roads.<sup>34</sup> Letters were the most common things posted using the post office. Using the Post Office for communication meant that a letter had to be written. When the letter was brought to the post office, the sender bought a stamp according to the weight of the letter and placed it on the letter before keeping it for posting.<sup>35</sup> The stamps were a source of revenue for the postal system. Stamps were sold at different prices, depending on the weight of the mail.<sup>36</sup> When the mail bag was received at the post office, it was opened in the presence of the Post Master and the next process known as sorting. Sorting was the process of separating the mail according to their different destinations. After sorting, the mail was put in bags, according to their destinations, sealed and dispatched.

The post system was a fast means of long distance communication that attracted the general public. This led to

<sup>20</sup> NAB, File, no. Ag/1 Memorandum no. 901/10 from Residents Office Buea 23 December 1916. Kumba, Victoria, Ossidinge, Chang, Bamenda.

<sup>21</sup> Nkwi and De Bruijn, “Human Telephone Lines”, 217.

<sup>22</sup> NAB, File no. 23/Ag Memorandum no. 354/1916 from the Residents Office, E. C. Duff Resident, Cameroon Province, Buea, 5, December 1916 to Post Master General Lagos.

<sup>23</sup> NAB, File CB, 1918/2, Bamenda Province Annual Report.

<sup>24</sup> Walter, “Human Telephone Lines”, 232.

<sup>25</sup> Ngoran, “Communication in the Bamenda Grassfields”, 67.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>27</sup> NAB, File No, Cb1919/1, file no 53/1920B, Annual report 1919 Bamenda Division.

<sup>28</sup> NAB, File No. Cb1921/1, file no 520/22, Bamenda division annual report 1921.

<sup>29</sup> NAB, File No.Cb1925/1, file no 1568, Bamenda Division annual report 1925.

<sup>30</sup> NAB, File No.Cb1924/2, Quaterly reports on the Bamenda Division, Cameroons Province March 1924-September 1927.

<sup>31</sup> Ngoran, “Communication in the Bamenda Grassfields,” 68.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>33</sup> NAB, File No. Cb1944/1, Annual report 1944 Bamenda Division.

<sup>34</sup> NAB, File No.AB83, Report by His majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the general assembly of the United nations on administration of the Cameroon’s under United Kingdom trusteeship for the year 1952.

<sup>35</sup> Ngoran “Communication in Bamenda Grassfields,” 63.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

the creation of postal agencies in the different Native Authority areas within the Bamenda Grassfield such as in Ndu, Nsaw, Nkambe, Wum, Mbengwi.<sup>37</sup> These agencies were directly linked and operated under the post office in Bamenda.<sup>38</sup> Postal Agencies served community needs where full departmental post office facilities were not warranted.<sup>39</sup> Even though postal agencies were linked to the post office in Bamenda, they were maintained by the native authorities.<sup>40</sup> The Post and Telegraphs Department of Southern Cameroons took responsibility for mail delivery in an area only when it became a full-fledged post office.<sup>41</sup> Postal Agencies were only created when the area proved that it could take responsibility for the expenses.<sup>42</sup> The Postal Agencies to a larger extent served the local people in the communities than the colonial authorities. To this effect, the District Officer in Victoria wrote:

Postal agencies can be established whenever justified on the understanding that it is sufficiently supported by the area concerned. They will be required to bear any expense above the payment made by the department for ethical work done. If any business of the agency expands and adequate support from the public is forthcoming, the post office department will take over the entire working. If business does not expand, the post office will pay for the actual work done and if the office account be carried on with this payment only, the agency must be closed. The department is not justified in spending money for a service which is not adequately supported. The people concerned must pay the excess cost unless the service is approved by government for administrative reasons<sup>43</sup>

Postal agencies were greatly the duty of the Native Authority areas. Conscious of the need for agencies in their areas, the native authorities did not hesitate in encouraging the establishment of the agencies in their areas. It was needed for the collection and delivery of mail to the Bamenda Post Office in order to ease communication with family and friends away from the area.<sup>44</sup> This was more so due to the fact that a good number of family members and grassfielders had moved to the coastal or forest zones in search of plantation jobs and source of livelihood in the trading firms and companies. Thus there was the need to foster and keep communication and affinities with their kith and kin back home or with those away from home. This was the case in Ndu in the Nkambe division.

<sup>37</sup> Ngoran ‘‘ Communication in Bamenda Grassfields,’’64.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> NAB. AB87, Report by His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the general assembly of the United Nations on administration of the Cameroon’s under United Kingdom trusteeship for the year 1956.

<sup>40</sup> NAB, File No. Ci 1954/1, Wum Division annual report for 1954.

<sup>41</sup> NAB, File No. Rg1953/1, Mail services.

<sup>42</sup> NAB, File No. Rg(1928)1, Mail services-Cameroon Province.

<sup>43</sup> NAB, File No. Rg(1928)1, Mail services-Cameroon Province.

<sup>44</sup> . NAB, File No. Rg1951/2 ,File no 1325, Postal Agency in Ndu.

Following the minutes of a community development meeting in Ndu on 12 March 1951, E.R. Chadwick, the Community Development Officer noted that:

... Among some of the projects mentioned in community works were opening of a Postal Agency. Mr. Chadwick concurred with the people in one of the questions and that was the need of the postal agency that has kept them backward from communicating with other parts of the province as well as outside the province. He said if the people were ready with the amount of £20 for the furniture in the postal agency, he was going to arrange for and will discuss with the post and telegraph department when he goes and that can be done within a few months. He made it clear that people will be at a loss, and not the government, if they did not establish a postal agency. The assembly unanimously agreed to pay the £20 by subscriptions for the purpose and to carry stones for the building if there was none ready. So he promised to arrange for it as soon as he would get to Bamenda or back to his station.<sup>45</sup>

The extract no doubt makes it evident that postal agencies were an initiative of people in the native areas. When Mr Chadwick mentions that the absence of a postal agency has kept them backward from communicating, it shows that postal services were popular to the extent that an area without one was considered backward. This also meant that colonial structures like the post office changed the mindset of the people who saw the post as the ideal means of communicating, regardless of the fact that indigenous systems of communicating were still present.

Despite the fact that Postal Agencies were an initiative of the native areas and individuals, the colonial government provided £12 a year for the allowances of the postal agent that was to be employed in the agency.<sup>46</sup> This was mentioned in a letter written by the resident of the Bamenda Province to the Post and Telegraph Department in Enugu on the issue of the Ndu Postal Agency, forwarded along with the extract quoted above. It read thus:

25<sup>th</sup> June 51

The Divisional Surveyor,

Post and telegrams department Enugu

Ndu postal agency

...it therefore remains to you as to whether you can put up with the only expenditure which fall on the government, namely the monthly allowance of £1 to the postal agent...I may add that the Native Authority already pays for the mail runners from Bamenda to Banso and onwards from Banso to Ndu and to Nkambe. So that all that is required for

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

the opening of the Agency is for the government to pay the £12 per year...

Ag.resident,  
Bamenda Province<sup>47</sup>

By 1944 a relay mail system had been organized to cover all Native Authority (N.A) areas in the division. This was not under the aegis of the Post and Telegraph Department but it worked in conjunction with the weekly incoming Mail.<sup>48</sup> The Native Authorities, with the help of the agent, took care of mail until 1955 when a four-wheel lorry was brought for the prison department in the Bamenda Grassfields. It was hoped, on the arrival of the lorry, that it would transport mail regularly round the ring road when it made its trips to collect prisoners<sup>49</sup>. By 1956 this dream became a reality; the prison lorry began a once weekly collection and distribution of mail round the ring road as it moved round to collect prisoners.<sup>50</sup> In 1958 there were ten Postal Agencies in the Bamenda Grassfields, these included: Wum, Nkambe, Bafut, Ndop, Ndu, Bali, Njinikom, Batibo, Mbengwi and Santa.<sup>51</sup> These agencies functioned with the help of the Native Authorities through the service of a postal agent that was employed and trained, as well as messengers that were paid by them.<sup>52</sup> These laid the foundation for the establishment of post-colonial post offices and postal agencies. In fact, the post-colonial communication channel simply continued with the system that had been put in place by the colonial administrators.

Within the Bamenda Province, mails were distributed on a weekly basis from Bamenda through Bafut-Wum and Njinikom and from Bamenda to Ndop- Nsaw and Nkambe. In fact, the system of mail collection and delivery from Bamenda and within the Bamenda Province was formulated to follow the ring road.<sup>53</sup> The creation and development of post and postal services led to an increase in letter writing. There was the need for letters to be written and posted or to send a telegram. As of 1947, for example, approximately 41604 letters were posted in the Bamenda post office.<sup>54</sup> This was an indication that there were a number of people in the Bamenda Grassfields that could write or better still letter writers were made possible with the presence of colonial education<sup>55</sup> that had been introduced in the Bamenda Division. Thus the few educated people gained higher status in society because they

were solicited to write for others and this motivated many more people to send their children to school in order to have letter writers in the family.<sup>56</sup> Letters served like the grass system of indigenous communication with the messenger being an official system like the post office. Letters were bearers of messages from one person to another expressing intimacy, joys, sorrows, complaints, or making demands in a way that was new to the people.<sup>57</sup> Receiving a mail gave pride and prestige to the one receiving because it meant he had someone in the urban towns far from the village.

#### IV. MAIL DELIVERY IN THE BAMENDA GRASSFIELDS

In 1956 the prison lorry started the collections of mails. The prison lorry only reduced the cost of the mail service for the native authorities but did not bring any improvement on the mail runner system that operated twice a week. This complaint was expressed in an address from the Nkambe Division to his Excellency the Governor General during the latter's tour of Southern Cameroons in April 1956.<sup>58</sup> It was highlighted that the system of transporting mail by the prison lorry was bad and very unreliable and had brought no improvement to the former whereby the native authorities did the service.<sup>59</sup> In that same visit, in the welcome address from the Bamenda South Eastern Federation Native Authority to the Governor, the same complaint and others were raised as regard the running of postal agencies in some of the NA areas and requested for the substitution of the prison lorry by a mail van in the following words:

Postal Agencies have been built by the Native Authorities in some communities but the controls are so rigid and so unreasonable that the services rendered are unsatisfactory. In many cases the stamp stock allowed is so small that it cannot meet the need of the community the Agencies intended to serve... The transportation of mail round the Bamenda ring road previously done by the native authorities, although a federal matter, has been heaped on the prison lorry that transports prisoners. There is a relief on the Native Authority finances but the mail services around the ring road are slower than ever before as the lorry runs at the pleasure of the prison department. It is requested that a special mail van be supplied for the ring road mail transport and should be controlled by the post and telegraphs department. It is further requested that stamp stock be increased in postal agencies to meet the demand of the communities<sup>60</sup>

From the address, it is obvious that the issue of mail delivery was not limited to Nkambe, but was an issue affecting all areas along the ring road: Bafut, Wum, Bum, Misaje, Nkambe,

<sup>47</sup> NAB, File No. Rg1951/2, File no 1325, Postal Agency in Ndu.

<sup>48</sup> NAB, File No. Cb1944/1, File no B638/451, Annual Report 1944 Bamenda Division.

<sup>49</sup> NAB, File No. Cb1955/1, Annual Report 1955 Bamenda Division.

<sup>50</sup> NAB, File No. Cb/1956/1, Annual Report 1956 for Bamenda Division.

<sup>51</sup> NAB, File No. AB89, Report by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the general assembly of the United Nations on administration of the Cameroon's under United Kingdom trusteeship for the year 1958.

<sup>52</sup> NAB, File No. Ci 1954/1, Wum Division annual report for 1954.

<sup>53</sup> NAB, File No. Rg1958/1, Bamenda Ring Road Mail Service.

<sup>54</sup> NAB, File No. Cb1947, Annual Report for Bamenda Division.

<sup>55</sup> Walter Gam Nkwi, *African Modernities and Mobilities: An Historical ethnography of Kom, Cameroon, Ca. 1800-2008* (Bamenda-Langaa Research and publishing, 2015), 195.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 195.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 190.

<sup>58</sup> NAB, File No. Rg1953/1, Mail Service.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> NAB, File No. Rg1953/1, Mail Service.

Ndu, Kumbo, Ndop and Bamenda. It also indicated how important the postal service was to the people of the Bamenda Grassfields and their involvements in ensuring its effectiveness. This thus accounts for their worries about the slow and unreliable means of mail transportation. Another impediment to the system was the limited supply of stamps. It is relevant to note that that without stamps, letters could not be posted thus limited supply of stamps restricted the posting of mail and slowed communication. The N.A requested the supply of a mail van for the ring road and an increase in the stock of stamps.

As a response to the request, an agreement was established between the native authorities, the Cameroons Co-operative Engineering and Transport Union and the Post and Telegraphs Department.<sup>61</sup> The N.A had, as part of the agreement, to make a payment of £125 on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1958 and £500 on or before 1<sup>st</sup> April 1959 and £500 on 1<sup>st</sup> April annually thereafter, until the termination of the contract.<sup>62</sup> The contract was a regular once weekly run in the postal agencies. The prison lorry was then withdrawn and the mail service van started on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 1959 but regrettably the lorry did not go round the ring road as agreed.<sup>63</sup> The first run was to leave the Bamenda post office once weekly on Mondays for Bafut-Wum -Njinikom and return via same agencies to Bamenda post office within 72 hours. The second run was to leave Bamenda post office weekly on Thursdays for Ndop-Nsaw - Nkambe agencies and to return via same agencies to Bamenda within 72 hours.<sup>64</sup> This schedule shows that there was no run between the divisional headquarters of Nkambe and Wum which still slowed communication between the two divisions. The District officer in Wum complained in May 1959 that the van arrived Wum at 2pm on Mondays and departed within half an hour of arrival and urgent mails could not be replied instantly. He equally mentioned that the absence of a Nkambe-Wum link was a problem.<sup>65</sup> In line with this complaint of June 1959 the Permanent Secretary of Land and Survey requested the Area Controller of Post and Telegraphs in Southern Cameroons to rearrange the schedule in a manner for urgent mail to be replied, especially in the divisional headquarters of Wum and Nkambe.<sup>66</sup> In September 1959 the schedule was rearranged in two runs, run A (see table 1) and run B (see table 2). This shows how much the people wanted to improve postal communication in the Bamenda area. All this stemmed from the importance of communication, thus expressing lending credence to the idea that communication is power and very necessary in human activities.

Table 1:Run A

	DAY	TIME
Leave Bamenda	Monday	11 a.m
Arrive Wum	Monday	2 p.m
Leave Wum	Tuesday	11 a.m
Arrive Bamenda	Tuesday	2 p.m

Source: NAB. Rg 1958/1, Bamenda Ring Road Mail Service.

Table 2:Run B

	DAY	TIME
Leave Bamenda	Thursday	9 a.m
Arrive Nkambe	Thursday	3 p.m
Leave Nkambe	Friday	10 a.m
Arrive Bamenda	Friday	4 p.m

Source: NAB.Rg 1958/1, Bamenda Ring Road Mail Service.

This schedule unfortunately did not solve the problem of a run between Nkambe and Wum. It was still the situation of leaving Bamenda to Wum and back to Bamenda and Bamenda to Nkambe and back to Bamenda. This was because the road between Wum and Nkambe was bad and the van could not go through it. The schedule however solved the problem of urgent mail that needed immediate reply. The schedule shows that the post agents and the van drivers did not leave Wum and Nkambe on the day they got there. In the Bamenda Post Office mails were brought from different areas as well as other areas of British Southern Cameroons, French Cameroon, Nigeria and from foreign countries.<sup>67</sup> In 1950 a fleet of mail vans went operational to provide a thrice weekly service between the principal towns of British Southern Cameroons of Victoria, Tiko, Buea, Kumba, Mamfe and Bamenda but because of the poor nature of roads it ran twice a week.<sup>68</sup> Thus mails from these towns were received in the Bamenda Post Office twice a week and dispatch was vice versa. The mail van on its way to or from Bamenda usually delivered mails that were meant for towns along its axis like Bali and Batibo.<sup>69</sup> By 1953 there was a four wheel Austin lorry which operated a thrice weekly delivery and collection of mail from Kumba to Mamfe and to Bamenda.<sup>70</sup> This schedule went on till 1959 when there was a thrice weekly service from Victoria-Kumba-Mamfe-Bamenda, operated under the Cameroon's Co-operative engineering and Transport Union.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Ngoran "Communication in Bamenda Grassfields,"72.

<sup>68</sup> NAB, File No.AB83,Report by His majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the general assembly of the United nations on administration of the Cameroon's under United Kingdom trusteeship for the year 1952.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> NAB, File No.AB84,Report by His majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the general assembly of the United nations on administration of the Cameroon's under United Kingdom trusteeship for the year 1953.

<sup>71</sup> NAB, File No. AB90,Report by His majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the general

<sup>61</sup> MAB, File No. Cb1959/1, Annual report Bamenda Division 1959.

<sup>62</sup> NAB, File No. Rg1958/1, Bamenda Ring Road Mail Service..

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> NAB, File No. Rg1958/1, Bamenda Ring Road Mail Service.

## V. TELEGRAPHIC SERVICE

The telegraphic service of the Bamenda post office included a means of sending information or messages through a coded transmission known as Morse Code.<sup>72</sup> Messages were transcribed from the sounds produced and written down for the receiver by the telegraphic attendant at the receiving post office. This means of communication was faster than the posting of mails as information transmission was instant. The first telegraphic line in Bamenda from Nchang (Mamfe) was completed on 8 February 1919, making available 20 miles of telegraph line supported by temporary bamboo poles. The telegraphic line sometimes was interrupted due to poor weather conditions and the post master was obliged to send some telegraphs by post.<sup>73</sup> The bamboo poles were later on replaced by iron poles due to frequent storms that caused eruptions on the telegraphic lines and often disturbed the smooth flow of information.<sup>74</sup> The introduction of telegraphic lines in the Bamenda area was an appreciated initiative by the population and was reflected in the number of telegraphs that were dispatched from Bamenda and those received. They witnessed steady increase within the first three years of its operation as shown on table below.

Table 3: Statistics on Telegraphs send and received

Year	Received	Dispatched	Total
1944	3,770	6943	10,713
1945	6,626	7,470	14096
1946	9828	10447	20275
1947	9025	10164	19189
1948	6039	6303(January-July)	12342

Source: Deduced from Annual reports on Bamenda Division for 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947 and 1948.

Despite the frequent eruptions and hurdles in the telegraphic line, the population was not discouraged from using the services. The table shows an increase in the first three years. This means that the telegraphic service indeed served the communication needs for which it was required .

## VI. CONCLUSION

Communication remains very central in human existence and evolution. This paper has been able to uncover that the introduction of communication channels in the British Colonial Bamenda Grassfields were based on existing indigenous communication modes and mediums. In fact, communication was indispensable I the successful implementation and effectiveness of the colonial machinery. The development of post offices and postal services were developments that gradually replaced the flag post runners relay system. To be able to sustain the family ties and

relations with their kith and kin especially those in distant coastal towns, the indigenes demonstrated their readiness and engagements in the development of post offices and postal services in the Bamenda Grassfields. This thus rendered the Bamenda Grassfields accessible as the links with the other divisions or coastal towns and Enugu and Lagos in Nigeria were maintained. Despite the major setbacks, it none the less rendered the colonial machinery more pragmatic. This laid the foundations for post-colonial communication systems, infrastructures and services.

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<sup>72</sup> Ngoran, "Communication in the Bamenda Grassfields",80.

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