

Architecture of Colonial Plantations and Elements of Discrimination and Marginalisation in Resource Allocation in Cameroon: The Case of Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC)

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ABSTRACT

This research was carried out in Cameroon Development Corporation plantations with the objective to examine and compare the infrastructure and management systems provided to workers during the German and British colonial periods and also understand the various infrastructural changes and working conditions that have taken place decades after colonialization and independence. The various infrastructure and facilities available to workers were examined in various workers camps that were constructed during colonial rule. The study revealed that over the years, there have been drastic deterioration of basic infrastructure, and decline in working conditions, including the provision of basic amenities in workers camps. It was revealed that deterioration of infrastructure and facilities was attributed to neglect and lack of innovations in housing units, and the deplorable nature of hygiene and sanitation conditions in labourer's camps. In addition, working conditions of labourers who constitute the greatest segment of the workforce is deplorable as compared to the working and living conditions of the executives who constitute an insignificant minority of the company workforce. Further evidence of discrimination and marginalisation within the company is revealed in the allocation of housing, as innovations are been carried out to improve the welfare of labourers and semi-skilled workers over the decades. It was also revealed that discriminatory practices in the management and allocation of resources have continued unabated in the company's contemporary history. This research attempts to demonstrate that architectural heritage in the executive and workers' camps have become a driving force for maintaining and spreading colonial ideologies of discrimination and marginalisation, in the management of the corporation's resources. The study recommends the corporation to embark on innovations that can improve infrastructure and welfare as remedy to the deplorable conditions of its workforce.

Keywords : Architecture, colonial plantations, discrimination and marginalisation, resource allocation, CDC, Cameroon

INTRODUCTION

Colonization and industrialization of Europe were major concerns of European powers during the 19th and 20th centuries. To advance industrialisation in metropolitan Europe, colonisation transformed its overseas possessions

into agricultural experimentations that grew and expanded production of raw materials for the development of industrial empires in Europe (Daniel, 1980). In Africa and elsewhere, production patterns were altered to align with the needs of European industries. It is for these reasons that Germany established vast plantations of crops, notably cocoa, rubber, banana that were needed for the growth of its industrial capital. To project the country's economic interest, and maintain supplies of raw material the Germany instituted a policy of discrimination and marginalisation of indigenous population, through forced labour, land dispossession and brutal suppression of Cameroonians opposed to their domestic policies in the colony. Indigenous people were forced to change their production patterns to align with colonial interest. According to Fanso (2025), the system of discrimination reflected structures put in place in workers camps and executive European officers who enjoyed all privileges, in housing, administration and resource allocation in plantations. In contemporary Germany, the historiographical works of (Pape (2016), and Chantal (2017), including public discussion and debates in Germany reveal divergent expositions on the country's colonial past. According to Chantal (2017), the idea of marginalisation during the short-lived German colonial period(1884-1914) is projected due to its short duration (30 years) as compared to the English and French empires, whose colonial impact has lasted for decades after independence. Walters (1974) and Chantal (2017). argues that Africans countries were not granted independence to control their economic resources and structures as their economies still serve as appendages for European exploitation. According to Walters (1974), African economies were structured to facilitate the exploitation of resources to the detriment of the economic and social development of former colonies in aggregate. According to Fanso (2025); Walters (1974), it is on the basis of maintaining colonial structures that after independence, the economic interest of former colonizers were protected by the ruling classes to the detriment of inhabitants of former colonies. This evidence reveals in discrimination and marginalisation of workers in Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) plantation camps decades after the countrys independence. Further evidence is revealed by poor living standards in workers camps and the ever deteriorating infrastructure that are yet to undergo reconstructions and innovations for improving welfare of plantation workers. The neglect of infrastructure in workers camps, the provision of descent accommodation for the company executives have been viewed as continuation of colonial heritage of discrimination and marginalisation in resource allocation in the corporation.

According to Daniel (1980), Germany and other powers who colonised the African continent laid the foundation of poverty and underdevelopment in their former colonies. The aim of colonial powers in Cameroon was not to develop the country but to use the territory as a reservoir for extracting and expropriating economic resources to the detriment of economic and social development in the countries. Adrian &Aram (2021) note the impact of German colonization and expresses dismay over the country's actions toward the colonized people. Adrian and Aram (2021) exposes the brutality of German colonizers and injustices perpetuated through discrimination and marginalization in all facets of social and economic life in its colonies. This reflected the poor living conditions of workers in German plantations, whose company executives enjoyed better living standards for reason that they were either Germans or Europeans. Jefferson (1974) notes that in spite of the brutal history of the German colonisation in Cameroon, the structures left behind after the country's defeat during First World War are lasting effigies that require innovation by subsequent administrations. These innovations and other changes are expected to take place to reflect the developing nature of Cameroon. Norah and Ngog (2021), on related studies in CDC expresses concern over the deplorable nature of buildings in workers camps and other installations. The infrastructure and facilities require adaptable innovations that could improve camp life and living standards of workers. Norah and Ngog (2021); Fanso (2025) laments the glaring inequalities between residential areas of workers and company executives who enjoy social benefits, incentives, and motivations that are almost non-existent in workers' camps. According to Adrian and Ziai (2021), inequalities existing between the workers' camps and the senior executives' residences reveal a perpetuation of the model of social distinction and discrimination whose foundations were laid during the German colonial period, the later British colonial era retained after independence by the successive company administrations to maintain exploitation by former colonial administration. If these powers had the objective of developing the present English speaking regions of North West and South West some profits made by the corporation were suppose to be ploughed back to develop infrastructure and improve the welfare of camp workers. Ninjoh (2018) is of the opinion that after independence, institutions left by colonial Germany and Britain were supposed to have undergone drastic innovations to improve the working and housing conditions of workers.

Objectives of the study

- 1) Give a presentation of workers' camps and living conditions during the German and British Colonial period by documentation.
- 2) Examine the current housing situation and living standards among different categories of workers in the corporation.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in CDC workers camps established during German colonial rule. The camps are located in five towns which were purposively selected. This is because not every workers camp of the corporation was established during German colonial rule. Before embarking on the research consent of the company hierarchy was sought through official administrative letters addressed to the company administration by the Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation, while the office of the South West governor was informed through an administrative letter addressed to the Governor of the region to guarantee the safety of researchers/interviewers as the research was taking place during the on-going anglophone crisis. Fako division was selected for the study because of relatively reduced violence and also because German annexation of Cameroon started in Fako Division where the pioneer workers camps were established in the study area. These camps are the pioneer camps constructed by German companies during the colonial period. The towns were purposively selected because though the corporation has several workers camps, they are of spectacular importance for the study being pioneer workers settlements established during German colonial rule (1885-1918). Colonial legacy would have been difficult to discuss without citing camps left behind by the German colonial administration. Most of the other workers residential areas were constructed during British colonial period and after independence. However, the architectural design in the new camps constructed by the British administration and after independence are not characteristically different from those inherited from the German administration. The camps selected for the study are located at Tiko (Upper Kostaiins, Middle Kostain, and WaterTank, Likomba), Limbe city (Moliwe, Bota Middle Farms), and Ideanau along the West Coast of Africa. The age of these camps visibly exposes the systematic deterioration of housing infrastructure in workers' camps from colonial times to contemporary Cameroon.

Location of the study area

The study was carried out in Fako Division, which is a key administrative area in Cameroon's South West region. The division is known for its rich biodiversity, fertile volcanic soils from Mount Cameroon, and access to the sea. This geographical foundation facilitated the export of agricultural raw material to metropolitan Europe during the colonial and post colonial periods. Limbe is the capital town of Fako Division. Major urban centres in the division include Buea, which doubled as the capital of German Cameroon, Limbe (formerly known as Victoria), Tiko, and Muyuka. The fertile volcanic soils and the divisions rich biodiversity attracted the development of plantations by the German colonial administration. Fako Division covers an area of 2,093km². As of 2005, population estimates the division had a population of about 466,412. In recent years, the division has witnessed population growth attributed to internal migrations into the cities of the division and increasing birth rates. The division comprises five administrative Sub Divisions of Limbe, Buea, Muyuka, Tiko, and Idenau. Fako owes its origin to colonisation of Cameroon by Germany. Fako division consists of the following indigenous tribes, namely Balongs, Mungo, Isubu (Bimbia), Wovia (Bota), and Bakweri who constitute the majority.

Figure 1. Location of the surveyed sites in the South West Region



Source: <https://www.osidimbea.cm/collectivites/sud-ouest/>

The circled areas indicate zones covered by the study. These zones located in the maritime area of the South West region attracted German plantations due to nearness to the sea and land fertility partly attributed to volcanic soils from Mount Fako or Cameroon mountain.

Brief historical presentation of Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) in Fako Division

The company known in contemporary history of Cameroon as Cameroon Development Corporation was formerly a German company established among other plantations between 1885 and 1914. After the defeat of Germany during the First World War (1914-1918), German possessions in Southern or British Cameroon were taken over by the British government. The Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC), since 1947, took over from West African Plantation Victoria (WAPV) and West African Fruit Company (AFC), owned by the Germans. Mr. F.E.V Smith, who became the Corporation's first Chairmn, tabled the Commonwealth Development Corporation Ordinance in Lagos, the then capital of Nigeria. Thereafter, the property became property of the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC), set up under the auspices of the British Post-War Labour Government. The name CDC was born to replace the former German plantations. When French Cameroon (*la Republique du Cameroon*) gained independence in January 1960 and West Cameroon or British Cameroon was granted independence by joining French Cameroon under a federation in 1961, the company was still managed by the British Government. The CDC continued to be managed alongside other British assets for fourteen years (1960-1974) and handed over to Cameroon under the name Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) with the same abbreviation.

The Cameroon Development Corporation is a government parastatal in the country's Agricultural sector with its head office at Bota-Limbe. It is the largest agro-industrial complex in Cameroon, and next labour employer after the Cameroon government. Initially, the company's activities were limited in the South West region and the Fako Division, in particular. However, its activities have expanded to other divisions of the South West region like Ndian, Meme, and Kupe Mwanenguba, and the Littoral region in French Cameroon. As of 2009, CDC plantations covered a total area of approximately 42,027 hectares of land, 38000 hectares of mature plantation at the production stage. Rubber plantations cover 22,262 hectares, while oil palm trees cover 15,240 hectares, and banana 4525 hectares. The corporation constitutes a vibrant workforce of 22,036 employees, including temporary workers. The company produces between 18,000 and 20,000 tonnes of rubber, 18000 to 19000 tonnes of palm oil, 6000 tonnes of palm kernel, and an average of between 90000 and 110,000 tonnes of banana annually. Before the advent of privatisation advocated by the IMF/World Bank Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), CDC also produced tea in Tole-Buea and Ndu in the North-west region, where the corporation established processing plants for the crop. The corporation has ceased tea production because of the privatization of the sector.

The establishment of CDC in the Fako Division has led to the occupation of vast areas of land formerly used for agriculture for the cultivation of mainly industrial trees without taking into consideration food demand for the ever-growing populations of the division. Land grabbing and dispossession of peasant communities been done without sustainable compensations to empower the communities. As a result, there are landless peasants all over Fako division. The phenomenon of land dispossession was inherited from the subsequent colonial administrations, who were granted no defined limits to the expansion of plantations (Owono, 2005; Fanso, 2025). The resulting economic, social, and environmental consequences have evolved into land conflicts with both urban and rural communities, who are desperately in need of land for agriculture and urban expansion. The company has been ordered to give up parts of its occupied land for the expansion of settlements in the towns of Tiko and Limbe subdivisions (Tiko Rural Council, 2016). According to the Ministry of State Property and Land Tenure (2008), CDC occupies more than 50% of the land mass in the Fako division. Between 2018 and 2022, the Cameroon Development Corporation went through a major crisis due to the Anglophone crisis, which negated production, and of displaced significant majority plantation workers. The crisis led to a decrease in the workforce, from 22,000 to 15,000 workers, and the activities of the corporation were suspended, with workers unpaid for several years. In 2025, following the Cameroonian State's settlement of five years of salary arrears amounting to 35.7 billion FCFA, a new impetus has been given to this agro-industrial enterprise (<https://ecomatin.net/cameroun-letat-regle-357-milliards-fcfa-darrieres-de-salaires-a-la-cdc-grace-a-trois-banques-locales>). However, the situation of the workers remains worrisome, particularly in the plantation camps where discrimination in the award of amenities between executives of the company and labourers is glaring.

Data Collection

Data collection was in two stages: primary and secondary data.

Primary data sources

The data were primarily data sources were obtained by use of questionnaires, group discussions and observation of the workers' camps in the study area. Interviewers were authorised by company administrators to move round the workers camps to observe residential homes and infrastructure in workers camps, offices, recreation facilities, energy supply, including areas of sewage and waste disposal in the workers camps. Because the research was carried during the climax of the anglophone crisis researchers were given limited time to administer questionnaires in the workers camps. Five questionnaires were allocated to each of the selected workers camp pioneered by Germans. Workers were selected purposively because not everybody resident in the camps were CDC workers. Also most workers were scared from interviews even though the purpose of the study was explained to them and confidentiality was assured in line with research ethics. Questionnaires were allocated to five workers and the camp wardens for the camps. Four group discussion were held behind close because movement was highly restricted in the war zone. A group discussion was held with administrators in their various capacities from diverse locations within the study areas at the company head office in Bota Middle Farm-Limbe. The following administrators were invited for the group discussions :

- Mr. Eric N.S Nzegge (Director for Human Resources)
- Ms Melanie (Assistant Director for Human Resources)
- Mr Kebbi A. Ekwele (Property Manager at Head Office-Limbe)
- Mr. Nelson/Mr. Chesi (Camp Managers in Tiko)
- Mr. Angoula (Chief of Idenau and Bibundu stations)
- Mr. Epie Kolle Vinen (Health Service at Moliwe camp).

A group discussions scheduled for Upper Koustain camp-Tiko was called off due to insecurity. Separate group discussions were held with camp workers because most of the labourers declined joint participation with administrators and other executives of the company. However at Idenau members of the workforce voluntarily participated in group discussion with managers. Executive residential areas were visited to understand the amenities available compared to those in workers camps. Other areas covered by the study included the oil palm processing plant, roads, railways, and plantations (rubber/palms) and the Atlantic ocean shore. Information was recorded manually in block notes as video recording were banned for security reasons. Data analysis for the study was qualitative.

Apart of group discussions held at the corporation head quarters in Bota-Limbe where participant names were written on the research instrument, respondents in workers camps were assured strict confidentiality. They were not required to provide their names or any form of identification materials on the research instruments. Participants were assured that information provided was to be used strictly for research purposes. These assurances facilitated the gathering of information in workers camps

Secondary data sources.

Secondary data sources were obtained from desk review of documentation from CDC archives, where some aspects of colonial history of the company was obtained. Some information concerning German colonial administration in the company could not be made available for the study. Due to poor system of documentation the names of archives were not made known. However, through the few available documents a clear presentation of the company's past and contemporary history were obtained. Other sources included text books, scientific journals, and websites. Documentary evidence helped to build historical elements to support the study objectives. The following information was obtained from the available CDC archives: types and structure of residential homes based on workers' category, materials used in construction, household occupation in rooms and apartments. The architectural plans of camp buildings and other information of interest could not be made available for the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Historical reconstruction of workers camps during German colonial period

During the colonial era, workers' camps were spaces characterized by linear housing or settlements. During German colonial rule, most of the houses were meant for plantation labourers who were uneducated by western standards. The buildings were square shaped and each room had an area of 4m² meant to accommodate two natives who worked in the plantation in various capacities like cleaners, night watchmen and field labour who dominated the workforce. Figure 1 from the company archives is a picture taken by Burck (1938) around the camp of Moliwe-Victoria presently Limbe subdivision. The middle of the camp shows a common area used as a kitchen for all workers in the camps. The supervisor's residence was separated from the workers' camp due to his executive position.

Construction of workers camps in plantations during German colonial period portrayed discrimination and marginalisation in housing allocation. The architectural design reflected gender marginalisation because the camps were constructed to accommodate only male migrant workers who came from various parts of Cameroon. Most of the plantation camps were constructed from wood, terracotta bricks, and volcanic stones, which were transported mostly by headloads under German force labour regime to the various construction sites as modern roads linking extractive centres were limited (George 2000). The camps were mostly linear settlements

consisting of houses facing each other and separated by large space which also served as playground. In the morning work supervisors and labourers were assembled to allocate daily tasks on the field. Two migrant workers (labourers) were allocated to a single room equally used for dinning and sleeping. There were no beds or mattresses allocated to workers. Workers slept on mats on bare floors. There were no provisions for workers to stay with their spouses as privacy was highly compromised. Figure 1 shows a workers camps constructed with wood and corrugated iron sheets in Moliwe. Women only came for visits within a limited period of time approved by the German camp authorities. Architectural design for workers camp was difficult to be provided from the company archives.

Figure 2. Plantation workers camps at Moliwe during German colonial period



Bundesarchiv, Bild 108-201-027 / Fotograf(in): Burck

Figure 1 shows the picture of German plantation camp constructed between 1884-1918. The camp is square shaped. These structures were inherited by British colonial administration after the First World War (1914-1918). When Germany was defeated their plantations in British Cameroon (the Present North west and South West region) were gradually changing ownership following recommendation of the Versailles settlement in 1919 which handed West Cameroon to the British government. Changes in architectural design of German possession gradually came in 1947 when its plantation were officially taken over by British Government after the defeat of Germany during the Second World war

Transition to British administration and some changes in workers camps

When German possessions in the present day South West region were taken over by the British, changes in structural transformation were not automatic. It took some time for Britain to modify housing units and the general administrative structure left by Germany. One of the greatest achievement made by the British administration was the introduction of currency to facilitate exchange for goods and services (Fanso 2025). Internal trade in colonial Germany was through barter trade, as Germany failed to introduce her currency, the Mark for exchange in its colonies. Under the force labour regime workers were compensated in kind, not in cash. The British introduced a common currency the pound sterling for exchange. This breakthrough facilitated trade, as many items were valued in monetary terms. Payments of services could be made without double coincidence of wants. Through monetisation of the colonial economy, the British colonialists increased domestic trade; thus gradually marking the end of barter trade. Plantation workers were enumerated in money paid as salaries at the end of the every month. The innovation encouraged migration into plantations in search of jobs in the plantations. Another significant change witnessed in the CDC camps was categorisation of workers based on skills and

qualifications. Another significant change was the modification of workers housing units left by the German colonial administration. Field workers were allocated in single rooms and a kitchen instead of sharing single rooms as it was during the colonial period. The only similarity was that workers shared common facilities like toilets and free water in camps. Furthermore, the British colonial administration introduced their education system and standards in most of their institutions. These standards were later used to categorise workers according to skills and educational level. One of the most significant changes that took place among worker of all categories during the transition period was the introduction of free medical facilities and electricity energy in workers camps. In spite of these changes housing problems remained endemic especially as British colonial administrators formerly granted workers to live with their families (CDC manpower Analysis, 2008).

Housing allocation based on categorisation of workers

As earlier mentioned, the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC) allocated residential homes for its workers based on rank and experience. Workers were ranked from category one to twelve based on skill and education level. Among the various categories of workers were skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers. Among the unskilled workers are literate and semi-literate workers. Table 1 shows the allocation of residential homes based on work category. The houses are classified into senior executives, medium or intermediate, junior executives, and field labourers who were mostly illiterate or semi-illiterate. According to information from 1949 archives, labourers constituted the greatest proportion of the company workforce because the level of literacy in British Cameroon was low, and managerial skills were inadequate. The company employed camp wardens who allocated houses based on work category. The categorisation was strict because workers were never allocated houses that did not reflect his their category, irrespective of family size. The camp warden had statistical information about the various types of vacant houses available in the camps. However, the activities of the warden were limited to workers' camps. The warden was not empowered to allocate houses for the executives of the corporation. Table 1 indicates is the categorisation of workers during the colonial period and after independence.

Table 1: Housing allocations by Commonwealth Development Corporation

Work category/level of education/skills	Type of house	Job specification/ description
Category (1-3). Illiterates, semi-illiterates, unskilled. Lack of academic qualification/credentials	Single room/kitchen	Plantation labourers: harvesters, cleaners, nursery workers, field transporters, guards(day time and night time watchmen), cooks, club attendance,
Category (4-6) At least FSLC, skilled or semi-skilled worker	One room and parlour, including packing store.	Office clerks, technicians: carpenters, electrical workers, builders, plumbers, drivers, locomotive drivers, factory workers, nurses, checkers, headmen, camp warden etc
Category 7-9 GCE O/A levels, OND/HND plus work experience, others. Intermediate category	Two sleeping rooms, one parlour, kitchen, store, and modern toilet.	Junior executives, assistant managers, supervisors, overseers, midwives.
Category (10-12). Skilled workers Senior executives	Three to four sleeping rooms, two modern toilets, a kitchen/ store, a parking lot for cars, and boys' quarters with modern toilets	Estate managers, Medical doctors, Agronomists, Engineers, Field assistant managers, General managers, accountants, etc.

Source: Extracted from company archives for study on Architecture of Colonial Plantations and Elements of Discrimination and marginalisation in resource allocation in Cameroon, March 2025

Allocation of houses in workers camps based on worker category became heritage that have continued in contemporary CDC workers camps of the study area including new camps that have been constructed out of Fako division. Residential quarters in camps were designed mostly for illiterates, semi-illiterates, unskilled, and semi-skilled workers who make up more than 90% of the workforce in the corporation. The semi-skilled and unskilled workers are the most disadvantaged when it comes to allocation of houses. According to CDC Manpower Analysis from (2005-2009), allocations of houses in the camps have failed to take into consideration household occupation or the number of people in the family allocated to a house. Workers between categories 1 and 3 were mostly unskilled workers who happened to be illiterates or semi-illiterates. However, in the later years, the corporation passed law forbidding the employment of workers, whether illiterate or semi-illiterate, in category 1. This category constituted field workers who were employed for activities like weeding, grass cutting, harvesting, gathering, transportation, and cleaning. Others include guards (day and night guards), nursery workers in case of plantation extension, including truck drivers and locomotive drivers, checkers, and headmen. It was revealed that most cooks and security guards had the advantage of being allocated houses in the senior service “boys” quarters, where accommodation was relatively spacious.

Contemporary living conditions in workers camps

According to the study, contemporary living condition in workers camps have been characterised by depreciation due to the inability of the CDC to carryout innovation in workers camps inherited from imperial powers who colonised Cameroon. Although Britain carried out some structural reforms in housing the reforms did not adequately address the expectations of camp workers as they are still allocated houses based work category. As household populations in workers camps increased due to higher birth rates, and migration living conditions became deplorable because workers demand for decent housing increased without equitable response from the administration (Norah and Ngoe, 2010). Secondly, there were no innovations carried out to improve infrastructure and facilities for the welfare of workers. One of the problems which made camp life uncompromising was the common use of toilet and bathrooms buildings for men and women. This undermined moral and gender values as it was seen as rights abuse which compromised privacy. Problems of hygiene and sanitation increased with neglect of infrastructure over the years. In the camps covered by the study, it was revealed that, more than twenty households shared a single toilet building for men and women.. According to the respondents, camp workers were not allowed to launch complaints about marginalisation and discrimination in housing and other facilities needed by workers. Workers' trade unions introduced by the British colonial administration were too weak to address problems of marginalisation for fear of repercussion to its members. According to the study the inability of trade unions to address problems affecting the wellbeing of workers constitutes another heritage from colonial orientation.

The executive officers of the corporation, who enjoy privileges in housing and other facilities, often intimidate trade union leaders and field labourers. In essence, the colonial administration stifled strike actions. In the same vain, the brutal methods developed by subsequent colonial administrations to contain strike actions were copied by CDC administrators after independence. Workers were free to launch complaints but forbidden to strike. Fonso (2025) in support of these findings revealed that most trade union leaders who succeeded in provoking strike action are more often rounded up and dismissed from their jobs. According to similar findings in colonial plantations by Fonso (2025), most of the executive officers were aware of workers' marginalisation but were instructed never to participate in any action that could jeopardise company interest.. Executive officers who sympathized with the plight of labourers and forwarded proposals for improving living standards were sent back to his mother country and replaced by other European (Walters 1974; Fonso 2025).

Allocation of houses in the workers camps of the corporation have often been based on work category than household occupation. The lowest categories of workers (unskilled and semi-skilled), who constitute more than 90% of the workforce, have endured the worst forms of injustices and social exclusion inherited from respective colonisers. As to further worsen the plight of workers, the implementation of IMF/World Bank Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in the late eighties and early nineties sept away the few advantages enjoyed by the workers during the British colonial period and decades after independence. Amenities such as free energy, water consumption and health care services enjoyed by workers before the implementation of SAP are being paid for; thus adding untold difficulties that have fundamentally reduced workers living standards; especially the

labourers who in addition, are grossly underpaid by the corporation. These factors have further increased the burden of responsibilities of the already vulnerable workforce; especially the plantation unskilled and semi-skilled labour whose living standard have further worsened. These appalling conditions constitute a call for concern. Figure 4. is a picture taken at Likomba CDC workers camps showing the state of dilapidated homes with leakages attributed to neglect over the decades.

Figure 3: Dilapidated roofs of the CDC workers' camp at Likomba camp



Source: Unpublished fieldwork report on Architecture of colonial Plantations in the South West region, March 2025

It was revealed that the dilapidated nature of the buildings have been attributed to neglect and absence of innovations during the last century. The study further reveals that most of the camp residential quarters are exploding with population, lack of income, and unemployment. Due to high population growth rate in the camps, living conditions have deteriorated especially at the pick of the Anglophone crisis when the corporation suspended salary payments because of drastic fall in production and productivity attributed to decline in workforce in the plantations (CDC Man Power Analysis 2005-2009 ; Monteh 2018)

Disparities between workers camps and executive residential camps

This study identifies the housing disparity element as the greatest factor that fosters marginalisation and discrimination between CDC workers camps and the executive residential areas of the company. It is among the greatest colonial heritage that has been difficult to eradicate even after independence. It fosters class dominance and discrimination with accompanying rights abuses. The system has been protected over the decades because camp workers or labourers are banned from activities that threatens the stability of the company from subsequent colonial administration to contemporary times. According to Ninjoh(2018), the heritage protects human right abuses in the corporation. The architectural design of workers camps during German colonial administration was meant to accommodate only male migrant workers. These workers were prevented from living with their spouses, and fostered discrimination between plantation labourers and the executives of the company. According to Elouga (2011) camp residential quarters in CDC and other companies formerly owned by colonial masters were not constructed to improve the living conditions of workers. The prevailing evidence portrays brazen injustice when infrastructure and facilities available in executive residential areas are compared to those of workers camps. Study findings reveal the impossibilities of improving worker camps since discrimination in the award of facilities continues unabated over the decades. Evidence of discrimination in executive and workers camps have been glaring over the decades shown in photographs taken in Moliwe workers camps(see figure 2)

and the bungalow constructed in European design for modern houses in 1938 by Burck (figure 3). The following disparities were revealed in workers camps.

- Workers houses contained no water facilities nor any modern infrastructure to improve life standards
- Common use of toilet and bathroom building which grossly undermine gender privacy
- Unkempt, overused, and abandoned toilets and bathroom buildings in workers camps
- No designated areas for sewage and waste disposal in most camps of the study area

Figure 4 shows a modern house allocated to executives of the company at Moliwe in 1938. It shows a modern house equipped with a lawn, gardens, flowerbeds, and parking spaces for cars. In addition, each executive house had “boys’ quarters,” which were homes for workers employed as cooks or housekeep for Europeans. The workers enjoyed special non-monetary advantages like clothing and some food items like meat and tinned food that were not given to labourers in the workers' camps before the introduction of a monetary economy by the British colonial administration. The company executives enjoyed recreation facilities like bars and restaurants, swimming pools and credit accessibility, which were exclusively reserved for the executives or senior service workers. Senior service clubs were reserved for white employees and a few privileged blacks who had acquired some skills and education during the British colonial period and after independence when Cameroonians of English speaking extraction were gradually replacing European expatriates.

Figure 4. A woman watering the lawns of the company executive's house at Moliwe-Victoria, 1938



Bundesarchiv, Bild 108-201-004 / Fotograf(in): Burck

Source: Image Burck 1938. Archives Federal Republic of Germany.

A critical view of Figures 2 and 4 from the company archives indicate glaring disparities between workers' camps and the executives' residential areas. The company provided the executive residential homes with furniture, notably chairs, beds, and mattresses, gas cookers, and refrigerators including other household items like cupboards and wardrobes. If an executive officer, such as an estate manager, was transferred to another plantation, an inventory was taken to ensure that missing or damaged items were replaced before the coming of the new tenant.

Workers reaction and coping strategies

Based on this study observation and revelations by different stakeholders, increased demand for accommodation in workers camp attributed to migrations, and increased birth rate in workers camps have given rise to a situation whereby the existing housing units and facilities have been unable to sustain workers housing demand. In a group discussion at Moliwe camp, a fifty-three-year-old palm harvester who now lives in his personal house

at Mile 4- Limbe revealed that most of the houses in CDC camps have undergone depreciation to an irreparable state, which requires construction of new houses. Besides these features in camps constructed by the Germans, it was observed that bad weather conditions worsens the plight of most households as water leakages from dilapidated roofs keep pouring on the limited spaces used for sleeping, dinning, and kitchens. These experiences were not limited to Moliwe camps but to most camps constructed by the German colonizers in Idenau, Tiko, and Bota. According to Salamatu(2019) even camps constructed by the British administration and after independence are affected by dilapidation attributed to marginalisation and discrimination blamed to the corporation administration.

Confronted with this dilemma, workers have reacted in various ways to minimise the endemic health and environmental problems. Most worker have decided to construct alternative structures used as bathrooms to avoid using the unkempt, dilapidated and neglected buildings used as toilets/ latrines. Others workers have constructed attachments to homes to decongest household population from limited space. A young female worker in her thirties attached to the stores account department of CDC Moliwé recounts that her inability to cope with the deteriorating housing situation forced her to abandon free accommodation for a relatively more comfortable home hired out of Moliwe. These revelations are similar to those raised in earlier studies by Ngoe and Manu (2016) on "HIV/AIDS and Commercial Agricultural sector in Cameroon." The study revealed that inadequate accommodation and lack of privacy in workers camps have led to deviant outcomes, which have accelerated the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmissible diseases among households in workers' camps. Cameroon Development Corporation Man-Power Analysis (2005 -2009) earlier revealed the health statistics of some of the corporation's workers with respect to HIV/ AIDS as disturbing from voluntary screening results in various workers' camps. Due to strict confidentiality policy, quantitative data could not be released to interviewers.

At Idenau camp, the workers testified that due to lack of privacy in the use of common toilets and bathrooms, most workers have constructed alternative bathrooms near their homes(see figure 5). It was revealed that more than fifteen households are assigned to a single latrine building, while more than thirty assigned for use of one common tap for portable water. Based on study observations, most users failed to flush the latrines due to absence of water supply. It was equally observed that material used for personal hygiene were mostly hard paper difficult to dissolve due to lack of water for flushing.

Consequently a majority of the latrine holes were blocked with paper and even non-bio-degradable materials; making it difficult for users to conveniently use the facility. As a result, some users defecated out of the latrine holes. The sights were so appalling that researchers were prevented from taken photograph for fear of exposing the deplorable conditions faced by workers in the corporation. A visit to one of the structures portrayed an unbelievable scenario where rats, swarms of flies, cockroaches, and other insects had made their permanent habitat in the latrine holes and in deep cracks on the walls. . It was revealed that during the British colonial period and early years of independence, cleaners were employed by the corporation to tidy the structures. In contemporary times young men seeking employment seldom accept the offer of toilet and bathroom cleaning due to its degrading nature, especially as the corporation fails to provide the bathrooms and toilets with water and cleaners are not equipped with adequate wears against air borne and water borne infections common in unkempt latrines and bathrooms.

According to earlier studies by EMIS (2010-2014), the largely unplanned structures in workers' camps have been associated with environmental problems of hygiene and sanitation attributed to inadequate drainage of waste water from the structures. It was further revealed that during the dry season, wastewater from the bathrooms produced odour, which attracted insects like mosquitoes, while at night, the standing water served as playgrounds for rats and insects, which are vectors of diseases. It was equally revealed that the most common diseases among camp inhabitants were malaria, typhoid, and airborne diseases such as cough and catarrh. These revelations are similar to those exposed in earlier studies by Gyamfi (2017) and Eric *et al.* (2022), respectively, in industrial tree plantations producing oil palm in some maritime areas of Ghana. Figure 5 shows bathroom extensions in CDC workers' camps at Idenau. The experiences encountered by workers in Idenau camps are similar to those of Tiko and other camps covered by the study.

Figure 5. Bathrooms extensions constructed to enhance privacy in workers camps



Source: Field work report on Architecture of colonial plantations in the South West region, 2025

It is rather disheartening and embarrassing that, instead of improving the living standards of workers decades after independence, the greater majority of camp workers still endure in squalor. These photos taken from a CDC camp at Idenau shows how infrastructure left behind by successive colonial administrations have deteriorated to the extent that it no longer serve the purpose they were designed for. According to the study, absence of innovations and repairs of these structures exposes discrimination and marginalisation of workers' camps as proof of the continuation of the colonial legacy. According to respondents, workers in camps are greatly underpaid and encounter difficulties raising money to improve their immediate environment. They have no alternative means of generating income because, over the decades, the Cameroon Development Corporation in blatant violation of human rights has expropriated most of the indigenous lands.

In a focus group discussion, some women confessed that they seldom use the toilets because there are no cleaners. They testified that making use of the toilets exposes them to the dangers of infections. Some women at Idenau camp testified that they have special containers, notably buckets and plastic bags where they defecate and throw either in the neighbourhood palm plantations or directly into the Atlantic Ocean in Idenau. Some of the respondents revealed that a larger majority of men and women in the camps defecate in plastic containers, which are disposed of in the estate. In support of these testimonies the indiscriminate dumping of faeces-filled plastic bags in the nearby palm plantation were observed. This situation in workers' camps is a reflection of earlier studies by Environmental Management Initiative and Strategies (EMIS) in (2010–2014) in the Pamol plantation at Mundemba in the Ndian division. Similar testimonies were also revealed in studies by the National Centre for Education, Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovations by (Assola *et al*; 2016) Cameroon Palm Oil Company known as *SOCAPALM* in its French acronym. On the other hand, vast differences in residential quarters of the executive revealed glaring disparities in environment and living standards discussed earlier. In addition, it was observed that even workers in high-risk operations in the field and factories were not given protective wears to prevent them from insect and snakebites common in oil palm plantations. According to Oyono (2005), Norah and Ngoe (2021), workers in plantations and factories are supposed to be granted protective equipment and wears because their activities are carried out in very precarious environment; they constitute primary source of revenue generation for growth and stability of plantation investments of the corporation

Study limitations

This research was carried out in Fako division of Cameroons South West region during the On-going Anglophone crisis, which have metamorphosed into arms struggle in the two English speaking regions of Cameroon. The first limitation encountered in this study was the inability of the CDC authorities to provide all information needed for the study. There was data paucity attributed to confidentiality in the corporation. Certain information concerning archives were considered classified data, which could not be released without permission from the concerned authority. Some of the authorities failed to show up for the study due to prevailing uncertainty. Another aspect of concern was the inability to take photographs concerning the deplorable housing condition including hygiene and sanitations. Executive fear of exposing the company's environment and living conditions of workers were quite unfounded because they were assured that the information was to be used only for scientific or research purposes. Most of the camp workers regarded researchers and interviewers with suspicion despite clarifications made to them before the start of study. Some workers were convinced that researchers were government agents who came to the region to gather information about the on-going conflict and relay to government authorities in Yaounde. However, there was some success in the allocation of questionnaires in the workers camps of the study area. Lastly movement of interviewers were closely monitored in course of data collection, thus creating an atmosphere of fear among the researchers.

Perspectives

This study, which took place in a limited number of CDC plantations and workers camps established by the German colonial administration in Fako division, has unveiled the history of the corporation from colonial era. Considering that the corporation has extended its activities beyond Fako division, it will be of national interest to extend the study to other divisions and regions where the corporation has established vast plantations of other industrial trees. The following studies have been proposed for the future:

- 1) Assessment of Social and environmental impact of CDC to neighbourhood settlements in Cameroon
- 2) Social and environmental assessment of water and air quality of CDC installations in Cameroon

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been advanced to ameliorate the endemic problems created by German and British colonial policies including the post-independence experience in the CDC plantations.

- 1) Transformation of existing workers' residential areas by constructing new houses with modern infrastructure and facilities to improve workers' welfare and living standards. The present architectural design from the colonial administrations must be improved to include recreational facilities, self-contained houses equipped with water, electricity, and modern toilets in workers camps. The ancient designs whereby workers irrespective of gender share common facilities should be abolished and replaced with structures that protect privacy to restore human dignity.
- 2) The corporation should restore its hospitals and give free medical treatment to all categories of workers as it had been during the British colonial period and the early years of independence. Most of the low-income workers are unable to pay medical bills for their families. It was rather unfortunate that most of the corporation hospitals were taken over by the government without taken to consideration the plight of workers in low-income brackets who constitutes more than 90% of the corporation labour force. Most of these categories of workers are in high-risk operations that are prone to accidents. They require adequate medical attention because they are the bedrock of productive activities in the company.
- 3) There is also need to establish recreational facilities in all CDC workers' camps. The recreational structures should take into account the cultural, traditional, and religious backgrounds of workers. This will also require the restructuring of the existing architectural design of the camps.
- 4) To achieve meaningful development to improve living standards of workers, the government should grant the corporation tax-free holidays for several years to enable the corporation obtain revenue for the construction of more workers residential areas and also embark on innovations to improve the existing infrastructure.

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