

## **Communication Holdup and Administrative Delay Entrenching Chieftaincy Conflicts in Missong, West Cameroon, 1964-1967**

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### **Abstract**

*The paper examines the role communication malfunction and administrative inexpediency play in the management of conflicts with focus on Missong Chieftaincy conflict. It contends that the inability of the administration to take decisions pragmatically and delay in communicating them to contestants to the throne greatly ingrained the conflict leading to hatred and division in the chieftaincy. It further affirms that though administrative intervention came, after a lot of suspense and delay, the problem would have been averted if the authorities were expedient in taking decisions, communicating them and educating the people on administrative procedures involved in solving such matters.*

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**Keywords:** Chieftaincy, Conflict, Administration, communication and Missong

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### **Introduction**

The chieftaincy institution has been and is an important element in the day to day administration of communities in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular. In the pre-colonial days, they carried out military, religious and administrative functions. According to Yeboah and Prah (2011), they were cryptograms of distinctiveness, source of respect and the unique guardians of their ancestral lands and unity of their peoples. Today, they have become instruments for the enhancement of government policy at the local level and a links between their communities and the seat of authority (p.22). In spite of its importance, the institution has been rocked with numerous conflicts, making it notorious, as many disputes or crises over succession to these establishments are present especially in Cameroon. The situation is more conspicuous in the North West Region of the country where the institutions are strong and well entrenched.

The cases of Bafanji, Babanki, Zhoa, Bu, Aghem Chiefdoms, Babungo and the Moghamo areas among others are examples are reminiscent. Though efforts have been made by the government of Cameroon in resolving these conflicts, communication holdup by some administrative officials in taking decisions expediently and communicating them to the people have been an aberration to the good intentions of such judgments or rulings. Further delay and failure in communicating them, from the higher to lower levels of administration as well as to the protagonists of the conflicts, has not made matters any better. Besides, failure in bringing the protagonists together to communicate their differences has been a cause to the protracted conflicts that have plagued the region since independence. Impacts of such conflicts have had undesirable consequences as it leads to violence, loss of lives and properties, anarchy and the dislocation of people. This scenario breeds insecurity and uncertainty and affects the development of communities in particular and the whole country as time and resources are directed towards the containment of the conflict instead of directing it towards the development of the nation.

It is within this frame that the Missong Conflict took place in West Cameroon between 1964 and 1967. Though others are on-going and deserve attention, it is worthwhile to focus on Missong as this will serve as a guide and lesson to actors involved in the management of such conflicts in Cameroon since this was successfully resolved and the

matter laid to rest by the West Cameroon Government. This is in great contradiction to what holds in most of the protracted conflicts which have incessantly continued unperturbed and because of improper communication among actors or administrative inefficiency and delay in handling the matter. In this article I will first explore the role of communication in conflict management and then the protracted struggle between the protagonists as this will provide a historical background and facilitate understanding of subsequent discussions on the role communication holdup and administrative delay played in the entrenchment of conflict in Missong.

### **Communication in the Management of conflict**

Adeyemi & Ademilua (2006) posits that Communication malfunction has remained an important source for conflict (p.185) and a vibrant force in conflict management as it may either entrench or minimise crisis as suggested by Hocker & Wilmot (1985, p.20). To Blake & Mouton (1984), it is a necessity in the management of conflict for it allow us to have clues to the origins of conflict "... than simply telling people the rationale of decisions reached or how expensive it is for them not to cooperate or sitting them down in a room to work it out for themselves" (p.286). It may also lay bare chronological actions which disfavour the resolution of the conflict leading to the loss of reciprocal impertinence, confidence, and the inception of suspicion. This is in great contradiction to the goodies of contact or dialogue where people unwrap, contain and lessen the conflict when they communicate to each other (Blake & Mouton 1984: 286). In other words, communication does not only catalyse cooperation but also reduces disagreement among conflicting parties and brings trust between them (Ariani, Ahm & Chashmi 2011: 84).

It is therefore not surprising that when communication between opposing parties fails, differences and misunderstanding creeps in, more and more, endangering relations between those involved in the conflict (Deetz & Stevenson, 1986: 205). When this happens and the administration is not fast in taking decisions as well as communicating them to the people, it means that the conflict management mechanism has failed. When this is considered untrustworthy to conflicting parties, insecurity and mistrust slither in and when coalesced with insufficient or lack of information the situation degenerates (Brown 1993). This article draws inspiration from these arguments and is of the opinion that failure in communication and delay in taking decisions became the bases for the entrenchment of conflict in Missong. Before that is substantiated it is necessary to discuss the people and situate the genesis of the crisis.

### **Background**

The people of Missong are Tikars and migration from North Eastern Nigeria to the Ngaoundere Plateau. It is from here that moved to their present site. (National Archives Buea (NAB), Ad(1929)10, No. EP6808: 10). Though originally part of the Kunabe that settled around the Katsina valley, the presence of oil palms that disturbed farming in the settlement motivated them to moved out of this abode to Muffu where there was abundance of farmland. It is from here that they broke up to establish an independent settlement and immediately established a chieftdom under the command of chief Nsimkeh (NAB, Ad(1927)15, No. SP4583: 3). Nsimkeh thus became the first chief that reigned in the village and was succeeded by Changabong. After the 'passing on'<sup>1</sup> of the former, Wagabong took over authority and upon his disappearance, Neng Nkohfu succeeded the throne. It was only after his disappearance and the coming to power by Luh Beh that the struggle for the throne began.

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<sup>1</sup> The dead of a chief is often described as passing on, disappeared among other words as his death is viewed simply as moving on to meet his ancestors as per the traditions of the Western Grasslands of Cameroon.

Tryself Apwa Ngu challenged the authority of Luh Beh who had acted as chief of Missong for over 30 years in 1964. He argued that with the disappearance of his father, Wagabond, Nkohfuh, was made regent in 1939. He was expected to hand over power to Ngu when he became of age. However, he did not do so and upon his passing on, his son Luh Beh took over as chief instead of Ngu Apwa and the former was made a tax collector by the later. This view has been rejected by Beh who affirms that he was a descendant of Nkohfuh, who was succeeded by Luh Beh I and Nkohfuh, all related to him. Upon the disappearance of Nkohfuh, who had designated him as successor, he was crowned chief. His position was challenged by Ngu who declared himself chief of Missong and his adherents mostly came from Bijum, one of the quarters of Missong.

Attempts at solving the matter locally failed and tension between the contesting parties mounted and Beh petitioned the District Officer (DO) for Wum (G. R Ashu) on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February 1964 (DMW. 644; letter from Lubi, Missong Village – Fungom, 27<sup>th</sup> January 1964, & Letter from to the DO from Tryself Apwa, 12<sup>th</sup> March 1964. The DO's response was conciliatory as he called on the conflicting parties to settle the problem amicably. This fell on deaf ears as Ngu and his supporters would not bulge nor concede defeat as they out rightly refused attending conciliatory meetings organised by elders of the village. They wanted nothing short of Beh denouncing the throne. According to Beh, the intransigence and lack of cooperation from his counterpart led to unfavourable consequences. In a petition to the DO, he intimated, that the activities of Apwa Ngu caused so much confusion as he promoted the politics of divide and disrespect for the sitting tenant. This was further compounded by the refusal of Apwa Ngu's supporters to carryout community labour and contribute to the development of the village. Besides, insecurity and uncertainty reigned as he feared for his life and those of his supporters. He thus called for the intervention of the administration (letter from from Luh Beh to the D.O., 6<sup>th</sup> February 1964)

### **Administrative Intervention and Dilly Dally Tactics Spiralling the Crisis**

In a strongly worded letter to Apwa Ngu, the DO informed him of the accusations levied against him and two accusations were conspicuous and include; division of the village into two, instituting and apartheid like situation, and illegally acting like chief in one of them. He warned him of these activities and advised that he remains a tax collector and nothing more as per the records in his office. He also reiterated the fact that Beh was the recognised chief of Missong and his authority needed to be respected and warned that failure in respecting this order would lead to severe penalties. He concluded that to know the rightful chief of the village, Ngu Apwa and Beh were to deposit 34.600 francs in any of the nearest treasury to enable the administration declare a disputed chieftaincy in Missong.

It was only after this was done that the Ministry of Local Government could take any appropriate action in solving the matter (Letter No. 610/86, from DO Wum to Apwa, Missong Village, Fungom Area, 10<sup>th</sup> February 1964). This was in line with section 4 (1) of the Chief's Law of 1960 which stipulated that such an amount had to be paid by the contesting parties before the Chieftaincy Advisory Committee could meet to adjudicate on such a matter (Southern Cameroon's Chief's Law 1960). He was given twenty days, from the 10<sup>th</sup> of February to the 31<sup>st</sup> March to make known his intention of contesting the throne or recognise Beh as the legitimate chief of Missong. However, this never helped matters as the opponents were unable to pay the deposits and little or nothing was done by the administration in arresting the situation. Instead of the divisional administration moving to adjudicate the matter by bringing the two sides to the dialogue table before the intervention of the Chieftaincy tribunal, the DO insisted that strict administrative procedures had to be followed while the situation degenerated. It is absurd that a problem that could be solved or

contained had to take a different twist because the conflicting parties could not meet up with administrative procedures.

In the midst of this confusion, Beh threatened expelling Apwa and his supporters from Missong as he firmly believed that the administration was delaying in making a decision on the matter. He argued that he had many supporters than Apwa and could effectively/smoothly execute this decision without any major headache. In response to this threat, Apwa barred Beh's supporters from obtaining grass that was to be used in the construction of a school building from Bijung, his stronghold (Letter No. 610/86, From DO, Wum, to Apwa). Without any headway, Beh was powerless and again called on the administration to intervene and maintain peace by arresting Apwa. As tension flared, one would have expected the administration to move in quickly and declare the rightful claimant to the chieftaincy but all it did was sent in security officials to investigate the matter while the problem continued unabated (Letter No. 610/92, From Divisional Officer, Wum, to Inspector of Police, Wum, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1964).

After a lot of feet dragging on the matter, the DO for Wum decided to take the bull by the horns and warned Apwa Ngu that there were no two chiefs in Missong as the administration still recognised Beh as the chief of the village. He intimated that any action of his which would lead to the breach of peace would not be welcome. He threatened arresting and detaining him until the 34.600 FRS demanded by the law had been paid by the contesting parties. Without this, Beh still remained the representative of the administration and chief of Missong. However, Beh was also advised to make sure that peace reigns in Missong (Letter from DO, Wum, to Tryself Apwa Ngu, Bijum Village, Fungom Clan Area, Administrative Warning, 17<sup>th</sup> March, 1964). Though such a decision was salutary, the prescription that both parties were to pay 34.600 FRS created more trouble. It never stated what action would be taken if one party did not do so. This is because Ngu Apwa paid this amount into the Wum Treasury on March 24<sup>th</sup> 1964 but Beh was unable to do so and nothing was done in forcing him comply.

With the administration silent on the issue, Ngu Apwa and his camp cried foul and accused it of taking sides. He and his camp had misunderstood the warning of 17<sup>th</sup> March 1964 and erroneously believed that payment on their part and the inability of Beh to pay meant his dethronement. In a petition to the DO on June 16 1964, he frowned at the delay and insinuated that;

I think you want him to kill me now. He always says that you are his friend and I think so. If not so, you should have dissolved the chief. I cannot say anything apart from your reply to me. All is for you and your friend (Letter from Tryself to DO, Wum, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1965).

The delay of the administration in taking action brought feelings of mistrust and partiality on the part of Apwa and his supporters. They could not understand why the DO remained adamant in making any official statement on a sensitive issue like this. This petition seemed have reminded the DO that there was a problem in Missong as immediately on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June 1964, he reminded Beh of not having complied with his letter of 10<sup>th</sup> February 1964. He was reminded of the payment of the fee required and if this was not done, it would simply mean his declination of the Chieftaincy of Missong. He further warned that he will not hesitate to call on the authorities to address the situation and enthrone another in his state (Letter No. 610/105, Do Wum, G. A. R. Ashu to Chief Luh Beh, Chieftaincy Dsipute, Missong Village, 18 June 1964).

Beh's plea for time to raise the money and pay was not heeded to as the DO made it clear on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1964 that if this was not done on or before 18<sup>th</sup> July 1964, the ministry of Local Government would go ahead to make a final decision. However, this

deadline was not respected and in a bid to make peace reign, the DO decided to declare the dispute. In a letter to the Ministry of Local Government, he opined that;

The present chief, Luh Beh, who claims to have been reigning for 30 years, is being regarded by his opponent, Mr Tryself Apwa as regent. Mr Apwa, a contestant, says that Luh Beh was a mere regent who should now surrender the throne (Letter No. 610/109A, O. J. N. Mbuyogha for the Divisional Officer, (sgn), Wum, 29 July 1964).

He went further to inform the minister that Beh had not yet deposited his fee but promised doing so in the shortest possible time (Letter No. 610/109A, O. J. N. Mbuyogha for the Divisional Officer, (sgn), Wum, 29 July 1964).

Such an endeavour from the DO was a welcome relief and it was hoped that a speedy resolution would surface but this was not so. By the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1964, the problem still lingered because Beh was still unable to pay the required fee. Beh's failure in paying the money made many to erroneously believe that DO had to dethrone him. Beh's authority over his people weaned and in a letter to the DO, he postulated that order was no longer coming from him as many things were done in the village without his consent or knowledge. He went further to postulate that supporters of his opponent were garnering support to Apwa as many believed that he had been dethroned (Letter from Chief Luh Beh, Missong Village, Fungom Clan Area to the Divisional, Wum, Chieftaincy Dispute, Missong Village, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1964). There was thus the fear of the outbreak of hostilities or open confrontations between the two camps.

Apwa Ngu and his supporters became so impatient as the administration was not taking any concrete action in resolving the palaver. In a complain to the Prime Minister (PM), he informed him of the problem and though he had paid his fee for the declaration of the dispute, no action has been taken by the Chieftaincy Commission and the chieftaincy dispute had not even been declared. He also informed the PM of the many letters of reminder he had written to the divisional administration without any favourable. He also told the PM that he had written a complain to the Secretary of State for LG and the only advise was for him to refer the matter to a higher authority. He affirmed that the DO's dilly dally tactics was because he was a friend to Beh. He sustained this argument with the fact that it was because of this friendship that the DO could not take any action against Beh. He thus implored on the PM to intervene and take proper action on the matter (Letter from Tryself Apwa Ngu, Missong Village – Fungom Area, Wum Division, to the Honourable Prime Minister, Buea, West Cameroon, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1964.)

In spite of this complain, the situation remained unchanged until the 27<sup>th</sup> of September when they DO in a Memo to the PM, laid the problem at the doorstep of the Ministry of LG which had not taken any action though the problem had been declared. He implored on the PM to grant him authority to carryout preliminary investigations as chief Beh was unable to pay the fee. He thus called on the PM to delegate powers to him or any other authority to solve the matter. He advised that this matter be referred to the Chieftaincy Committee as a last resort (Letter No. DWM. 644/19, Secret, to the Prime Minister's Office, Buea, West Cameroon, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1964).

The long awaited action took place 10 months after the debacle had started with the intervention of the Ministry of LG. What is so funny is that the DO was unaware of the fact that only those contesting against the reigning chief had to pay. It is very hard to understand how an administrator's negligence could render the entire administrative machinery inactive and the course of justice delayed. It is difficult to comprehend how the Ministry of LG could remain silent over the issue for ten months while people were gnashing their teeth. However, the ignorance of the DO was corrected when on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October 1964 he was informed by the Ministry of LG that the reigning Chief was not supposed to pay any deposit (Ref. No. 02,



717/7, Ministry of Local Government, Buea, West Cameroon, Federal Republic of Cameroon, to the District Officer, Wum, West Cameroon, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1964).

In spite of this, little or no effort was made to minimise the conflict. In the midst of these unfortunate circumstances, division in the village ensued and by December, Apwa Ngu began postulating like a chief. Inhabitants from his quarter and supporters in the entire village were barred from attending Council meetings organised in the palace by Beh. They instead attended the ones organised by Apwa Ngu and took orders from him. The hatred and division in the village was so great that even when a yaw epidemic broke out, Apwa Ngu and his supporters never showed up for vaccination and treatment at Beh's palace. This was also reported during registrations into the electoral register and the distribution of voters' cards as he informed the officials that his supporters could only do so in his compound. This created a tensed atmosphere and Beh made it clear that if Apwa Ngu and his supporters would not recant, open confrontations were to follow (Letter from Beh, Missong Village, Fungom Sub Area, Wum Division to District Officer Wum, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1964).

The reaction of the administration came in on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December and Apwa Ngu was advised by the DO to cooperate and respect Beh as the chief of Missong. He reminded him that this issue had been referred to the Chieftaincy Tribunal and until the matter was settled, Beh remained the chief of the village (DMW/644/26, Letter from DO Wum Division to Mr. Tryself Apwa, Missong Chieftaincy Dispute, 11 December, 1964).

#### **Administrative Incongruity Amplifying the Conflict**

One would have expected the Chieftaincy Tribunal to move in and adjudicate the matter immediately but this was not so as the administration of the Division took up the matter again. This was on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April 1965 as the Divisional administration visited the scene of conflict for the first time and initiated consultative talks between the two contestants and their supporters, elders of Missong and chiefs of Fungom (DMW/644/26, Letter from DO Wum Division to Mr. Tryself Apwa, Missong Chieftaincy Dispute, 11 December, 1964). This was not to give a verdict on the matter but the talks were purely consultative. With this, Apwa Ngu questioned the *raison d'être* of such talks as the matter already laid at the door steps of the Tribunal. He argued strongly that he would not be part of the exercise. He never expected reasonable justice and fairness from the Divisional administration as he advanced a number of reasons.

He wondered why the sitting tenant had not paid the required fee as prescribed by the law. Just like the Divisional administration before October 1964, he was ignorant of the fact that his counterpart was not supposed to pay as little or nothing had been done by the authority in educating him on such a matter. This made him believe that the administration was biased in handling the matter. As for mentioned, he would not understand why the administration was meddling in a matter already being handled by the court. He made it clear that he expected action and nothing else from the court rather continuous delay and unrealistic discussions. To him, the law had not changed as the case was with the tribunal and would not accept this inconsistency from the administration (Letter from Apwa, Missong Village, Fungom Clan Area, to the District Officer, Wum, 18 April 1965).

The DO's attempt at making him reason on the premise that he would handle the case judiciously bore no fruits. Even his proposal that chiefs of Fungom beaker peace were also rejected by Apwa Ngu. He had lost confidence in the Divisional administration and would not adhere to any attempt at or moves from whosoever to bring him to the negotiating table. Powerless in the matter, the DO warned him and his supporters to make peace reign. He was also advised not to conduct himself as chief (that no supporter of his carry a chair or bag for him nor clap hands for him while prostrated). He was also asked to continue respecting Beh

as chief until the Tribunal passed judgement on the matter (DMW/644, Missong Village:35 – 38).

This inconsistency in the administrative handling of the matter instead entrenched the conflict as the Divisional authorities' attempt at solving the matter met stiff resistance from Apwa Ngu. The situation continued until the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 1965 when the Tribunal met in Wum. The contesting parties had to wait with disillusionment for six more months for the court to pass its decision on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 1966 (Letter from Tryself Apwa, Missong Village through the DO to the Honourable Secretary of State, Local Government, Buea; Refund of Chieftaincy Deposit, 34.600frs, 13/3/67). Between the time of hearing and execution of the decision, the Secretary of State for LG had to present the facts of the finding in Memorandum no. P.M.1147/S.6/9 of 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1965 and argued that, chieftaincy in Missong was hereditary and as such, Tryself Apwa Ngu was the rightful heir to the throne. He summarised the findings thus;

Council accordingly :- a) Agreed that Tryself Apwa should be recognised as the village head of Missong in view of the fact that Nkohfuh and Luh Beh were regents.

b) Directed that the deposit of 34.600 francs paid by Tryself Apwa in Wum Treasury Receipt No. 15/248915 of 24<sup>th</sup> March, 1964 should be refunded to him.

C) Recommended that the Missong Community should be asked to build a house for Luh Beh so that he can move out of the Palace into it (REF. WCA(1965)25, Missong (Wum) Chieftaincy Dispute, 22/10/65).

The ruling had to be presented to the Executive Council by Memorandum no. WCA (65)128 and confirmed by Conclusion No. 25(65)10. By this, it was believed that the matter was settled (REF. C2.717/64, Correspondence from the Ministry of Local Government to Divisional Officer, Wum, Missong Chieftaincy Dispute, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1966).

### **Delay in the Implementation of the Tribunal's Decision deepens the Crisis**

Instead of the administration of Wum implementing the decision immediately, no action was taken in that direction and rumours spread. The delay in executing the decision entrenched the crisis and in a strongly worded petition to the DO on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 1966, some elders and traditional councillors from Missong (supporters of Beh) opined that it was rumoured that chief Beh would be dethroned. They argued that this was against the customs and traditions of the people. Once a person was made chief, he had to remain in that office till death, they intimated. They also made it clear that any opposition to the reigning chief (Beh) was sanctioned by eviction and exile from their community and his right to own property withheld.

This was a strong custom that held around Fungom villages and especially the palm belt communities of which Missong was one. To them Beh remained the rightful claimant to the stole or chieftain. They blamed the DO in trying to provoke trouble and bloodshed and that even if Apwa Ngu was enthroned, his followers were small. They further argued that his following was insignificant or negligible and was further complicated by the disapproval of some of his family members of his claim to the chieftain. Their arguments were further reinforced by the fact that most of the chiefs in the areas (bordering chiefdoms) were against him, meaning relations with their neighbours would be affected negatively if he was made chief. Added to this, they made the DO understand that inhabitants of Missong were ready to migrate out of the settlement if Apwa Ngu was made chief and concluded that if the decision was not revoked, they would put up stiff resistance in any way they could (Letter from

Traditional Elders and Councilors of Missong Village, Fungom Clan, Wum Division, West Cameroon to the Divisional Officer, Wum, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1966).<sup>2</sup>

I am of the opinion that if the authorities moved in timely to inform the villagers of the decision and installed the new chief (avoiding the petitioners to get it from rumour) the petition would not have come or would have taken a different twist. The delay in administrative procedures gave Beh and his supporters' time to lobby and garner support within and without the Chieftdom. This vestibule worked so well and drew pity from some Fungom elite. This is true with the case of J. C. Kangkolo, Member of House of Assembly from Fungom area, and supported by his colleagues in the House of Assembly from this area, who called on the administration to take action against Apwa Ngu. In a letter to the Divisional Officer, Wum, he posited that;

According to information received from the chiefs and other sources close to Missong, Mr. Apwa Ngu is causing a lot of unrest in the whole Missong village. He engages in actions which may likely lead to serious breakdown of law and order in the village (Honourable J. C Kangkolo, MHA, Bu Road, Wum, to the Divisional Officer, Wum, Missong complaint, 30<sup>th</sup> January 1965, p.1).

He went further to accuse Apwa Ngu of trying to kill Beh and that he (Apwa Ngu) had out rightly rejected doing community work, together with his supporters. He cited the case of the Village School that was under construction and the Mukap – Mashu road project. He also frowned upon his refusal to attend summons issued to him by the traditional or village council, disrespect for the traditions and customs of the land and his terrorisation of women who were in support of his opponent by stopping them from fetching water in a stream that was located in his quarter. He further intimated that Apwa Ngu had even threatened poisoning this spring if they did not stop coming there to fetch water. He also insinuated that attempts made by the administration in expelling him from the village was met with resistance (Honourable J. C Kangkolo, MHA, Bu Road, Wum, to the Divisional Officer, Wum, Missong complaint, 30<sup>th</sup> January 1965, p.1).

Such accusations from the Honourable member of the House of Assembly has been affirmed by Apwa Ngu in a petition to the Secretary of State for LG when he stated that "J. C. Kangkolo who has never been in agreement with me called for several meetings convincing the Missong people against me" (Letter from Apwa, Missong Village, Wum, to the Honourable Secretary of Local Government, Buea, 4/4/67). He also made the Secretary to understand that Kangkolo had tried to incriminate him without success. Since he was a tax collector, he had persuaded the Zhoa Court to take action against him for not willing to handover the tax nominal roll book. The troubles in Missong had led to his dismissal. He was fined 10.000francs. In his very words, he alleged that "... this was a plan to ... ruin me but I paid the money" (Letter from Apwa, Missong Village, Wum, to the Honourable Secretary of Local Government, Buea, 4/4/67).

Such accusation and counter accusations was not healthy for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. The entertainment of further complains by the DO from the camp of Beh worsened the already aggrieved situation the village was in. things were compounded by his response to the petition from elders against Apwa Ngu as he called on them to furnish him with another copy on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1966 if they wanted any action to be taken against the latter (DMW. 644/57, from the Divisional Officer to the Traditional elders and Councilors, Missong Village, Fungom Clan Area, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1966). Though they did so, nothing was done as he remained silent. It is difficult to understand the reasons for this demand and his inability to respond or carry out the perceived action.

<sup>2</sup> This petition was signed by Ibio (Family Member to Apwa Ngu), Ikea, Ichile, Lango, Wanmbe, Ndenkah and Nsunte.



This state of affairs only raise the hopes of the Beh's camp and intensified Apwa Ngu's defiance of Chief Beh and his traditional institutions. Knowing fully well that he had won the case, he could not understand why the Executive Council's decision making him chief was flouted by the authorities. In a letter to the Secretary of State for LG on the 13th of March 1967, he did not hide his frustrations when he lamented; "... this is really making me wonder whether there are two governments in Cameroon where the other takes decisions and another revokes" (Letter from Tryself Apwa, Missong Village through the DO to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of LG, Buea rnmnt, Buea; Refund of Chieftaincy Deposit, 34.600frs, 13/3/67). He could not understand why it was taking too long for him to be enthroned and his 34.600 FRS deposit refunded. To him, his natural right had been denied or infringed upon (Letter from Tryself Apwa, Missong Village through the DO to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of LG, Buea rnmnt, Buea; Refund of Chieftaincy Deposit, 34.600frs, 13/3/67).

This petition seemed to have reminded the DO that an issue of that nature laid on his table and on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1967, a month later, he forwarded Apwa Ngu's petition to the Secretary of State and also reminded him of the one written on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 1966. To him (the DO), the letter was in one copy and could not be forwarded to him (Secretary of State for LG). This explains why he could not go ahead with the execution of the decision of the Executive Council. He further called on the Ministry to give him guidelines on how this could be done (DMW.644/60, from Divisional Officer Wum to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Local Government, Buea, West Cameroon, Missong (Wum) Chieftaincy Dispute, 18<sup>th</sup> April 1967).

It should be noted that he had erroneously informed the Ministry that he could not implement the decision because the people would not allow Apwa to enter the village and had asked for a review of the decision. However, upon investigation, it was discovered that he did not visit the village but made his demand on information gotten from a delegation that visited his office from Missong. The Ministry's response was simple as he reminded the DO of the decision of the Executive Council and made it clear that it was not to be reviewed until a further careful study of the matter had been made. The DO was advised to stay execution of the Council decision until further notice (Ref. no. C2.717/75, Correspondence from The Ministry of Local Government, Buea, West Cameroon, Federal Republic of Cameroon, 11 June 1967).

In spite of this attempt at reviewing the matter, Apwa Ngu was taken aback when on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 1966, the Cameroon Official Gazette published the name of his contestant as chief of Missong. This inconsistency from the administration was not taken lightly by Apwa Ngu (Letter from Apwa, Missong Village, Wum, to the Hinourable Secretary of Local Government, Buea, 4/4/67). With this state of affairs, Apwa Ngu continued his refusal in doing community development work and the feud in the village continued. However, he was warned by the DO not to continue breaching the peace in Missong and that he had to contribute to the growth and development of his community through community work (DMW.644, Missong Village Headship Dispute, 1964, p.62; Ref. No. DMW.644/63, letter from DO to Tryself Apwa, Missong Village, Fungom, Wum, "Community Work" 8<sup>th</sup> May 1967).

After a lot of feet dragging on the matter, the Ministry of LG decided to put an end to the problem and this is evident in the words of its Permanent Secretary when he postulated that;

On further discussion, it was agreed that Council was right in recognising Tryself Apwa as chief of Missong. Council accordingly directed that the decision taken and conveyed in conclusion of the 25<sup>th</sup> Meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1965 be implemented (Ref. No. C2.717/88, Correspondence from the

Ministry of Local Government, Buea, West Cameroon, Federal Republic of Cameroon, to the Divisional Officer, Wum Division “Missong (Wum ) Chieftaincy Dispute” 21 June 1967).

During this meeting, the Council had adopted its earlier decision and endorsed Apwa Ngu as the chief of Missong but no official correspondence was sent to the parties concerned nor the Divisional authorities that had to implement the decision. It was only on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 1967 that the DO was officially informed of this decision, 18 months after.

### **Struggle for Supremacy intensifies as the Administration Delays in Enthroning Ngu**

Even though the DO was officially informed of the decision late, it was expected that he had to act immediately and installed the victorious Apwa Ngu. However, it took some months for him to officially inform the people and implements the decision of the Executive Council. With Apwa Ngu informed of the decision and the instruction of the Ministry to installed him on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July 1967 (Letter from Senior Divisional Officer to Tryself Apwa, Missong Village, Fungom, Wum Division, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1967), he decided to assert his authority and this flared up tempers once more.

Petitions against Apwa Ngu’s choice by the Executive Council flooded the SDO’S Office. For instance, the *Nahtums* (Queen Mothers) denounced Ngu in favour of Beh. They reiterated the fact they crowned Beh and not Apwa Ngu. They called on the administration to exile Apwa Ngu and his supporters from Missong and argued that they could do so long ago but the respect of the administration forbade them (Letter from Nahtum, Missong Village, Fungom Clan, to DO, Wum Division, 17 – 7 – 67).

While the administration was diagnosing these petitions, Apwa Ngu busied himself putting up his *Ngumba*<sup>3</sup> House. He was thus determined to create his own regulatory society to rival that found in the palace of Beh. It should be noted that in most societies in the North West Region of Cameroon, it is uncommon to find more than one in each village. This move was again frowned upon by the supporters of Beh who once more called on the SDO to stop Apwa Ngu from continuing with the project. They threatened to attack him he and his supporters if the divisional administration did not intervene. To them, Apwa Ngu was breaching the peace against previous agreements, that he had to continue respecting Beh until the trouble was settled by the administration. Just like the women, the councillors of Missong called for the eviction of Apwa Ngu, and his brother Nchotu (one his fervent supporters) from the village or war would ensue (Letter from Councillors of Missong, Fungom, to the SDO, Wum Division, 14<sup>th</sup> July 1967).

All these petitions were pouring in because the people were ignorant of the instructions given to the Divisional administration by the Ministry and a meeting that took place on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July 1967 between Apwa Ngu and the SDO informing him of the decision and a letter carrying the same information given to him. It was because of this that Apwa Ngu and his supporters intensified their defiance for Beh. It is clear that if the SDO had informed the people of Missong instantly/officially, he should have limited the petitions that were sent to him and tensions that flared up between June and July. With the rising tensions, the DO would no longer be indifferent as he decided to ‘pull the bull by the horns’. He invited the two contestant and their supporters, quarter heads in Missong and chiefs of Fungom area to converge on Zhoa on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 1967 (Letter from J. N. Ntui, SDO Wum, to Luh Beh). During this meeting, Apwa Ngu was presented to the people as the chief of Missong. A letter to that effect was handed over to Apwa Ngu and here is an except;

... By this decision, the government recognises you as the chief of Missong, and at the same time appeals to you for peace and corporation among your people ...

<sup>3</sup> Regulatory Society

. I wish to congratulate you and your success and also appeals for your corporation at all times... (Letter from J. N. Ntui, Senior Divisional Officer, Wum Division, to Tryself Apwa, Missong Village, Fungom Area, Wum, 20<sup>th</sup> July, 1967. Ref. no. DMW.644/68A).

The long awaited decision came at last after three years of suspense, tension, division and hatred. This finally laid the matter to rest and Apwa Ngu now had to mend fences and unite the people under his leadership.

### Conclusion

The paper examined the role administrative delay in taking decisions and communication malfunction paly in entrenching chieftaincy conflicts in Cameroon. With the example of Missong, it revealed that the refusal of Luh Beh in handing over power to Apwa Ngu led to the outburst of conflict between them and their supporters in 1964. Without any headway, they called on the administration to intervene and bring a lasting solution to the matter. However, the slow nature of the administrative machinery, lack of information on the procedure that had to be followed and inability of the administration to communicate decisions to the people promptly ignited the conflict as each the two sides tried to assert its authority in the chieftom. Furthermore, the delay made it possible for alliances to be made and supporters and sympathisers won from within and without as people could easily switch camps making the situation more complex. This state of affairs had a negative effect on the development of Missong and flared tensions, and the switching of alliances and apartheid like situation that existed in the chieftom became the foundation of more discord that was to characterise future events in the post 1967 era.

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