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Controversial Role of Actors Involved in the Decongestion Process of the Bamenda Urban Center in the North Western Region of Cameroon

Chiane Beng Japhet Kuma

Part Time Lecturer, Department of Geography and Environmental Science
University of Calabar, Nigeria

Samba Gideon

Senior Lecturer, Department of Department of Geography,
The University of Bamenda, Cameroon

Abstract:

In Cameroon, and most other sub Saharan African cities especially the city of Bamenda in the North Western Region of Cameroon, the problem of urban transport is endemic. This is easily identified by persistent traffic jams and congestion. The anarchical installation of the informal transport sector in the city consists of large number of mini-buses, taxis and motorcycles operators that dominate the provision of public transport. In a manner, in which the disorder implantation was tolerated by administrative authorities in the name of crisis, the struggle for decongestion of the central city to relocate transport agencies and motor-parks to re-instate order in the city is becoming a bet-risk for the Mayors and Senior Divisional Officers (SDOs) who have to attack these groups who are well organized and ready to defend their position. This paper expresses in controversial role of the administrative authorities that retarded the decongestion process which till today there has not been any successful decongestion of Bamenda city.

Keywords: Decongestion, controversial role

1. Transport Situation in Bamenda City

In Bamenda city, Cameroon, public transport is dominated by the operation of disorganized informal sectors accepted by their authorities in the name of 1980s economic crisis. The dominance of these transport services hampers economic development and reduces the quality of life of the citizens as large number of vehicles requires meeting demand causes traffic congestion and parking difficulties. The administrators who accepted their installation at the central towns have sort ways to decongest these gross infrastructures to more convenient sides at the periphery of the city. The negotiation proves difficult in the city of Bamenda due to controversial rule of administrative actors at the head of the Mezam Division. In an attempt to transfer motor-parks and travel agencies to the periphery as was the case in other Cameroonian cities in 2007 only resulted to instability of these motor parks and agencies. The spatial displacement of these parks and agencies has left social and economic impacts, which are well visible at their abandoned sites at Up-Station Bamenda. The new structures that came with the parks and agencies have dilapidated while others have been transformed into slums. The population saw themselves the booming economic activity collapsing.

Decongestion, as it is thus presented in the popular media, involves the removal of all informal structures that clog up the streets in the central business areas (Adjovu 2009). This conception of informality extends to both work and home, street vendors as well as slum dwellers are the objects of such operations. In the case of the former, their activities on the "sidewalks" are said to hamper pedestrian movement and road traffic, as well as to create filth and general uncleanness. The state authorities such as the Governors, Senior Divisional Officers took their administrative initiative to decongest Bamenda from transport services in 2003 that ended up in a controversial manner.

At the wake of decentralization in Cameroon, important persons emerged in territorial administration of the state, a successor of a long line of administrative authorities carrying federal inspection of the administration, governors of regions passing through unavoidable Senior Divisional Officers (SDOs) who are the custodians of the state in their respective administrative units. On 12th November 2008, the head of state of Cameroon signed two important decrees, the Decrees No 2008/376 to lay down administrative organization of Republic of Cameroon and Decree No 2008/377 to determine the powers and duties of the head of administrative units and the organization and functioning of their services. It is these state representatives that

2. The State Representatives

In a given city in Cameroon like Bamenda, the state through the Governors, Senior Divisional Officers, Divisional Officers and the City Council Delegates have the assignment within the framework of their respective powers to maintain

law and order, social peace of the citizens, national interest and administrative control. These administrators are state delegates appointed by decree of the president of the Republic and this disposition of law bestowed on administrative authorities commands them to intervene in the management of urban affairs considered at risk. This is exactly the case in Bamenda city where the different government administrative actors who have succeeded at the head of Mezam Division since the year 2000 were obligatory to take position in relation to the reluctant of Travel Agencies noticeably Amour Mezam Transport Agency, Vitican Agency, Guarantee Agency, Moughamo, Jeannot Express Agency and a host of others to leave the central city to the city outskirts in a bit to decongest the central city of congestion and frequent traffic jams.

3. The Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) Misunderstanding Positional Action of the Decongestion Process

The mobility of motor-parks and travel agencies was part of the national programmed aimed at decongesting the urban centers in Cameroon. This strategy of management was engraved in the processes of Structural post-adjustment reconstruction by the government, where citizens of nationals observed a recovery of great sites of urban construction so much by the private sector than the public sector in the name of privatization. In a context where the disorder implantation of travel agencies was tolerated by public authorities in the name of the 1982 economic crises, to maintained order after decades later, became a bet-risk for the Senior Divisional Officers and Mayors who have to attacked these well-organized informal transport sectors who are ready all the time to defend their position as most of them had building permits granted by these very authorities to open up complex commercial structure in their various sites of operation in the central city. With shock and suspicion of corruption, many think that the administrators who have ruled in Bamenda and directly implicated in the document of decongestion of the central city have played a great part of their administrative carrier in the process. For example, the instability of Senior Divisional Officers (S.D. Os) at the head of the Mezam Division, since the year 2000 more than five SDOs has succeeded at the helm of the Division. This is perceived as part linked to the management of the decongestion document.

Names of S.D. Os	Duration	Their Action on Transport Management
Bell Luc Rene	1990 - Sept 1992	-Normal
Soufo Samuel	Sept 1992 - Oct 1996	-Normal
Mout Egbang	Oct 1996 - April 1998	-Normal
Elanga Mmbela Louis	April 1998 - May 2000	-Normal
Nzegge Onyang	May 2000 - Jan 2001	-Normal
Okalia Benard Bilai	Jan 2001 - July 2003	-Negotiation for decongestion of the central city, to free the city of traffic congestion -Sealed Amour Mezam Transport Agency not to operate in central city
Sanji Robertson Tado	July 2003 - Oct 2005	-He maintains the sealed-on Amour Mezam while other Transport Agencies have moved to the city entrances
Ndjanga Jules Marcelin	Oct 2005 - July 2008	-He removed the sealed-on Amour Mezam without any condition allowing the agency to singly operate alone at city center there by gaining locational advantage over the others. - the rest of the Travel Agencies got annoyed and returned to the central city -Approve building permits for commercial structures by transporters
Madu Joseph Bertrand	July 2008 - present date	-Negotiation for another decongestion that did not yield fruits -Temporal design of resettlement site at periphery (Up Station) -Realization of another access road into Bamenda city to decongest the inner city
Mr. SONGA Pierre René,	April 2016 till Present date	-continue negotiation with transport operators for another decongestion

Table 1: Names of SDOS 1990-2018 and Their Action on the Decongestion Process of Bamenda City

Source: Field Computation Bamenda, 2018

4. The Decongestion Process and Genesis of the Controversial Role of Actors

The decongestion process started when Okalia Benard Bilai came to power in 2001. In a process of negotiation, he finally convinced the owners of travel agencies to move to the city entrances in 2003. All the agencies moved at the same moment when the motor-parks were deployed at the periphery except Amour Mezam who refused to move claiming administrative authorization from the Ministry of transport. Ndjanga Jules Marcelin came in 2005 with different view of the city. He removed the sealed-on Amour Mezam Agency and in 2006 the city dwellers saw the travel agencies descending back Down Town thus the genesis of the controversial role of different actors that have succeeded to rule in the city on the decongestion implication. In 2008, Madu Joseph came with open negotiation calling on the civil society leaders, the transport proprietors and non-governmental organization in 2008 to help suggest measures but it ended at deadlock.

Since the year 2000, it is agreed that the principal cause of traffic congestion in the central city of Bamenda city (Down town) is attributed to the anarchical installation of motor-parks and travel agencies at the central city. Within a superficial area of 3km² along the Commercial Avenue corridor are found a good number (in total 17) of transport bus station of veritable sizes just 1m rolling at the road side and no S.D.O up to the year 2000 had taken courageous decision to send the motor-parks and travel agencies at the entrances of the city. It was during the reign of Mr. Okalia Bilai Benard the then SDO of Bamenda in a process of negotiation, finally convinced the travel agencies destined south (west, south west, littoral, center) to move up at Up-station in 2003. Many attributes to him as a good leader who wanted sustainable development of Bamenda city.

5. The Seal of Amour Mezam Site at Central Town

All the agencies moved up at the same moment that the motor-parks were re-deployed to the north, south, east and western entrances of the city. Only Amour Mezam express refused to re-locate claiming authorization decision from the ministry of transport recognizing her activities on her site of implantation and operation. In reaction, Okalia Benard Bilai decided then to seal the site of Amour Mezam banning the agencies from operating at the central city. In reaction, Amour Mezam carried this administrative litigation before the administrative judge and at the same moment, the society shifted its activities on a temporal site at least 1km from the forbidden or banned site. After more negotiations and even two interventions from the ministry of transport recognizing the activities of Amour Mezam on the indicated site, S.D.O Okalia Benard still refused to remove the seal on Amour Mezam.

6. The Released of the Sealed-on Amour Mezam and Return of Agencies to Central Town

Okalia was finally replaced by another Senior Divisional Officer Sanji Robertson Tado who during his period of reign did not open the document nor released the seal on Amour Mezam. He was later replaced by Ndjanga Jules Marcelin who during his term of office (2005-2008) decided to release the seal on the site of Amour Mezam in 2006 to operate Down Town. According to Acha Simon Ngwen, Mayor of Bamenda I Council (16th July 2012), in an interview he said: "Bamenda was to be the largest town in Cameroon; this SDO Ndjanga Marcelin caused a lot of trouble, I believe he was on a mission". For him, it was the removal of the seal on Amour Mezam to start operating in the central city that sparked the instability of transport agencies in the city as all the agencies were re-deployed to the central city by transport proprietors. What happened is that since the city had started developing around the transport agencies at the periphery, the people who wanted to build around the periphery came back to central town. Since Amour Mezam had become the only agency authorized to operate at the central city, the other travel agencies took this advantage as an excuse to move down town to benefit the same advantages like their colleague Amour Mezam.

The instability of SDO at the head of Mezam division is said to have provoked the dislocation of the parks and agencies. It is noted that there was no specific document for decongestion to be followed. Each SDO came in with his own opinion for the functioning of the town. This is true because no Plan of Soil Occupation have ever been put in place, except for the Master Plan of 1982 that has not been revised since it was adopted. Since the year 2000, Bamenda has been practicing a jungle type of planning hopping that at any moment infrastructures could change location. This is exactly what has been happening in the transport domain. Since when the decongestion process started, the transport agencies and motor parks has constantly changed location, from central city to the periphery and back to central city so on and so forth. This has been illustrated on the figure below.

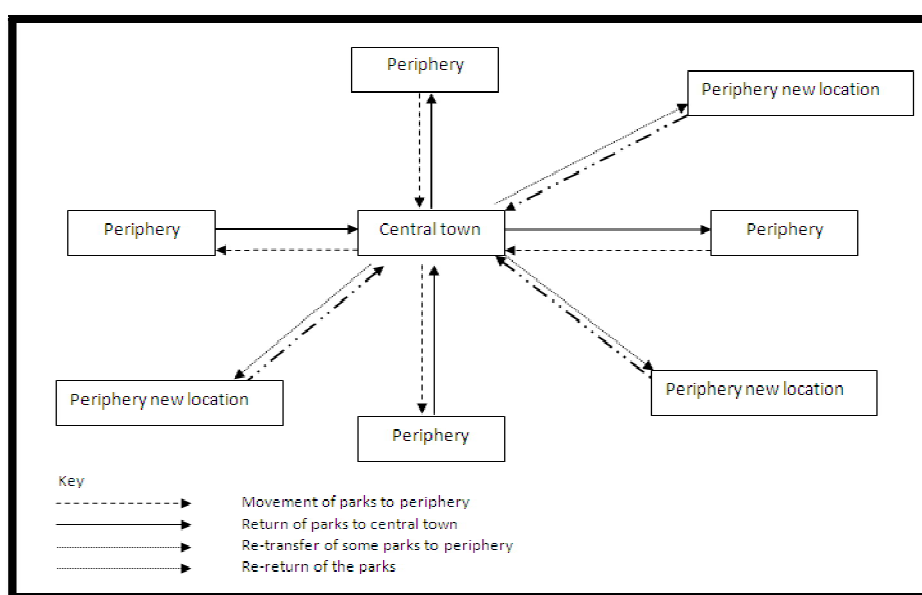


Figure 1: Evolution of Movement of Travel Agencies and Motor-Parks in Bamenda

7. Strategies of Decongestion of the Central Town

The decongestion process was done as follows:

First and foremost, the transfer of motor-parks and travel agencies to the periphery: All the agencies and parks destined south, west ward (south west, littoral, west and center) were to move Up Station, while those Eastward (Ndop, Ndu, Nkambe, Wum and Fundong) were to move toward Mile4 and those destined West ward (Mamfe, Akwaya, Pinyin) to move to Mile8. This was to encourage equitable peripheral circulation of automobile and reduced traffic at the central town. The agencies and the motor-parks moved out in 2003 but return back in 2006 at the central town. Secondly the Construction of second axis road into down town: This project was sponsored by the World Bank, an 8km road from Up Station to enter the city through Mile2 Bayelle; this was to help reduced congestion at the Up-Station-escarpment road.

The Removal of containers from the center of Bamenda: The city before had been nicknamed the "city of containers", about 3500 containers occupied the commercial center, and road junctions have been transforms into shops, boutiques, saloons. The presence of these containers was a real burden to car parking, and easy circulation. Their removal was effectuated in 2010 by the City Council transforming the town of Bamenda from that of Containers City to the one of "Green Infrastructure City". And the creation of new motor-parks sites: From 2008 the City Council embarked on the creation of new motor-parks at the entrances of the town. These included the BMM Park, the Mile4 Park; Mile8 parks that plight rural and inter urban areas. This was to encourage peripheral circulation of automobile, local population to open up businesses around the parks and provision of social amenities such as electricity, public toilets and roads.

The management of municipal ordure with the service of Hysacam, to keep Bamenda clean, the city had a new face look. Every morning on Thursdays from 6am to 11am, no services are to take place at this period, the shops, saloons, and markets remain closed and no taxi movement. The inhabitants of Bamenda have to come out with their tools for cleanup campaign to keep the city clean.

8. Weaknesses of the Administrative Authorities in the Decongestion Process and Personal Interest Action

It is noticed that jurisdiction over urban transportation issues in Cameroon and Bamenda in particular extend over multiple tiers of government, creating a sort of jurisdictional impediments to integrated flagged earlier by the World Bank. Many functions are carried out at the national level, others have been devolved or decentralized to local government although the institutional and financial capacity required to execute those functions are often lacking and flow from top to bottom. When overlapping responsibility lie with multiple institutions, the result is duplication of effort, poor accountability, lack of coordination of diffusion of commitment at all levels towards implementation of transport strategies that serve people's needs.

It is unfortunate that public transport sector in Bamenda city is dominated by the private sector. The Bamenda City Council and the three sub divisional councils overlap responsibilities on the private transport sector implanted in the city and the existing markets. The fact here is that, each municipality wants to neither maintain the motor-parks and travel agencies within their area of jurisdiction nor matter if there are inconveniences since they want to collect taxes. This brings about lack of coordination and diffusion of commitment at all levels towards implementation of transport strategies to decongest the central city for durable development.

The decongestion of Bamenda city was a good idea perceived by the administration but the measures taken by the various administrators had unforeseen contingencies. The administration had a lot of overlaps weakness in the decongestion process as can be seen below:

The decongestion process was organized with no proper feasibility study being carried out. The general public powers did not look into the long-term impact of the decongestion process, even when the travel agencies were transferred to the periphery, they were all the time rolling along the high way and pile up at one spot which exposed the travel agencies to even more risk of accidents and insecurity than their stay in Down Town.

There was no effective design of resettlement sites for the travel Agencies at the periphery, they were only asked by the urban council delegate and the city authorities to move to this or that axis of the city. The transporters rented their site depending on their negotiations with the landowners. No doubt the transporters had to return back Down Town at their interest.

Poor communication with the stake holders. The S.D.O, the Government Delegate and the Mayors did not do their public relations well like educating, sensitizing and convincing the transporters, the drivers, businessmen and the civil society on the importance of decongestion.

Lack of Master Plan (MP) that orientates the operation of infrastructural development: For the past 35 years, Bamenda city still depend on the old Master Plan of 1982 that was supposed to be revised every after 10 years. It becomes very difficult to plan new infrastructure following the old MP, even Plan on Soil Occupation (POS) is lacking. Bamenda for the past decades have been doing a jungle type of planning meaning that infrastructures at any moment could change locations. One may not be wrong to attribute this fact to the constant instability of the motor-parks and the travel agencies, if not how can we explain the fact that a big city like Bamenda does not have a new MP and POS.

Lack of finance: The government in Bamenda lacks the finance to open up more roads and compensate those travel agencies to leave, because there is no development without destruction and no destruction without compensation. The government needed to evaluate the expenditures at the travel agencies and compensate them to leave but she never did so. Also, there was that act of personal interest, Inconsistency in decision making by appointed officials in which most of the administrators who have ruled in Bamenda came for their personal interest. If not, how can they explain the fact that the Senior Divisional Officer BenardOkalia Bilai under judicial power convinced and successfully transferred the travel agencies and motor-parks to the periphery in 2003 and placed a seal on Amour Mezam which refused to moved, but

when Ndjanga Jules Marceline came to power, he, under judicial power released the seal on Amour Mezam and allowed the travel agencies to return Down Town.

9. Drawbacks of the Government Delegate (GD) Reform Movement

According to Le Messager October 2009, Ndumu aim to modernize the city is considered to be necessary but the reforms implemented are hasty, harsh, poorly planned and no alternative measures are provided to the present population affected. Before the appointment of the G.D. the mayors of the three councils issued temporal authorization for the installation of containers whereas, they were sources of revenue for the council and providing employment opportunities to the inhabitants of the municipalities. According to Achu Simon, Bamenda 1 mayor, "some of the containers were well placed and did not need to be taken off. The formal G.D. Abel Ndeh of the defunct urban council authorized the use of containers for trade. The present D.G. Ndumu Vincent is against it. Many people are against the policy because it does not limit itself in the core of the town but also extend to the peripheries as such many people where asking for spatial limitation. The G.D. gave six months to evacuate the containers; this was too short for the owners to convert themselves."

10. Meetings Held in View of Management of the Urban Transport Sector

Since the year 2000, many meetings have been held concerning the urban transport sector especially around the agencies that poses a big problem on the management of the city. In 2000, recommendations were made to send the agencies out of the central town, that was finally done and the agencies were transferred to the periphery in 2003.

In March 2006, another meeting was held that appointed members into commission to re-define the conditions for the operations of operating inter-urban travel agencies and the creation of new motor-park sites. This was done following a prefectural order No 57PO/E.29/71/SI. In effect, the city dwellers instead saw the return of the travel agencies to the central city and the construction of complex commercial structure at their sites.

In July 2008 and January 2009 meetings were held on attempt to send back the agencies at up-station but none of the meetings seems to have yielded fruits. In January, 2010 another meeting was held and decisions were mitted out to the travel agencies given them ultimatum of 30 days to quit the central town, in response only Mazi Express among all the agencies responded and moved back up-station in February 2010. The Bamenda Mobile Market motor park that descended to it formal location at Nkwen in July 2010, had to return at up-station in 2010 after heavy intervention of authority forces and bands. Since 2012, the Bamenda City Council and MINDUH (Ministry of Urban Development) has been looking forward for a master plan of the town that will be respected by all the stakeholders of the city.

11. Distribution of Transport Infrastructure within the Municipal Councils in Bamenda

The motor-parks and travel agencies are cosmetic and multi-functional activity centers and attract a lot of businessmen. These are areas where the council gets much income from access ticket paid by bus loading, market fees, entertainment tax and building rents. In Bamenda city, these multi-centre companies are mostly concentrated within the Central Business District (CBD) area either basing much on one council municipality than the other, thereby creating inequality within the three sub-divisional councils that makes up the City Council. According to the Mayor of Bamenda I council Mr Acho Simon, "if the agencies are implanted in his municipality, this will bring development to the population, local population will do business around the parks and construct more houses for restage". For him, where travel agencies and motor-parks go, development follows.

Council	Number of Councilors	Political Party
Bamenda I	31	SDF
Bamenda II	31	SDF
Bamenda III	31	SDF

*Table 2: Composition of the Municipal Councils within Bamenda, SDF (Social Democratic Front)
Source: Bamenda City Council, 2018*

All the three councils were created in 2007 by Decree No 2007/117 of 24 April 2007 carried on the creation of councils. The three councils are ruled by the main opposition party of the country, Social Democratic Front (SDF). The equitable distribution of transport infrastructure within the council areas is not rational. Bamenda II council disposed alone of 03 public motor-parks, in addition to the Bamenda central market: the "Food market" and the "Ntarikon market". They handle also most of the transport agencies. It is therefore indisputably this Bamenda II council that produces much of the wealth or riches of the city, thus creating more looks and converts.

The Bamenda I council covers the administrative center, the area in ruin of the abandoned transport agencies and the Mendakwe motor-park Up-station. This is an area of the city where high social class residents are mostly concentrated. The Communal forest reserve that used to be here has been cleared for construction, for operation of Bamenda Mobile Market (BMM) motor-park and transport agencies. Thus, this council dreams to see the transport agencies go back to its territory.

While the Bamenda II council counts only on its unique market, the fiscal fall in some warehouses and urban spreading, the Mile 4 Park and Amour Mezam express. The presence of Amour Mezam here has attracted clandestine parks that load on this site every morning and evening.

Councils	Number of Motor-Parks	Number of Travel Agencies	Number of Markets
Bamenda I	1	2	1
Bamenda II	3	11	4
Bamenda III	1	4	1
Total	5	17	6

Table 3: Disposition of the Motor-Parks, Travel Agencies and Markets within the Three Councils
Source: Field Observation, 2018

12. Syndicates at the Motor Parks

At the motor parks, there exists more than one syndicate. We have the Canasiut, Grassfield inter-urban, Membadatta, and Strataucam. These syndicates function mainly on partnership business. The agent sells tickets to drivers. They are represented in all the municipal parks. They also provide tariff for the City Council. They function in checking road accidents and advice drivers on road safety. Finally, they check bad tires and provide tires for drivers. During the decongestion period, most of their members abandoned the syndicates because it was facing financial ruins. Papa Ngala is the president of the Canasiut, during an interview with him, he said: "his syndicate was made up of 14 executives, during the instability, 7 members left because of financial setbacks and competition. Till now, the syndicate still composes only of the 7 remaining executives".

To these syndicates, they think that the administrative decision to decongestion the City of Bamenda was an act of developing the periphery but the administrative decisions were too fast and quickly adopted. They needed to do more sensitization and open up debate forum on social ills that are degrading the city of Bamenda especially that of traffic jam and congestion. They blame the instability of Senior Divisional Officers at the Head of Mezam division where each Officer brought in his own personal decision. The fact that SDO Benard Bilai opened up negotiations and successfully convince the agencies to move to the Periphery of which they did so, when Amour Mezam express refused to move, he sealed the company from operating but when power change hand with the coming of SDO Jules Marcelin Njanga in 2004, he removed the seal on Amour Mezam to operate in the central town, the instability started, this show incompetency at the level of the administration in Bamenda. The syndicate participation in decision making at public meetings during the decongestion process was minimal. They were not given forum to contribute ideas, even when they did so, their ideas were not considered. They think that the decisions were conservative within the public authorities and only implemented to be accepted by the population without public debate.

Days	Syndicate
Monday	Grassfield inter urban
Tuesday	Setraucam
Wednesday	Membadatta
Thursday	Grassfield
Friday	Setraucam
Saturday	Canasiut
Sunday	Membadatta

Table 4: Syndicate's Weekly Meetings Are Schedule as Follows
Source: Mile 2 Park Office, 2018

13. Conclusion

We can draw the following conclusions, the administrative effort to decongest the town was short lift to an extent, and the struggle in their effort had a lot of draw backs, their misunderstanding position in solving the urban problem congestion ended up in dismay. The decongestion document was effectuated without effective sensitization, designed of resettlement sites and no feasibility studies were carried out. The administrative decision to allow Amour Mezam operates in central city while all the other agencies were at the periphery was a wrong foresightedness at the side of the urban authorities to ever live to regret the act. This one factor was a spring board that triggered instability of the motor-parks and travel agencies in the city. The socio-economic impacts of the instability became so clear and visible to every one's eyes.

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