



**OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC INDEPENDENT CONCILIATOR
SOUTH-WEST REGION**

**2022 ANNUAL REPORT SUBMITTED FOR THE
HIGH ATTENTION OF H.E. THE PRESIDENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON**

DONE IN BUEA, MARCH 2023





Buea, the: _____
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REF N° _____/SWR/OPIC/PS

**H.E. The President of the Republic
Head of State
% The Minister of State, Secretary-General
Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon
Yaounde.**

Subject: FORWARDING LETTER

Your Excellency,

In conformity with the concluding provision of Article 4(1) of Decree N° 2020/773 of 24 December 2020 to lay down conditions for discharge of the duties of Public Independent Conciliator in the North-West and South-West Regions;

I have the honour, most respectful, to you forward here-enclosed, for the very high attention of H.E the President of the Republic, the original of the Annual (administrative) Report of the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator on the state of relations between citizens and Regional and Council Services.

Kindly accept, your Excellency, the assurances of my esteem for your high office and person.

The Public Independent Conciliator
South West Region

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INTRODUCTION

The 2022 annual report of the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator for the South – West Region marks the end of the first full year of activity since its creation and official commencement of activities. Indeed, having been administered the oath of office in July 2021, last year’s annual report covered the first six months of the existence of our institution.

Naturally, drawing inspiration from our first steps in 2021 and taking advantage of the longer timespan as well as the progressive availability of human and financial resources required for the accomplishment of our missions, the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator has initiated and effectively conducted more intensive activities during the year just ending.

However, it is important to underline that notwithstanding the relatively longer period of activity for the current year as compared to the previous year (2021), the general context in which our institution has functioned remains basically the same as in the previous year. I am referring specifically to the Socio-economic and especially security context characterizing the South-West Region.

Consequently, while we have been able to deploy our collaborators to carry out routine duties and other field activities in many more localities within the region, our general observation is that most of the local collectivities- essentially the municipal councils that showed difficulties in functioning effectively within their areas of jurisdiction last year due to security preoccupations, have continued to experience the same situation. The obvious outcome of this regrettable situation is that the local population who ought to benefit from the services of these municipalities cannot always access their services.

An evaluation of the level of effective functioning and the provision of various expected services to Service Users by the Municipalities of the region shows a relative improvement on the ground. In this regard, a few of the municipalities that maintained a discreet or timid presence within their territory during the year 2021, demonstrated greater determination through a more

effective functioning during the year 2022 under review. The Eyumojock Council in Manyu Division is a positive example wherein, in spite of the continuing precarious security situation in many localities under this sub-division, the Mayor is effectively resident and present in the municipality, attending to the most immediate and provideable needs of Service Users.

In the same vein, it is also relevant to indicate that during this year 2022 which constitutes its second year of activities, the South-West Regional Assembly has had a positive impact on the livelihoods of the population especially in terms of its social actions or solidarity initiatives. Although the manner in which this impact is perceived will certainly vary from one administrative unit or beneficiary community to another, it is to the credit of this relatively new institution that it has been able to carry out several activities that reflect and meet some of the urgent preoccupations of the Service Users and population in general.

Overall, the state of relations between citizens and the Regional Assembly or Council Services is relatively positive and satisfactory. This assertion can be buttressed by the observation that during the period covered by this report, there has been no major situation wherein Service Users have experienced cases of gross discrimination, injustice, blatant corruption causing denial of services or an infringement of their freedoms that have threatened to get out of control or provoked general alarm.

This globally positive outlook should not be misunderstood to mean that citizens of the region or service users who have sought the services of our local collectivities have always seen their expectations fulfilled. There is need for more proactive and citizen-friendly actions on the part of the Region and respective Council Services as a prerequisite for improving local governance and enabling citizens benefit fully from the fall-outs of decentralization.

In order to enhance its understanding and ensure ease of exploitation, this report will be structured into two main parts. Part I will be devoted to the relations between citizens and the Regional Assembly or Municipal Council

administrations while part II will examine the functioning or activities of the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator.

However, beyond this broad organizational structure, each main part will in turn be comprised of sections. Part I shall have a separate section devoted to the Regional Assembly as an entity and another section that will examine the functioning of the local collectivities per Division.

Similarly, Part II will have a section reserved for the administrative actions or internal activities of the institution and a separate section for various activities carried out in the accomplishment of the missions assigned to us.

In order to uphold the bilingual character of our country and although the report does not have an elaborate or detailed component in French, I have provided an executive summary which constitutes a synopsis of this annual report. It is my conviction that this executive summary provides a panoramic presentation that will be adequate for strategic and high exploitation.

RÉSUMÉ DU RAPPORT ANNUEL DU “PUBLIC INDEPENDENT CONCILIATOR” POUR L’ANNÉE 2022

Conformément à l’option de promotion de nos deux langues officielles, le présent résumé exécutif vise à donner un aperçu général du contenu du rapport annuel en présentant les principaux thèmes abordés et décline en grandes lignes, les différents volets de son élaboration.

Le présent rapport annuel pour le compte de l’année 2022 consacre la toute première année de pleine activité des Services du “Public Independent Conciliator” depuis le début de son fonctionnement. En effet, ayant prêté serment en Juillet 2021, symbolisant la période du début de nos activités, le précédent rapport annuel correspondait en réalité au deuxième semestre de l’année 2021.

Naturellement, s’inspirant des expériences acquises lors de nos premiers pas et tirant profit de la disponibilité progressive des ressources financières et du personnel nécessaires pour l’accomplissement des missions qui nous incombent, nous avons pu initier et mener davantage d’activités au courant de la période de référence.

Toutefois, il convient de préciser qu’en dépit d’une période d’activités relativement longue par rapport à la précédente année, le constat qui se dégage sur le terrain est que nos activités et celles des collectivités territoriales décentralisées (CTD) ont été essentiellement mené dans le même environnement sécuritaire que lors de l’année 2021.

A cet effet, alors que nous avons pu effectuer des descentes auprès de certaines collectivités et déployer nos collaborateurs à travers des nombreuses circonscriptions de la région, nous relevons que la majorité des communes ayant éprouvé des difficultés de fonctionnement au cours de l’année 2021, en raison de cette crise sécuritaire, ont connu des contraintes similaires en 2022. La

conséquence directe de cette situation déplorable est que les populations et usagers qui nourrissaient l'espoir de bénéficier des prestations de ces collectivités locales n'ont pas pu, pour une grande majorité, accéder à ces prestations.

Cependant, une évaluation globale du niveau de fonctionnement des communes, le taux de fréquentation des administrations de ces collectivités par les usagers en quête des prestations diverses démontre une relative amélioration sur le terrain. En effet, certaines parmi ces communes qui ont affiché une présence et niveau de fonctionnement plutôt discret en 2021 se sont illustrées à travers une plus grande détermination au cours de l'année écoulée. L'on peut citer parmi celles-ci la commune d'Eyumojoock dans le département de la Manyu où le Maire et son exécutif municipal résident effectivement au chef-lieu de la circonscription, assurent le fonctionnement régulier des services, permettant ainsi aux usagers de bénéficier des différentes prestations.

De même, il importe de signaler que lors de cette année 2022 marquant la deuxième année de fonctionnement du conseil exécutif régional, cette institution s'est signalée de manière positive à travers des réalisations dans le domaine social ainsi que des actions de solidarité fort louables. De toute évidence, la perception ou appréciation desdites actions ou réalisations ne sauraient être identique à travers l'ensemble de localités ou au sein de différentes couches de la population mais cette subjectivité dans la perception ne saurait remettre en question le mérite dû à l'institution.

Ainsi, dans l'ensemble, ces réalisations du conseil exécutif régional ont contribué à l'instauration progressive des rapports positifs entre cette collectivité et les citoyens. Dans un contexte marqué très souvent par des agitations intempestives, il n'a pas été enregistré des situations de mécontentement provoqué es par des sentiments d'injustice ou de discrimination reprochés à cette institution.

Nous devons toutefois rester mesurés dans cette appréciation de l'état des relations entre les citoyens et ces collectivités car, il existe bien des secteurs où les attentes des citoyens ou usagers n'ont pas été atteintes. A cet effet, des efforts doivent être multipliés et renforcés afin de permettre aux populations de tirer un meilleur profit du processus de décentralisation est de bénéficier des retombées palpables des actions de la gouvernance locale.

Dans le souci de faciliter l'exploitation du présent rapport annuel, il sera élaboré en deux grandes parties. La première partie sera consacrée aux relations entre les citoyens et les collectivités en l'occurrence le Conseil Exécutif Régional et les communes ; tandis que la deuxième partie examinera les activités et fonctionnement des Services du " Public Independent Conciliator."

Au-delà de la présentation sous deux parties principales, chaque partie comportera des sous rubriques consacrées aux volets précis. C'est ainsi que la première partie comportera un volet réservé au fonctionnement du Conseil Exécutif Régional est un autre pour les collectivités locales examinées par département.

La deuxième partie réservée au fonctionnement des Services du " Public Independent Conciliator" traitera à son tour d'un volet du fonctionnement en interne et des activités menées sur le terrain au cours de la période de référence.

PART I

RELATIONS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND THE REGIONAL ASSEMBLY OR LOCAL (CITY AND MUNICIPAL) COUNCILS

A: RELATIONS WITH THE REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

A keen observation and exploitation of the 2021 annual report of the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator will reveal that it did not contain an elaborate review or analysis of the state of relations between citizens or Service Users and the then barely functional South-West Regional Executive Council. The explanation for what could be misinterpreted as an omission is simply informed by the awareness that having become operational during the first semester of 2021, the Regional Assembly only received its budgetary allocation during the last quarter of the same financial year.

Under the circumstances, it was observed that the institution essentially devoted the rest of the months to its internal administrative organization and conception of a draft action plan to be implemented in a more coherent and coordinated manner in 2022 although it endeavored to execute a number of projects identified as urgent on the field.

The year 2022 has been significantly different as the institution effectively held a budgetary session in November 2021 to enable it elaborate and adopt activities or projects earmarked for execution during the year. It is the execution or implementation of such actions and projects that determine and provide a basis for the assessment of the relations between the citizenry and this institution during the period under review.

This perspective for the assessment of the relations between the Regional Assembly and Service Users or the citizenry is informed by the fact that contrary to the Municipal or City councils to which numerous Service Users go to seek

various services on a daily basis such as birth certificates, marriage certificates, building permits etc., the Regional Assembly does not provide such proximity services to the public and would generally or logically only impact the citizenry through its realization of relevant or pertinent projects to the benefit of this population.

In this connection, our institution has been able to verify and confirm effective execution of some as well as receive reliable information from credible sources concerning the realization of others in areas which we cannot readily access under the prevailing security context. The sectors which were given priority attention in the selection and execution of these projects are essentially four (4) namely:

- Education;
- Health;
- Infrastructure development (mostly roads and bridges);
- Electrification and water supply.

In the domain of education, the choices of the beneficiary schools or localities is likely to have a positive impact on the image of the Regional Assembly in the eyes of the populations. The table below highlights some of these realizations.

<u>PROJECT DESCRIPTION</u>	<u>DIVISION</u>
Construction of a block of two classrooms in GTC NTEMZEM (WABANE)	LEBIALEM
Construction of a block of two classrooms in GHS MAMFE	MANYU
Construction of Phase 1 of a fence in GBHS Ekondo-Titi	NDIAN
Construction of a block of two classrooms	Kupe-Muanenguba

At GTHS Bangem

Supply of dress-making kits to GTHS BOVA

FAKO

Supply of dress-making kits to GTHS Mamfe

MANYU

Supply of dress-making kits to GTHS Ntemzem

LEBIALEM

Supply of dress-making kits to GTHS TOMBEL

Kupe-Muanenguba

Indeed, it would be remembered from some recent occurrences in the South West Region that in the early months of 2022, armed separatists attacked the premises of Government Bilingual High School, Ekondo-Titi leaving a total of five persons dead in the trail of this inhuman action. As it could be expected and as certainly calculated by the armed assailants, the immediate consequence was that both students and teachers who had demonstrated a high degree of resilience abandoned the campus for lack of adequate security.

Obviously, many of these students and teachers who were forced to abandon school did so with regret as they and many parents who enrolled their children wanted classes to be maintained. An analysis of this painful situation can only lead to the conclusion that those parents, their children who are the students as well as enthusiastic teachers expressed joy towards the authorities of the South-West Regional Assembly and government in general for this positive action which has enabled the beneficiary community to happily embrace schools resumption for the 2022/2023 academic year as seen by the increase in the number of students now back to GBHS Ekondo-Titi which had fallen to virtually zero after this sad incident.

It is not considered necessary for the purpose of this report to conduct a similar analysis as regards the relevance of the decision made by the Regional Assembly for the other institutions. However, it is useful to point out that virtually all of the schools concerned had been maintained open and functioning through commendable determination and resilience when schools were closed down in most

localities of the Region outside FAKO Division that benefitted from greater security protection. Having functioned under such difficult circumstances the population can only hail and applaud the Regional Assembly for providing the necessary push for their continuous functioning.

Similar commendable actions were also carried out in the domain of health and road maintainance. However, since it is not the purpose of this annual report to carry out a project-by-project inventory on the actions of the Regional Assembly during the period under consideration, some of the most salient health projects are highlighted here-below, considering the direct beneficial impact the effective realization of health projects has on the livelihoods of populations of the localities concerned.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

BENEFICIARY DIVISION

Renovation of Mundemba District Hospital, Roof of Block A and Construction of a wall-way from Block “A” to Block “B”

NDIAN DIVISION

Acquisition of an X-ray machine for the Bangem District Hospital

KUPE-MUANENGUBA DIVISION

Construction of a Maternity Block at NGUTI District Hospital

KUPE-MUANENGUBA DIVISION

Supply of Hospital Equipment to the EYUMOJOCK District Hospital

MANYU DIVISION

Supply of Hospital Equipment to the KONYE District Hospital

MEME DIVISION

It can be ascertained that the realization of these projects received favourable reactions from the inhabitants as illustrated by feedback obtained through interactive radio programmes or newspaper reports bearing interviews with some members of the beneficiary communities. To this list, should be added the prompt solidarity action carried out through the provision of several mattresses

and some essential drugs following the terrorist attack on the Mamfe District hospital in mid-2022.

In the same domain of solidarity, the Regional Assembly carried out public actions for the benefit of one hundred (100) Internally Displaced persons (IDPs) per Division during the year 2022. This action attracted very positive reactions from a cross-section of local public opinion who viewed the provision of materials and foodstuff assistance to these IDPs as a laudable humanitarian gesture.

Overall, although the institution cannot have totally fulfilled the aspirations or addressed all of the pertinent preoccupations of the populations of the Region, the analysis above illustrates that the choice and realization of several projects in the social domain contributed to the establishment of satisfactory relations between a significant segment of the population of the Region and the South-West Regional Assembly.

FUNCTIONING OF THE LOCAL COUNCILS AND RELATIONS WITH THE CITIZENS

As it could be expected as a result of the prevailing context characterized by the security crisis that has continued to affect the North-West and South-West Regions six years later, the functioning of our local collectivities has been negatively impacted by this precarious situation. Obviously, all municipal councils are not affected to the same extent or degree since all localities do not also experience the security crisis with the same severity. Beyond the security aspect but closely linked to it, another factor that has also contributed to the regrettable situation of poor functioning of councils is the high enclavement of some areas.

The picture painted above is not only valid for different administrative units such as Divisions but also varies from one council to another within the same division. In this regard, it can be observed from a general assessment of the

situation at the regional level that overall, most of the local collectivities of FAKO Division have been able to function in a more or less satisfactory manner even though some of them also remain way below expected optimal performances.

On the other hand, the Division whose local collectivities continue to register an almost minimal or insignificant level of operability within their areas of jurisdiction remains Lebialem Division. Indeed, as it was the case during the 2021 financial year, it was once again observed that the activities of all three councils- MENJI, ALOU and WABANE continue to be jeopardized by the security situation within their respective territories.

The local collectivities of the other four Divisions- Kupe-Muanenguba, Manyu, MEME and NDIAN fall between these two positions. However, it is important to underscore that even within these four divisions, there exist municipal councils that may have functioned virtually at a similar manner or even below some of the Councils of Lebialem Division. The municipalities of Dikome Balue and TOKO in NDIAN Division or AKWAYA in MANYU Division fall into this category and their functioning will be examined more elaborately in the part devoted to each Division.

ON THE COUNCILS OF FAKO DIVISION

A-LIMBE CITY COUNCIL

Fako Division is one of the two out of the six (06) Divisions of the South-West Region to have the two categories of local collectivities- the LIMBE City Council and seven municipal councils corresponding to the seven (07) sub-divisions of the Division.

From a functional perspective, an assessment of the functioning of the LIMBE City Council has a direct bearing on the three sub-divisional or municipal

councils namely LIMBE I, LIMBE II and LIMBE III that constitute its jurisdiction and territory.

An evaluation of the relationship between the LIMBE City Council and citizens or inhabitants of the City reveals that although the elected officials at the head of this collectivity deployed commendable efforts during the 2022 financial year in an attempt to meet the expectations of the population, their actions did not attain all expected objectives as a result of the drastic reduction in the financial resources of this collectivity.

Conventionally, the state of relations between each collectivity and its inhabitants or the citizens thereof can be assessed using two broad criteria namely:

- The provision of statutory or laid down services to Service Users;
- The organization of impromptu or sporadic social activities such as sporting or cultural events.

As regards the provisions of habitual services such as the issuing of civil status documents, building permits, it can be considered to have been satisfactory both at the level of the City council and the three sub-divisional councils since all four collectivities carry out these duties as an integral part of their routine missions. This assessment is based on observations and information collected during random visits to the field during which our personnel conduct both formal and informal interactions with Service Users or the local inhabitants. An analysis of information obtained through this mechanism shows that the performance of these routine duties has not recorded any disruption or serious dysfunction affecting the citizens.

However, there are other sectors of activity where the inhabitants of the City expressed reservations and even preoccupations. The removal and disposal of garbage whose deterioration is viewed as a threat to the health of the population is one of such domains. The concerns of the population about a total halt to

garbage removal by the accredited company “HYSACAM” were more persistent during the last three months of the year 2022.

Similarly, the prolonged delays registered in the payment of the bills of a considerable number of service providers and contractors of the LIMBE City Council due to liquidity difficulties has also caused some degree of frustration within the business class especially those who contracted bank loans in order to fund the execution of the contracts or requested services. Obviously, this regrettable situation contributes to undermining the atmosphere of trust and confidence between the local collectivity and its partner economic operators.

B-RELATIONS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND OTHER COUNCILS OF FAKO DIVISION

One of the outstanding characteristics of FAKO Division and its local collectivities remains the highly cosmopolitan profile of the population in the vast majority of localities as well as the urban and semi-urban nature of an ever-increasing number of communities within each council area. This cosmopolitan character of the population bringing together persons of diverse ethnic groups, occupations and social or political leanings signifies higher demand for various services from the local collectivities as well as an increased likelihood of fluctuations in the perception of relations between the collectivities and their inhabitants.

In terms of effectiveness of functioning during the period under review, the Buea Council understandably stands out amongst the rest of the collectivities of FAKO Division as the one that operated within an atmosphere convenient for responding to the daily solicitations of a very significant portion of the Service Users or citizens that live within its jurisdiction. Indeed, whereas over 40% of its physical surface area consisting of the Bonjongo court area, the BONAVADA

area and the Muea court area still suffers from pockets of insecurity that relatively hamper the delivery of some services to the populations of these localities, the urban perimeter which holds over 75% of the population of the municipalities remains fully accessible.

This positive security context provides a conducive atmosphere for citizens to physically displace themselves to the council premises in order to seek and obtain various services as well as for the council officials to provide other expected services to inhabitants within various localities and parts of the municipality.

Our observation and performance assessment actions vis-à-vis the satisfaction of the expectations of Service Users reveal that there was an overall positive relationship between the Buea Council as an institution and its Service Users for a good number of services provided exclusively from the office premises. These services essentially concern the deliverance of civil status documents and papers required by automobile taxi drivers for the smooth exploitation of their commercial activities.

Unfortunately, this generally satisfactory state of relationship is not applicable to other sectors of services provision. One of the areas wherein the citizens and council Service Users express serious discontent is the domain of market vendors. The grievances at the origin of the unhealthy relationship with their local collectivity concern the absence of any toilet facilities in virtually all the main markets of the Municipality (Great Soppo, Molyko central market, Muea etc.), the absence of any public taps or bore-holes to contribute to the improvement of hygiene through the cleaning of various foodstuffs (fruits, chicken, vegetables) or regular washing of hands as part of measures to fight against COVID-19 or the cholera outbreak recorded in parts of the town in 2022 as well as the arbitrary or frequently fluctuating rates for daily market tickets rising to an incomprehensible amount of CFA 1000frs in some cases.

In addition to these preoccupations from the ordinary category of vendors generally described as “buyam-sellams”, there are also rampant complaints about illicit or unauthorized controls of business licence (patente) accompanied by intimidation or extortion of traders and shop owners as well as against what they describe as the rudeness and brutality of elements of the municipal police charged with ensuring discipline and conducive order in the market areas.

Whereas the domain of the issuing of building permits has also been a source of relatively conflicting relations between a segment of the population and the officials of the Buea Council, a close examination shows that in many of the concerns expressed, Service Users are not completely irreproachable and even partially to be blamed. There are several cases of building permits having been refused because applicants are constructing in prohibited areas such as obstructing waterways, in marshy areas, close to water catchments or on parcels of land which are the subject of litigation between contestants often attracting administrative or judicial injunctions. In other cases, some applicants who turn around to complain have been observed to be reluctant to pay the rate laid down by the regulations in force and corresponding to their project or envisaged investment.

However, in order to build greater trust from the public and improve the perception Service Users have about their actions, the officials of the Council need to adopt a more professional and even pedagogic approach, explaining their actions using the regulations in force. Such an approach will reduce or progressively eliminate feelings of discrimination, injustice or high-handedness nursed by some Service Users and usher a more positive relationship.

An evaluation of the relationship between the Buea Council and the citizenry during 2022 will be incomplete without mention of the disappointment expressed by the population in the last quarter (September-December) of 2022 as a result of the abandonment of garbage removal operations throughout the town. Indeed, this lamentable situation became so disturbing that inhabitants of

numerous quarters and neighborhoods resorted to setting ablaze huge heaps of garbage in a bid to avoid what they considered as likely to provoke health hazard or even an epidemic. It will be remembered that it is the failure to ensure the performance of this hygiene and sanitation duty and especially the spill-over of garbage from the temporary municipal dump site that resulted in the double fatal road accidents that claimed a total of twelve (12) lives from two road accidents a few kilometers from the locality of MUEA.

The public anger and discontent that was provoked from these incidents almost resulted in public demonstrations at the end of the year-barely a couple of days before the Christmas festivities. As it can be imagined, during this scenario, public anger would not have been directed at the authorities of the Buea Council alone but beyond to the high public authorities of our country and further served as a pretext for criticism against state institutions in general.

Consequently, although the situation was prevented from degenerating and successfully brought under control by Regional administrative authorities, it will be helpful if greater attention is paid to this sensitive and visible sector in order to prevent the recurrence of situations that can only erode public confidence and darken rather than consolidate good relations between the collectivity and its citizenry.

Notwithstanding the analysis carried out in the paragraphs above, it can be observed that the authorities of the Buea Council deployed laudable efforts to ensure that the town lives up to its adopted appellation of the city of legendary hospitality especially during the 2021 (2022) Total Energies CAN.

Through its participation in the successful hosting of the teams lodged in Pool F of the tournament as well as CAF officials who chose to lodge in one of the prestigious hotels of the town, the Municipal authorities earned the admiration of its inhabitants and visitors alike, thereby bringing sentiments of joy amongst the sports loving component of its population.

For the purpose of this report, it has not been deemed necessary to carry out an elaborated review of performances or the state of relations between Service Users and each municipality because it is our conviction that such an approach will lead to repetitions that may not bring any relevant information for the high attention of H.E. the Head of State.

In this regard, after the detailed examination of the state of relations between the Council of the Capital City of the South-West Region and its inhabitants, one of the municipalities of the Division that has been considered deserving of separate attention is the MUYUKA Council. This is explained by the consideration that unlike the Six (06) other municipalities of FAKO Division, the Muyuka Council area continues to be severely affected by the prevailing security crisis, making it virtually impossible for the overwhelming majority of the population still resident in the sub-division to either seek or benefit from effective services delivery from their local collectivity.

Although the current Council executive demonstrated great determination and took the courageous initiative to get the Council administration to resume functioning in its official premises in Muyuka as opposed to Buea from where it had almost completely been relocated for over two (02) years, the precarious security situation in over eighty-five (85) per cent of the localities comprising the Muyuka Council area remains an impediment to the provision of services to the population or the carrying out of the routine activities by the council.

Our observations have shown that the Council officials have been able to provide limited services in the domain of the issuance of some civil status documents, birth certificates essentially and the follow-up of timid activities in the constructed main market of the town on the regular market day-Friday. However, even this timid activity has been a source of an acrimonious relationship as sympathizers of the separatist ideology on the ground are said to have continued to use threats to prevent traders from complying with even the daily rate taxes.

Faced with these challenges within the market in Muyuka town as well as its inability to deploy itself to previously densely populated localities such as EKONA, Munyenge, Bafia, Ikata, Malende, Mpondo etc., the current Council administration is observed to have embarked on a process which is intended to gradually build some level of trust, reduce fear amongst inhabitants and contribute eventually to relative collaboration.

In this light, the actions of the Mayor and his deputies deserve to be lauded as they effectively held both the 2022 administrative accounts and 2023 budgetary sessions in the premises of the council with the effective participation of virtually all councilors, some of whom used to boycott the sessions for fear of reprisals from separatists or their sympathizers. This situation illustrates that in spite of the suspected presence of separatists or their sympathizers amongst segments of the population, the Muyuka council administration is on the path of positive relations with part of its resident population.

As regards the TIKO and IDENAU Councils, they were observed to have functioned to near optimal capacity within the headquarters and adjoining urban localities but remained relatively hampered in actions for the benefit of their inhabitants within rural and distant localities. In this regard, it is important to highlight the case of the TIKO council, led by its mayor that undertook and executed some projects within the year 2022 that greatly impacted the relationship between the collectivity and its population.

Most important amongst these projects are the construction of a befitting grand stand at the TIKO ceremonial avenue, the rehabilitation through the use of pavement blocks of some kilometers of township roads in the neighborhoods of the TIKO Central market and some thickly populated streets as well as the construction by surface dressing of over 1km of tarred road in one of the oldest settlement areas of Mutengene town. The fact that the inhabitants of the beneficiary areas collaborated with the council officials to ensure the successful

execution of these earmarked projects without disruption, exercising patience during the inevitable inconveniences caused can be considered as a demonstration of the relatively cordial relations that this local collectivity has succeeded in establishing with the residents of the municipality.

However, it may also be useful to highlight that during 2022, the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator received two (02) complaints from service providers for what they considered as unusual delays in the payment of their bills. Considered in isolation, it could be viewed as an indicator that the relationship between the Council and service providers is not very positive and could have a negative impact on its image amongst direct economic operators and sub-contractors who depend on them. But an examination of the complaints revealed that they concern actions that were initiated by the previous administration of the council which failed to respect the managerial principle of only awarding projects when the institution has the financial resources to pay for contracted services. Consequently, they are liabilities inherited from the previous administration and whose settlement requires due process.

In another area, one of the sectors which mitigated or dampened the positive relationship between the TIKO Council and the citizens is the prolonged failure to remove and dispose of huge heaps of garbage even along the major roads as seen opposite the Mutengene main market or the secondary market opposite Government Bilingual High School Mutengene. This has led to the population especially the market vendors adopting the regrettable habit of setting the garbage on fire to eliminate the highly unpleasant odour that is generated from the garbage while at the same time provoking thick fumes that are not only polluting to the eyes and lungs but also hamper visibility for road users and drivers along the Buea-Mutengene road axis.

Although this practice has not yet caused any direct loss of lives through an unfortunate road accident, such an occurrence will certainly cause the eventual

victims and market vendors to immediately forget any positive realization by the TIKO Council officials and focus on the negative incident which usually overshadows previous achievements or laudable performances.

ON THE COUNCILS OF KUPE-MUANENGUBA DIVISION

Apart from the local collectivities of FAKO and MEME Divisions, the councils of Kupe-Muanenguba Division are amongst those that were able to attain an acceptable level of operationality during the period under consideration although this level of functioning obviously varies from one municipality to the other.

Out of the three collectivities namely BANGEM, TOMBEL and NGUTI, reports indicate that the council of the Divisional headquarters has the highest direct impact in terms of the relationship between this collectivity and its local population. As it has been the case since the second part of the year 2021, the Mayor and his collaborators also distinguished themselves during the year 2022 by being permanently resident in the municipality and ensuring the effective functioning of municipal services on a daily and regular basis.

Considering the near obvious link between effective presence, availability to attend to Service Users and its impact on the relationship citizens are likely to enjoy with their collectivity, the day-to-day functioning of this council from its official premises means any service users who so desire were able to access services and receive due attention from the Council administration.

Unfortunately, in a context where most local councils of the region are functioning almost exclusively from subventions provided by the state and almost totally unable to raise any internal revenue, the ability of the collectivity to meaningfully impact the livelihoods of citizens is severely undermined. Consequently, even a council with devoted and determined municipal authorities finds itself unable to implement its own plan of action in terms of the provision of such services like pipe-borne water, electrification projects for communities or the execution of road maintenance projects that could really contribute to a visible improvement in the living standards of the population within the municipality.

Besides the Bangem council, the TOMBEL council also recorded effective and regular functioning in its area of jurisdiction during the year 2022. Although, a significant number of localities that comprise the municipality continue to be affected by the prevailing security situation or from relative inaccessibility due to the poor state of the rural roads, the town of TOMBEL which enjoys good security protection provided the council a suitable atmosphere for its functioning and the provision of various Services to Users.

Top of the list of the category of services provided to the population were the deliverance of all three categories of civil status documents as well as issuing of building permits to those who solicited. From this perspective, it can be considered that the municipality maintained a satisfactory relationship with citizens during the year 2022. However, a number of indicators are a pointer that the reality may not entirely correspond to this assessment.

In this connection, complaints concerning the prolonged absences of the titular Mayor from the locality in which she is said of not residing, coupled with accusations of high concentration of powers in the hands of the Mayor indicate that the ability of the collectivity to respond to the aspirations of Service Users and the population was highly affected during the period under review because quite often, actions may have been delayed or frequently postponed to await the effective presence and approval or signature of the Mayor.

Similarly, as it was the case at the beginning of the 2021/2022 academic year, the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator received written and oral complaints in 2022 from Heads of some nursery and primary schools concerning prolonged delays and even the non-provision of the minimum packages intended to enable these schools function effectively and reassure both parents and pupils about the determination of government to provide quality education in a context wherein separatists and their sympathizers clearly made education a target and have since carried out numerous violent actions to disrupt schools.

From the analysis above, it can be observed that whereas the Tombel council was able to function regularly within its premises and attend to Service Users, a combination of factors prevented it from taking advantage of the relative security in its municipality in order to respond in an optimal manner to the expectations or aspirations of its citizens and local population; thereby preventing it from establishing an overall positive and commendable relationship with these citizens.

NGUTI COUNCIL

Out of the three councils of Kupe-Muanenguba Division, the NGUTI Council stands out as having continued to attempt to carry out its activities in a relatively more challenging atmosphere compared to those of BANGEM and TOMBEL. Significantly enclaved and almost inaccessible to or from the other local collectivities of Kupe-Muanenguba, the functioning of this council remained severely affected or influenced, during the year 2022 by separatist actions both within its own areas of jurisdiction as well as spill-over effects from the neighboring KONYE and Upper Banyang Sub-Divisions.

Situated along the Kumba-Mamfe-EKOK highway served by a good tarred road, the activities of this council whose geographic location ought to be an important asset for its socio-economic development have been seriously undermined by the very precarious atmosphere observed within its territory.

Against the backdrop of this handicap, the Mayor of the NGUTI Council, his deputies and personnel demonstrated commendable determination and courage during the year 2022, in deciding to ensure the function of the council from its official premises in NGUTI as opposed to the situation observed some two (2) years ago when the council administration had been relocated to Kumba-headquarters of MEME Division.

However, it is useful to point out that notwithstanding this positive initiative, within a context where over 75% of the population of the chief-town have been displaced, unable to maintain access to hinterland localities, it remains difficult to objectively evaluate the state of relations between citizens and their collectivity. Indeed, under the prevailing circumstances, the functioning of the council in 2022 was observed to be essentially limited to services that could be provided from its office premises such as the issuance of requested civil status documents or the rare revenue activities.

Most significant amongst what has been attained through this decision about its effective presence on the ground was the holding in November 2022, within the council premises, of the 2023 budgetary session. Having taken place some months following the holding of the session devoted to the adoption of the administrative and store-keeping accounts, it could be considered that the executive of the NGUTI Council is pursuing laudable efforts aimed at confidence building that should have a positive impact on the relationship it entertains with its inhabitants or population.

ON THE COUNCILS OF LEBIALEM DIVISION

Contrary to the situation prevailing in large parts of Fako Division and some urban municipalities or administrative units of the region, the overall security environment of Lebialem Division has not witnessed a significant improvement on the ground. As it could be expected, this continues to negatively impact the functioning of the local councils within the Division.

Out of the three councils of the Division, our observations and reports reveal that only two-the ALOU and WABANE Councils can lay claim to minimal functioning within their municipalities. The MENJI Council, Council of the Divisional headquarters has no presence within its area of jurisdiction. Obviously, under the circumstances, it is difficult to evaluate the relationship between these local collectivities and the inhabitants or Service Users within these localities because any genuine impact on such a relationship can only be created when the council is on the ground and deploys itself for the provision of expected services to the citizens.

Even in the cases of the ALOU and WABANE Councils, it is important to highlight that a significant part of the populations who constitute potential Service Users of these Councils have been displaced out of their native communities since 2017-2018 and have still not returned to these localities. Consequently, even the sporadic presence or timid attempts by the municipal authorities or their collaborators to function within their areas of jurisdiction can only be of benefit to a negligible part of the population.

In conformity with the picture presented for other local councils, some of the Councils of Lebialem Division show proof of the deliverance of Civil Status documents comprising essentially birth certificates for some of the children born within these localities and whose parents are conscious of the importance of birth certificates for their offspring. It may be useful to indicate that there are no records

from any of the three councils attesting of the celebration of any marriage during the year 2022. This alone constitutes one of the major indicators of their level of functioning as well as of the relationship between the collectivities and citizens of these municipalities.

Amidst this generally unenviable picture, the most disturbing remains the Council of the Divisional headquarters-MENJI which is rather known to have a low-keyed presence in a neighboring Division. It is hoped that with the determination demonstrated by the current and relatively new Senior Divisional Officer who is leading by example through his physical presence in the Divisional headquarters, this regrettable pattern will witness a positive evolution and see the council recommence activities within its premises and by so doing also contribute to encouraging the displaced populations to gradually return to their homes and localities.

ON THE LOCAL COUNCILS OF MANYU DIVISION

Favoured by their privileged geographical position situated either immediately at the borders or not far from this land border with the Federal Republic of Nigeria- a regional economic power, the four (04) local collectivities of MANYU Division namely MAMFE, AKWAYA, EYUMOJOCK and UPPER BAYANG are endowed with huge economic potentials that could be harnessed and transformed into instruments for the provisions of diverse services for the benefit of their citizens.

Unfortunately, just as it was the case since 2017 and until 2021, during the year 2022, only two of these collectivities-MAMFE and EYUMOJOCK were observed to have recorded a relatively tangible level of functioning or volume of activities at the service of their inhabitants, while the routine activities of the other two councils- AKWAYA and UPPER BAYANG continued to be hampered by the uneasy security situation that has continued to characterize these localities.

During the year 2022, the Municipal Executive of the EYUMOJOCK Council once again distinguished itself as having made laudable strides in ensuring dynamism in the functioning of the council administration. This dynamism is evidenced by its permanent and virtually quasi-normal functioning, carrying out diverse activities on a regular basis and the implied collaboration the institution seems to receive from the citizens because in spite of the general atmosphere of insecurity, the activities of the council have not been disrupted or compromised.

Obviously, routine services such as the delivery of civil status documents, issuance of building permits especially for constructions in the rapidly developing border town of EKOK and the organization of public ceremonies feature prominently amongst the range of services provided to citizens by the EYUMOJOCK Council. Regrettably, the determination and dynamism of the

Municipal Executive were of benefit only to the inhabitants of EYUMOJOCK – the headquarters and the border town of EKOK because they are not only accessible but also enjoy a satisfactory level of security protection.

In this regard and on the basis of its scope of activity during the period under review, it could be ascertained that the state of relations between citizens and the EYUMOJOCK Council administration were satisfactory and encouraging.

As regard the Mamfe Council- Council of the Divisional headquarters, the Municipal authorities were also observed during the year 2022 to have demonstrated a high level of determination in ensuring the effective and routine functioning of this local collectivity in spite of the frequently sorrowful terrorist incidents recorded within its jurisdiction and capable of constituting a source of intimidation or discouragement to less determined officials.

Apart from the regular services provided to Service Users of this municipality, one of the indicators of the generally positive relationship that prevails between the inhabitants and the Council administration is the fact that the premises of the Council have not been targeted by any of the acts of terrorism or violence that were recorded during the year 2022 within MAMFE town or localities under its jurisdiction.

However, it is useful to indicate that this apparently smooth relationship is mitigated on the ground by repeated complaints of misunderstandings between the Council Executive and segments of the population represented by some economic operators and even local administrative authorities. In this connection, the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator has been encouraging the Municipal Executive to explore avenues of improving collaboration with the local administration and other stakeholders in order to consolidate and enhance the delivery of quality services to all components of the population as well as establish better understanding with the disgruntled segment of its inhabitants because such

a relationship will be for the long term benefit of development within the Municipality.

As regards the functioning of the other two councils of Manyu Division- the AKWAYA and UPPER BAYANG Councils, the evaluation brings relatively familiar observations characterized by contrast triggered from some of the most challenging circumstances obtainable on the ground.

During the year 2022, the populations of several towns or localities of Akwaya sub-division suffered some of the worst atrocities witnessed since the beginning of the on-going socio-political unrest in the North-West and South-West Regions. In this light, it is on record that the populations of the localities of BALLIN, OBONYI I and recently BACHE recorded not only enormous destruction of homes and property but also high human casualties.

A municipality with dense population clusters in the headquarters- AKWAYA town but also around the BOKI court area, the MESSAGA-EKOL court area, the TAKAMANDA park zone as well as border localities to Nigeria like DADI, BODAM etc., it is no surprise that with the vastness of its territory and the peculiar security situation, the Municipal Council administration found itself limited to symbolic functioning within AKWAYA town and its periphery.

These difficulties are further compounded by the chronic problems of enclavement that have continued to plague this administrative unit for several decades until now. Notwithstanding this generally gloomy picture, our findings reveal that the Council administration managed to ensure minimal functioning, especially in order to provide some services to the segment of the AKWAYA town population that resisted insecurity and threats of violence to stay back.

Although the UPPER BAYANG Council was observed to have functioned within a relatively less precarious security atmosphere, its functioning on a regular basis was not fundamentally different. One of its main similarities with the

AKWAYA Council in terms of functioning is linked to the council administration having essentially limited its activities to TINTO-its headquarters and to the junction town of BAKEBE to some extent.

Whereas the territory of this council is less vast than that of AKWAYA, it also consists in a concentration of populations across localities such as TALI I, TAKWAI, ASHUM, MFAITOCK I (closer to NGUTI) as well as EBENSUK and SABES (closer to Lebialem). Unfortunately, problems of insecurity and inaccessibility due to poor roads prevented the Upper Bayang council administration from carrying out any meaningful actions for the benefit of the still resident populations of these localities.

However, the Council administration could be commended for making efforts to overcome the challenges and ensuring not only the holding of its 2022 administrative accounts and 2023 budgetary sessions but also for collaborating with the local administrative authorities in the organization of public events which contribute to animating social life in the sub-divisional headquarters and reassuring the resident population.

ON THE COLLECTIVITIES OF MEME DIVISION

As it was highlighted at the beginning of this report in the section devoted to the functioning of Councils in FAKO Division, the nomenclature of local councils in MEME Division is similar to that of FAKO Division in that they comprise two conventional local councils- MBONGE and KONYE as well as the Kumba City Council that combines the KUMBA I, KUMBA II and KUMBA III Councils.

Out of these three Councils that make up the KUMBA City Council, the Kumba I and Kumba II Councils are observed to have recorded a commendable level of activity during the year 2022 as their Council administrations deployed efforts aimed at meeting the expectations of Service Users. This positive level of activity can be explained by the relative security prevailing within the territories of these two collectivities as opposed to the KUMBA III Council whose area of jurisdiction comprises numerous rural but thickly populated localities such as MALENDE, MUKONJE, LADUMA, TEKE etc., some of which continue to witness regular disruptions of socio-economic activities due to the terrorist actions of separatist fighters and their sympathizers.

It is also useful to underline that as opposed to the general picture obtained from the functioning of local collectivities in FAKO Division, the functioning and state of relations between the KUMBA Councils and citizens thereof reveals an interesting paradox. This concerns the near total strict respect of ghost towns by most of the businesses or actors of the social domain on Mondays and the quasi-amazing return to very high levels of socio-economic and administrative activities as from the very next day-Tuesday through the rest of the week and into Sunday evenings.

Indeed, analysis and observations inspired both from the personal experiences of the Public Independent Conciliator as well as reports from random

working visits by our collaborators reveal that whereas movement into and out of the City of KUMBA remains either difficult or relatively unpredictable even on regular days, the situation is dramatically different within the different parts of the City of KUMBA where, judging from the rhythm of activities, the naive observer may be misled into concluding that there can be no risk or likelihood of the disruption of normal activities.

Basing our evaluation of the functioning of the three Councils comprising the Kumba City Council on this paradoxical pattern of activities, alternating from a near-total paralysis on Mondays to the resumption of bustling activities and movements within the urban perimeter on subsequent days, it could be ascertained that while the Council Executives continue to elaborate strategies aimed at ensuring a return to normal activities on Mondays, the administrations of these collectivities also adopted a more pragmatic approach in 2022 by capitalizing on the days of full activity to deploy themselves in the provision of Services to Service Users as well as the successful organization and holding of the deliberative sessions within the various Council premises.

In this regard, in conformity with the performances observed in a majority of the more or less functional Councils in other administrative units, the services most sought after by citizens or provided by the administrative services of these Councils during the year 2022 were essentially restricted to actions conducted within the Council premises. These predominantly concerned the delivery of various civil status documents, the issuance of building permits to applicants as well as field inspections or follow-up visits for the purpose of preventing illegal constructions.

In the same light, it was quite encouraging to observe that in spite of an atmosphere described as generally unpredictable, the officials of the Kumba City Council and those of the KUMBA I and KUMBA II Councils organized several marriage events attracting huge numbers of persons thereby illustrating a

satisfactory level of adhesion to these institutions in a context marked by socio-political agitation.

Besides these classical activities, an active interaction between the Council administrations and citizens was equally observed in the sector of shops allocation and the management of market spaces which represent an important source of council revenues as well as the follow-up of the functioning of various motor parks. It could be observed that whereas the Executive of the KUMBA City Council, as an institution, was considered to be relatively timid in the provision of various services to citizens during the year 2022, this institution demonstrated a visible presence in these areas concerning the follow-up and collection of revenue. Similarly, the City Council Executive effectively deployed the Municipal police to contribute to the management of open markets, the motor parks or in ensuring relative order in the sector of the exploitation of commercial motorbikes.

Unfortunately, a segment of the population expressed some level of disappointment with what they consider as one-dimensional action on the part of City Councils officials who deploy every effort aimed at revenue collection but demonstrate relative indifference or disregard for the provision of highly needed facilities such as public toilets and taps to enhance hygiene and sanitation within the open or unconstructed markets and motor-parks that play host to a high number of persons on a daily basis.

Similarly, citizens in some thickly populated but socially disadvantaged parts of the City have voiced preoccupations about the failure of the Kumba City Council officials to provide services such as street lighting especially by solar panels which are less costly to maintain as well as entail no consumption bills. These citizens consider the absence of such street lighting as one of the reasons for persistent acts of criminality in their neighborhoods at nights.

Consequently, it could be concluded that whereas the authorities of the collectivities comprising the Kumba City Council may lay claim to have ensured the visible functioning of their entities, the impact of this functioning on the citizens and Service Users who constitute the beneficiary population was not very satisfactory during the year 2022.

As concerns the regular functioning of the MBONGE and KONYE Councils, it was observed that after the laudable efforts made by the Mayor of the Mbonge Council to ensure presence on the field since the year 2021, this presence was further consolidated during the year 2022. As a result of the Head of the Municipal Executive who doubles as a traditional ruler being frequently resident in the administrative headquarters of the municipality, the Council administration was able to improve on its level of functioning.

In this regard, it is on record that apart from providing routine Services such as Civil status documents, the Council has made highly appreciated efforts in supporting the functioning of some primary and nursery schools within Mbonge town. These positive actions are said to have contributed in reassuring the teachers, parents and pupils of these school establishments, leading to an increase in enrolment as well as a more regular presence of teachers.

The Konye Council stands out amongst the five local collectivities plus the Kumba City Council of MEME Division to have recorded the weakest level of activities during the year 2022. Notwithstanding the dynamism and efforts deployed by the Mayor, the situation is attributed to the deterioration of the security situation in KONYE town following the dismantling of some detachments previously provided to reinforce security in this chief-town and its immediate environs.

The weak functioning of this collectivity was also observed to have had a negative impact not only on the provision of expected services to the citizens but even on the sustenance of several social and economic activities which had

become prosperous in this locality before the worsening of the security crisis. In this light, it is difficult to conduct an objective evaluation on the state of relations between citizens and a collectivity whose functioning and activities were essentially symbolic during the period under review.

ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE COUNCILS OF NDIAN DIVISION

The nine local collectivities of NDIAN Division make it the Division with the highest number of Councils within the South-West Region. As we have observed during the evaluation of the functioning of local collectivities in the other five divisions, the level of functioning of the Councils varies not only from one division to another but even within the same Division.

During the year 2022, this was the pattern in NDIAN Division wherein while some were able to attain a relatively acceptable level of activities, others had significant difficulties ensuring even a symbolic level of activity as a result of the persistent insecurity in some of the municipalities; a situation which has also aggravated the enclavement of numerous administrative units or localities within the same council area.

Indeed, during the past six years, the level of insecurity rendered it impossible to carry out any road maintenance either on the major roads or roads linking one Council area to another within the Division. The most visible illustration of this regrettable situation is the construction of the KUMBA – EKONDO-TITI road which was abandoned for over five years until the Head of State took the high decision last year to entrust the execution of these works to the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR). The inaccessibility of this central road axis has rendered almost impossible any movement of persons or goods into and out of the entire Division by road.

Even before the onset of this security crisis, the EKONDO-TITI Council has always been the most vibrant local collectivity of NDIAN Division, preceding the Council of the Divisional headquarters- MUNDEMBA. However, due to the deterioration of the security situation with several gruesome acts of terrorism recorded within the Municipality such as the assassination, some years ago, of the Paramount Chief of Ekondo-Titi as well as the assassination of the Divisional

Officer, Mayor, CPDM Section President and some personnel in March 2021, the functioning of this Council has been drastically affected, limiting its activities to a more or less symbolic level.

As a result of the significant limitation in its usual level of functioning, the Ekondo-Titi Council administration could only provide services to Service Users who were able to make it to the Council premises as well as to the resilient part of the population that remained within the sub-divisional headquarters and the town of LOBE-barely 2km away. The usual services concern the delivery of Civil Status documents and participation of the Council administration in the organization of popular public events as a way of maintaining positive collaboration with its inhabitants and sustaining relative socio-cultural animation of the locality.

Whereas this level of functioning could obviously not enable the Council to satisfactorily meet the aspirations of Service Users or the majority of the citizens of the Municipality, the Council Executive can be commended for ensuring the holding of both the 2022 administrative accounts session and the deliberations of the 2023 budgetary session within the premises of the Council. Its efforts to also carry out some follow-up activities in the domain of revenue collection also illustrate that in spite of the challenges, the Council administration maintains relatively positive relations with the resident population.

Apart from the Ekondo-Titi Council, one of the Councils of NDIAN Division that has demonstrated determination in ensuring continuity of functioning is the Council of the Divisional headquarters, Mundemba which enjoys relatively reassuring security protection from the presence of a military unit in the Municipality in addition to the regular security forces. Unfortunately, just as it has been the case for Ekondo-Titi and other Councils of the Division, the impossibility of accessibility to Mundemba by road has made the town virtually a land-locked locality whose only access for the past years has been by sea. One

of the direct consequences of this inaccessibility on the functioning of the Council has been the massive displacement of the population out of the locality including some members of the Council administration who are also no longer permanently resident.

From this perspective wherein the Council Executive and its administration are virtually absent from the locality thus rendering its functioning essentially sporadic, the relationship between the collectivity and the citizens of the municipality is basically symbolic. Indeed, whereas the Council administration can pride itself with having organized and held the deliberations of the 2022 administrative accounts and 2023 budgetary session, these sessions could be considered to have been more in fulfillment of recommended practice than a reflection of any real capacity or consistent level of activities during the period under review.

Pursuing from this analysis, it may be useful to indicate that this picture is not peculiar to Mundemba Council alone. This situation is also applicable to a few other local collectivities of the Division. The DIKOME BALUE and TOKO Councils also face similar challenges and have been reduced to functioning, during the past couple of years including 2022, on a purely symbolic basis. In this regard, due to their failure or inability to carry out any sustained activities capable of contributing to the generation of internal revenue, these local collectivities depended almost exclusively on the subventions provided by the State for even this minimal level of functioning. It has been observed that one of the priority actions of these Municipal Executives, under the circumstances, has been the use of these subventions for the payment of monthly salaries to employees although many local councils still owe several months of salary arrears to personnel as well as outstanding bills to some resilient economic operators for the provision of Services.

Obviously, this controversial situation raises the question of the rational use of state subventions as well as the maintaining of such state financial support even where the resources are clearly not utilized for the purpose for which they were intended.

After examining these two categories of Councils within NDIAN Division namely the relatively most active (EKONDO TITI) and the observedly least functional (MUNDEMBA, TOKO and DIKOME BALUE), it is necessary to also devote attention to the day-to-day functioning of the Councils of the Bakassi peninsular which is also part of NDIAN Division but exposed to specific constraints linked to their natural or geographical environment. As we have established during our examination of the routine activities of Councils in other Divisions of the Region, the fact that these Councils share the same or similar geographical environment does not mean that they all function in an identical or homogenous manner. The level of activity and rhythm of functioning also varies from one collectivity to another.

In this regard, although none of these councils has a total mastery of the territory of its jurisdiction, the functioning of the council administrations within the Bakassi peninsular can in turn be sub-divided into two groups namely those functioning in a relatively satisfactory manner through a laudable rhythm of activities such as the BAMUSSO, KOMBO ABEDIMO (AKWA), IDABATO and ISANGELE Councils and one with a more or less symbolic level of activity- the KOMBO ITINDI (Barracks) Council.

Beyond the sub-classification, it is important to highlight that all of the councils within the Bakassi peninsular possess one common characteristic in that the population of their municipalities is predominantly made up of foreigners, essentially Nigerian nationals who are either involved in trading, fishing or subsistence farming as seen in parts of ISANGELE Sub-Division. The percentage

of foreigners in the population of the respective councils ranges from approximately 65% in BAMUSSO to over 95% in councils like IDABATO.

This constitutes an important factor in assessing the level of functioning of these collectivities or their relationship with the citizens because the population profile has a direct bearing on the delivery of several essential services to its inhabitants. This is clearly the case as regards the establishment and issuance of civil status documents such as birth and marriage certificates which could subsequently serve in the acquisition of Cameroonian nationality to persons either not naturally and legally entitled to this nationality or whose commitment and loyalty to the Cameroonian nation cannot be guaranteed.

In spite of this consideration, the Head of the Municipal Executives deserve to be commended for their positive efforts to ensure the relative functioning of their services through their frequent presence within their localities even if they do not reside in the municipalities on a permanent basis. Some of the Council administrations were able to carry out revenue collection activities to enable them finance the funding of routine council activities.

Similarly, in the local councils of Bamusso, Kombo Abedimo (AKWA) and Isangele, the Council Executives actively contributed to the functioning of primary schools through the rehabilitation of classrooms in some cases, the provision of minimum packages or the recruitment of part time teachers to substitute for the prolonged absences of state employed teachers, many of whom have been displaced as a result of insecurity and are no longer permanently resident in these localities.

As opposed to previous years wherein some of these councils held their administrative accounts and budgetary sessions out of their localities, these sessions were effectively held within the respective Councils in 2022 in spite of the fact that all of the local collectivities are today exclusively accessible by sea.

PART 2

CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES

Functioning in its area of jurisdiction- the South-West Region which, like its sister Region of the North-West, has been plagued by the security crisis prevailing in the two Regions for over six years today, the activities of the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator cannot escape this physical reality. In this connection, notwithstanding our determination and desire to deploy our personnel on the field and fully engage with citizens in various parts of the Region in view of the performance of our duties, it was not possible to carry out any of our scheduled activities in many local council territories during the year 2022.

Manyu and Lebialem Divisions feature prominently amongst such administrative units. Consequently, although we conducted several activities involving stakeholders from these two Divisions, the venue of the concertation activities was Buea, the Regional headquarters. It is no longer deemed necessary to elaborate on the underlying factors or the actual situation on the ground because this aspect has been elaborately examined in the part devoted to the functioning of the councils per Division.

In concrete terms, it means that numerous citizens who are not adequately educated and able to read newspapers or access information through conventional news channels like radio and television, may continue to be ignorant of the existence of the institution and missions of the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator as we have officially organized concertations in three of the six Divisions of our Region.

Beyond this aspect of insecurity, the other major drawback witnessed by the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator in the execution of its activities in 2022 as laid down in its established plan of action was the very late allocation of financial resources or validation of its budget. Indeed, while it persisted in

carrying out some activities in the first semester of 2022 in spite of the non-availability of funds due to the delay in the approval of its budget, the bulk of the activities of the institution were compressed into the second semester namely as from the month of August 2022 when the budget was finally validated and resources put at its disposal.

This situation obviously has a negative impact on the level of functioning of the institution considering that very few significant actions can be carried out without the necessary finances. In order to avoid a virtual paralysis of our activities due to this situation, we undertook numerous sensitization initiatives using channels like radio spots, radio talks, interview etc. or taking advantage of events organized by other institutions.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight the prolonged delay in the release or publication of the statute governing personnel of our institution amongst the challenges faced in the year 2022. In this regard, whereas we have consistently reported on using the services of five personnel, excluding support staff, since 2021 and having been authorized to reinforce our staff strength during the year 2022 by an additional five (05) personnel, virtually all of these personnel have continued to work for the institution on a voluntary basis without formal or laid down remuneration.

Considering that human resources constitute the most important capital or resource of any institution or organization, the prolonged absences of an official status for these personnel constitutes both a physical and psychological challenge in ensuring the smooth functioning of the institution. Indeed, notwithstanding the level of commitment or determination demonstrated thus far by these staff in continuing to put in maximum effort to enable us attain our level of performance in 2022, it is obviously very uncomfortable to continue to exhort them to sustain these efforts, including going to the field in very risky or challenging security

situations without any corresponding remuneration or financial incentives to recognize and reward their efforts.

From a different perspective, another challenge encountered during the discharge of our duties arises from the absence of positive collaboration from some Municipal authorities within the Region. This attitude of poor or non-collaboration is illustrated through the repeated failure to honour invitations for working sessions or concertation meetings scheduled to examine complaints either brought against them or their council administrations by Service Users. Similarly, we have also recorded cases of some municipal authorities showing active collaboration at the beginning of the examination of complaints but subsequently either backing out or showing reluctance and even refusal to implement the consensus amicable settlement or outcome of discussions.

It may be pertinent to indicate that part of the negative attitude or resistance to collaboration is explained by the misconception by some municipal authorities who perceive the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator as a pseudo-Supervisory authority rather than an institutional mechanism for mediation, arbitration and conciliation between their collectivities and Service Users or citizens who express dissatisfaction over services or bring complaints about being victims of injustice or discrimination.

However, in the face of these drawbacks, the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator continued to demonstrate patience, persisting in various sensitization actions in view of raising awareness on the need for constructive collaboration as well as adopting total transparency and objectivity in the examination of eventual complaints.

In the same light, another category of challenges is represented by the habitual skepticism demonstrated by a segment of the population about the utility or relevance of institutions created by the state. In some cases, this is made worse by manipulation or misinformation on the Special Status especially from persons

who may have sympathized at one point or flirted with the separatist ideology. This segment of public opinion uses every pretext to try to discredit public institutions such as ours which they describe as an “irrelevant structure” intended to deceive the population.

OVERVIEW OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PUBLIC INDEPENDENT CONCILIATOR FOR THE YEAR 2022

During the year 2022, the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator carried out its activities in fulfilment of its missions using a total of sixteen (16) staff including three (03) support staff, ten (10) senior intermediary personnel of its own as well as the Specialized Financial Controller and Accounting Officer put at the disposal of the institution by H.E. the Minister of Finance. Out of its own internal personnel, five were recruited in mid-2022 following a rigorous screening process concluded through interviews conducted by a three-person panel under the supervision of the Public Independent Conciliator.

The analysis and observations contained in this report as regards the functioning of the South-West Regional Assembly and local collectivities of the Region are essentially derived from and inspired by information or data collected during field visits, interactions with some of these authorities during working sessions or concertation meetings as well as feedback provided by citizens on the ground or reflected in some of the complaints handled by our institution.

In this regard, it has been deemed more appropriate to provide a recapitulative table presenting the major or salient activities of this Office rather indulge in an elaborate and unnecessarily lengthy description of each of the activities we were able to carry out during the period under consideration. It is my conviction that this method of presentation is more digest and convenient to exploit or re-consult where need be.

However, it is important to indicate that apart from the principal activities outlined in this chart, the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator carried out other vital activities that contributed directly to the smooth functioning of the institution. The most prominent in this category is the taking of possession of the

structure approved by the High authorities of the State and most especially H.E. the President of the Republic to host the head office of the institution.

Although the occupation and effective use of the office space may appear to have been a mere formality, it was far from being so and became a veritable activity because the structure was not initially conceived to serve as an office building and had to undergo reconfiguration leading to a progressive allocation or occupation of the office space on the basis of the potential impact on the performances of the institution. Thus, commenced in July 2022, the process remained in progress till November 2022.

In the same light, the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator received and examined over twenty complaints from Service Users on issues falling within competence. Obviously, in conformity with the exigencies of the respect of professional ethics, it is not expected that this report provides an elaborate analysis on any of these complaints.

However, it may be useful to indicate that the majority of the complaints examined in 2022 concerned local collectivities of FAKO Division. A further classification per category also reveals that the complaints covered a wide range of domains. Indeed, some were brought by Service providers (economic operators) who felt that they had been victims of unfair treatment due to prolonged delays or what they considered as a refusal by some Municipal executives to pay their outstanding bills after the effective fulfilment of contract obligations. This category could also be classified as complaints brought by a moral person because their businesses are duly registered entities.

On the other hand, the bulk of the complaints examined by our institution during the year 2022 were submitted by physical persons on grounds ranging from infringement of their rights to feelings of being discriminated against or suffering some form of injustice. To this end, it is important to highlight that while a few were not conclusively resolved as a result of the non-collaboration of a few Local

Council authorities as pointed out in an earlier part of this report, the majority were concluded through a consensus settlement or conciliation process to the satisfaction of both parties.

ACTIVITIES OF THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC INDEPENDENT CONCILIATOR FOR THE YEAR 2022

DATE	ACTIVITY	VENUE	INITIATOR	OUTCOME
26 January 2022	Handing over to H.E the Prime Minister, Head of Government the proposed salary scale of personnel.	Prime Minister's Office Yaoundé	Public Independent Conciliator, South-West and North-West Regions	Awaiting signing of salary scale.
13-18 March 2022	Benchmarking with some premier public institutions involved in investigating allegations and bring redress to service users.	United Kingdom London and Edinburgh	British High Commissioner Yaoundé	*Creation of a collaborative platform for exchange of ideas/ opinions with other Ombudsman Institutions. *Complaint procedure.
03 June 2022	Participation in the Celebration of the platinum jubilee of the Queen of England.	Hilton Hotel Yaoundé	British High Commissioner Yaoundé	
08 June 2022	Follow-up of the validation of the Budget of the Public Independent Conciliator of the South West Region.	Ministry of Finance: Directorate General of Budget	Minister of Finance	Readjustment of the budget for 2022 due to the financial constraints on the State.
07 July 2022	Maiden seminar with Local stakeholders of Decentralisation: The Regional Executive council, City and Municipal Mayors and their 1 st Deputies.	Mt Hotel Buea	The Public Independent Conciliator, South-West Region	Collaborative platform agreed upon.

13 July 2022	Participation in the deliberations of the 3 rd Ordinary session for the 2022 Financial year of the South West Regional Assembly.	Mt Hotel Buea	President of the South-West Regional Assembly	Discussion on the rate of execution of the budget for the first 6 months of the 2022 year.
20-22 July 2022	Completion of selection process for prospective personnel- Research Officers, Executive Officers, Support Staff.	Office of the Public Independent Conciliator, Buea	Public Independent Conciliator, South- West Region	Results established by order of merit by a panel mode of officials from the Civil Society and the Administration.
03 August 2022	Meeting to deliberate on the statute of personnel of the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator in the South-West and North-West Regions.	MINDDEVE L Yaounde	MINDDEVEL chaired by the Chief of Division for Legal Affairs MINDDEVEL Yaounde	Articles agreed upon pending effecton of corrections and final draft copy.
04 August 2022	Participation in the deliberations of the Fourth session of the committee to Follow-up the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Major National Dialogue.	Prime Minister's office Yaounde	H.E. The President of the Republic represented by H.E. The Prime Minister, Head of Government	*Special Status gradually taking roots. *The Regional Assembly and Office of the Public Independent Conciliator in the North-West and South-West Regions in place. *The economic, social and security situation of both regions improving.
05 August 2022	Follow-up concertations on the possibility of approval of the 2022 budget approved on 18 th July 2022.	Director General of Budget MINFI	Based on audience requested by the Public Independent Conciliator of the South-West and North-West Regions	Optimism of assistance to ensure the "EDOT" is put at our disposal.
25 August 2022	Concertation Seminar with Civil Society Leaders on		The Public Independent Conciliator,	*Civil Societies to assist in valorizing, educating and sensitizing the grass

	Theme: The Office of the Public Independent Conciliator: “Engaging Civil Society Actors to Explore Avenues for the delivery of Optimum Services to Service Users”.	Mt Hotel Buea	South-West Region	roots on the missions of the PIC. * Build social Cohesion.
21 September 2022	Concertation Seminar with Association of Market Vendors on Theme: Office of the Public Independent Conciliator and Association of Market Vendors: “Collaborating to Reinforce Understanding for the Promotion and Defence of Rights and Obligation of Service Users”.	O.I.C Buea (Conference Room)	The Public Independent Conciliator, South-West Region	*OPIC’s missions where understood and how they come in to help the market vendors *The vendors raised their worries and some major outcomes where achieved such as; the building of toilets, creation of drainage, provision of portable water and many more.
26 October 2022	Concertation Seminar with Youths of associations and groups in the South-West Region on Theme: Office of the Public Independent Conciliator and Youths of the South West Region: “Examining Prospects of Collaboration to Enhance Services Delivery to Users of the Regional and Local Councils”.	Mt Hotel Buea	The Public Independent Conciliator, South-West Region	*The youths came up with ways and ideas on how they will collaborate with OPIC in achieving its missions.
30 November 2022	In- House Capacity Building Seminar for Personnel on Theme: Core Values as an Instrument in attaining the Missions of the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator	Conference Room OPIC	The Public Independent Conciliator, South-West Region	The personnel were urged to make the said core values their daily working tools as they carry out their various assignments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Deriving from the analysis above informed by visible indicators for performance assessment during the year 2022, it can be observed that the local collectivities of the South-West Region can be grouped into four main categories as follows:

- A) Those whose functioning remains almost totally paralyzed by prevailing insecurity;
- B) Those whose low-level of functioning or near complete inactivity due to a combination of insecurity and the lack of commitment of the Municipal Executives, Councilors and Council administration to take courageous initiatives likely to begin reassuring the population and thereby gradually change the situation within the Municipality;
- C) The local collectivities that are progressively overcoming the challenges of insecurity and an unpredictable social atmosphere to ensure a relatively acceptable level of council activity due to the dynamism and determination of their municipal Executives and committed councilors;
- D) The local collectivities that were able to function almost normally as observed in FAKO Division although they are not able to cover the entire territory of their municipal councils.

This tentative classification reveals that the local collectivities that fall into categories “A” and “B” can only lay claim to existence and any level of activity because like other councils of the region and country in general, they also received state subventions for various activities including the minimum package, construction of classrooms in primary or nursery schools and the maintenance of rural roads.

It is the continuous allocation or granting of these state financial resources which is the subject of the single recommendation from this report. Indeed, since

the commitment and dynamism of local authorities remains one of the inevitable conditions for a progressive return of peace or normalcy in their respective localities, it may be useful for the state to review or re-examine the criteria for the continuous allocation of these subventions.

It is the considered recommendation of the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator that while it is necessary to avoid completely suppressing such subventions in any local council, the level of functioning and performance could be used as a basis to determine the amount allocated to each Council thereby serving as an incentive to Local authorities who have been demonstrating commitment as well as convey a message to nonchalant Council Executives and their Council administrations that the state will not continue providing subventions indefinitely to collectivities that blatantly refuse or fail to perform their defined role as important actors of the decentralisation process and local governance.

CONCLUSION:

Globally, in spite of the challenges and difficulties identified on the field during the past two years since the commencement of the implementation of the process of decentralisation within the framework of the Special Status and in conformity with the provisions of the General Code of Regional and Local Authorities, the year 2022 witnessed a relative improvement in the functioning of the South-West Regional Assembly and the local collectivities of the Region.

As observed during the analysis which informs this conclusion, the rhythm of activities, level of functioning in terms of addressing the pertinent preoccupations of the populations is not homogenous or the same as it varies both within collectivities of the Region as a whole and even within Divisions. This laudable improvement can be attributed to the growing awareness amongst Regional and Local Authorities about the need to fully assume their responsibilities as major actors in the decentralisation process whose ultimate objective is to ensure the participation of the population in decision-making at the local level aimed at meeting their aspirations.

The Public Independent Conciliator
South West Region