



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

**2024 ANNUAL REPORT SUBMITTED FOR THE
HIGH ATTENTION OF H.E. THE PRESIDENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON**

DONE IN BUEA, MARCH 2025

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GENERAL OVERVIEW

Within the framework of efforts aimed at ensuring the accomplishment of its statutory missions, the Public Independent Conciliator and her collaborators deployed themselves in the execution of conventional assignments within the office as well as activities on the field. The information obtained, feedback provided, observations made or lessons drawn from these diverse activities constitute an essential input to this Annual Report on the state of relations between citizens and the Regional and Council Services.

In this presentation of the Annual Report on the state of relations between citizens and the Regional and Municipal Council Services for the year 2024, we have made a determined effort to be as objective as possible; using instruments of analysis that eliminate or significantly minimize eventual subjective or personal opinions. In order to attain this objective, I decided to initiate and supervise the administration of an opinion-sampling questionnaire to a total of 1905 respondents throughout the South-West Region, out of which we received back and analyzed 1885 representing over 98%. The number of questionnaires administered to citizens varied from one municipality to another and was essentially determined on the basis of the official and projected population of each collectivity.

It is important to indicate that in order to ensure a fair evaluation, each questionnaire was elaborated under several sub-components, each covering a specific domain or field of action concerning services provided by local collectivities. On the field, the questionnaires were administered to persons from various socio-professional groups or social categories.

The decision to administer questionnaires to various categories of Service Users or Citizens was intended to ensure that respondents are not drawn from a single or limited professional groups. In this regard, some were administered as Users stepped out of different council services, others to taxi and motorbike riders, traders hiring business premises from the council, civil society actors etc.

In addition to this approach, complaints brought before the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator equally constitute a major indicator of the state of relations between citizens and the council services against whom such complaints are made. Indeed, the process of seeking an amicable settlement to these complaints which often requires both overt and discreet investigations usually provides useful indicators about the manner in which Service Users are treated or attended to by council services.

Furthermore, during the numerous townhall meetings and concertation seminars that the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator organized during the year in various localities of the Region, the questions and answer sessions in the presence of municipal authorities constituted an important indicator regarding the state of relations between the said local council and its citizens.

Judging from the preoccupations captured during these town hall meetings and other concertation activities and as reflected through the responses obtained from the questionnaires, Service Users consider the council services to have performed quite satisfactory in domains such as the issuing of various civil status documents, the provision and management of commercial spaces in the markets, the management of motor parks or the delivery or follow-up of building permits.

Conversely, citizens deemed the performances of the council administrations below expectation, most especially in domain of hygiene and sanitation with emphasis on visible shortcomings in waste disposal or management as well as the continuous absence of public toilets and stand taps or water points within the markets in most municipalities.

Similarly, numerous service providers continue to deplore the protracted delays they suffer before the payment of their bills for duly provided or executed and effectively received services or projects. This situation constitutes an area of unhealthy or poor relations with many local collectivities because the service providers or contractors view it as stemming from bad faith.

From the foregoing, a careful appraisal carried out on the basis of various criteria and flexible approaches of evaluation reveals that during the year 2024, the state of relations between citizens and the Regional and Council Services of the South -West Region could best be summarized as a mitigated picture, characterized on the one hand, by domains or areas of satisfaction driven by commendable performances and on the other hand, by areas of dissatisfaction or disappointment anchored on the failure of Regional or Council services in meeting the aspirations of residents and Service Users in domains with a direct impact on the livelihoods and welfare of the local population.

As it could be expected, this state of relations is not a homogenous picture across all local collectivities of the Region or even within councils of the same division. The reasons for these disparities are obvious considering the social and security context within which the local collectivities functioned during the period under review. Whereas the general context could be considered as the same because the prevailing social and security crisis continues to affect the entire Region, the

reality on the ground remains that all local councils are not affected to the same extent.

In this light, council services in some Divisions, most especially FAKO Division and the urban municipalities of MEME, MANYU and KUPE-MUANANGUBA Divisions were able to function within the range of 75-80% of their projected capacity and were thus able to receive and render various services to a significant number of Service Users in those municipalities. In such situations, it was observed that there were more areas or domains of relative satisfaction from Service Users and the local population thereby establishing acceptably good relations between the council services and citizens. Notwithstanding, even in these cases, there still persisted areas of discontent or disappointment from citizens and Service Users concerning unfulfilled aspirations.

However, whereas perceptions of insecurity linked to the prevailing context remain the most important factor negatively impacting the smooth or optional functioning of the Regional and Local Councils Services, it would be misleading to view it as the only such factor. Indeed, beyond constraints imposed by insecurity, the disparity in financial resources between various local collectivities is a non-negligible factor. In this regard, local collectivities possessing a more comfortable revenue base or higher financial capacity were able to earmark and execute more projects or provide better services to a cross-section of the population than local collectivities that rely solely on financial subventions from the state in order to accomplish any actions, including the payment of salaries for personnel.

In the same light, inaccessibility to various localities within administrative units or some communities within the same council area was observed to have been one of the factors that negatively impacted follow-up of the provision of services to citizens by many council administrations. This was specifically the situation for a

majority of the councils of Ndian Division to which access became almost exclusively by maritime transport. The same situation obtained for Akwaya (MANYU Division); Wabane (LEBIALEM Division); Mbonge (MEME Division) and portions of Nguti (KUPE-MUANENGUBA Division) where it was virtually impossible to ascertain the effective execution of any envisaged and duly awarded projects intended to contribute to an improvement in the living conditions of citizens in those localities.

On this basis, expressions of relative discontent or dissatisfaction recorded from citizens towards their local council administrations could not be a surprise and emphasize the importance for these collectivities to envisage the maintenance of rural roads as one of their priority areas of intervention because, while facilitating the evacuation of farm produce to local markets thereby empowering them economically, road maintenance initiatives also guarantee continuous movements of persons and goods as well as make it possible for the concerned council administrations to be in touch with the grassroots population, listening to their preoccupations and ensure the effective follow-up of the execution of earmarked projects.

RESUME EXECUTIF.

RAPPORT ANNUEL DES SERVICES DU PUBLIC INDEPENDENT CONCILIATOR SUR L'ETAT DES RELATIONS ENTRE LES CITOYENS ET LES ADMINISTRATIONS DES COLLECTIVITES TERRITORIALES DECENTRALISEES.

Dans le cadre des actions menées en vue d'accomplir ses missions statutaires, les services du Public Independent Conciliator sous l'impulsion de Mme le Public Independent Conciliator se sont déployés dans l'exécution des tâches diverses relevant tant des activités classiques, notamment le règlement des différends portés à son attention que des descentes sur le terrain pour des actions de sensibilisation ou suivi des interventions diverses réalisées par les administrations communales en vue de répondre aux doléances des citoyens.

Les informations recueillies, le feedback obtenu, les observations ou leçons tirées de ces différentes activités ont été d'un apport important dans l'élaboration du présent rapport Annuel relatif à l'état des relations entre les citoyens et les collectivités locales de notre Région.

Dans l'élaboration du présent rapport au titre de l'année 2024, nous nous sommes soumis au devoir de l'objectivité, nous appuyant sur des éléments d'appréciation susceptibles de minimiser une subjectivité éventuelle de notre part dans les analyses. A cet effet, nous avons estimé utile de conduire un sondage d'opinion auprès des citoyens en administrant un échantillon de 1905 questionnaires à travers la Région ; duquel nous avons reçu 1885, correspondant à un taux de 98% dudit échantillon.

Le nombre des questionnaires ainsi administré a varié d'une collectivité à l'autre, déterminé sur la base du chiffre de la population de chaque collectivité. Il importe de préciser que dans le souci d'assurer une évaluation la plus objective

possible, chaque questionnaire comportait plusieurs volets, couvrants chacun un domain spécifique ou champs d'intervention des collectivités territoriales décentralisées. De même, les questionnaires ont été administrés à des répondants issus des différents groupes socio-professionnels et couches de la population.

Cette option de faire administrer les questionnaires aux personnes tirées des catégories socio-professionnelles diverses participait du souci d'objectivité en élargissant l'échantillon. C'est ainsi que certains se sont vus proposer le questionnaire à leur sortie des services communaux. Les autres catégories associées au sondage sont des chauffeurs de taxi, des conducteurs de moto, des commerçants louant des boutiques ou espaces marchands auprès des services communaux, des leaders d'association et autres acteurs de la société civile ; le fil conducteur étant de se rapprocher de ceux sollicitant au quotidien ces administrations des collectivités.

En plus des données recueillies à travers cette démarche, les requêtes et plaintes déposées auprès du Public Independent Conciliator par des usagers des services communaux ou de l'Assemblée Régionale ont également constitué un indicateur important de l'état des relations existantes entre les citoyens et lesdits services. En effet, au cours du processus visant le règlement à l'amiable desdites plaintes, les échanges et autres investigations fournissent des renseignements ou informations révélatrices de la manière dont les administrations des collectivités accueillent ou prennent en compte les préoccupations portées à leur attention par les citoyens.

En outre, à l'occasion des différentes réunions de concertation ou échanges avec les populations initiées par nos soins dans de nombreuses localités et collectivités de la Région au cours de la période en considération, les sessions de questions.

Réponses en présence des autorités municipales nous permettent souvent de glaner des informations crédibles et non contestées relatives à l'état des relations existantes entre les collectivités décentralisées et leurs populations ou usagers.

Ainsi, de l'analyse des principales préoccupations exprimées à l'occasion de ces échanges et ateliers de concertation ; analyse corroborée à quelques exceptions près par les données obtenues des questionnaires, les citoyens et usagers des services communaux ont globalement une appréciation positive des prestations fournies en ce qui concerne la délivrance des différents documents d'état-civil, l'attribution et suivi de la gestion des boutiques ou espaces réservés aux activités commerciales dans les marchés, la gestion des gares routières ou le suivi et l'établissement des permis de bâtir.

En revanche, le secteur de l'hygiène et la salubrité, notamment l'enlèvement des ordures ménagères fait l'objet de récriminations et mécontentements au sein de la population qui stigmatise également l'absence des toilettes publiques dans une majorité des marchés, y compris ceux construits et l'absence des fontaines permettant le nettoyage des aliments et vivres frais proposés aux consommateurs dans ces marchés. Ainsi et comme ce fut déjà le constat au cours de l'année 2023, le secteur de l'hygiène et salubrité demeure une grande préoccupation non satisfaite des usagers dans la quasi-totalité des collectivités.

Nous relevons également que les retards importants enregistrés dans le paiement des prestations des fournisseurs et des cas assimilables au refus de paiement desdits prestataires constituent également une source de frustration des Usagers. Alors que les autorités municipales accusées se défendent en évoquant des difficultés de trésorerie ou la modestie de leurs recettes, il est difficilement compréhensible qu'une collectivité ayant régulièrement programmé un projet, procédé à la passation d'un marché y relatif et dûment prononcé la réception dudit

projet au cours du mandat de l'autorité signataire du marché puisse présenter de tels arguments ; parfois deux exercices après pour un projet inférieur à 25 millions ou une fourniture de moins de CFA dix (10) millions.

Cette situation est souvent source de récrimination et des rapports tendus entre des autorités municipales et certains opérateurs économiques qui n'hésitent pas dès lors de dénoncer des pratiques de corruption ou d'injustice et d'être victime de discrimination de la part des autorités concernées ; lesquelles, se sentant ainsi dénoncées, adoptent en retour des comportements assimilables au règlement des comptes à l'endroit desdits prestataires. Face à ces attitudes et démarches teintées de mauvaise foi, nous sommes souvent confrontés à des difficultés dans la recherche d'une solution à l'amiable, pourtant objectif primordial de nos actions.

La police municipale dont les agents sont régulièrement accusés de brutalité ou jugés arrogants et méprisants représente un autre secteur objet des rapports peu cordiaux entre les citoyens et les administrations des collectivités. Bien que certaines des ces accusations ou allégations soient fondées et reflètent les agissements de bon nombre desdits agents de la police municipale, ces rapports quelque peu conflictuels nous semblent également attribuables à la nature des tâches ou missions assignées à ces agents par leurs employeurs, notamment dans le domaine de la lutte contre le désordre urbain auprès de marchés ou zones d'occupation anarchique des trottoirs ou de la chaussée. Dans ces cas de figure, le constat est avéré que les usagers adhèrent très peu à la sensibilisation, amenant ainsi les services communaux à recourir à des actions peu courtoises.

A ceci, il convient d'ajouter que les commerçants et autres vendeurs à la sauvette ne sont pas les seuls à être ainsi en contact au quotidien avec les agents de la police municipale. Les chauffeurs de taxis et automobilistes en général font partie de ceux exprimant une désapprobation des actions de la police municipale

intervenant à empêcher le stationnement ou parking abusif des véhicules. C'est ainsi que nous estimons les responsabilités partagées dans ces rapports parfois relativement tendus car, les citoyens ou Usagers ne font pas toujours preuve de civisme dans leurs agissements objet et l'action corrective de ces agents querrelés.

A cet effet, nous nous réjouissons de l'inclusion de la formation ou recyclage des agents de la police municipale dans les programmes de formation de la NASLA ; formation déjà lancée pour la première vague. Sur le plan immédiat, nous mettons un accent sur la sensibilisation à l'occasion des nos descentes sur le terrain et différents ateliers de concertation et échanges avec les populations.

De ce qui précède, une analyse menée avec une combinaison des critères d'évaluation nous amène au constat qu'au cours de l'année 2024, l'état des relations entre les citoyens et nos collectivités territoriales décentralisées aura été globalement mitigé, caractérisé d'une part par des domaines de satisfaction basée sur des performances louables de certaines collectivités et d'autre part, par des récriminations voire frustrations relatives aux secteurs dans lesquels les administrations des collectivités ont failli ou échoué par rapport aux attentes des citoyens.

Dans l'ensemble, nous relevons que les secteurs objet de récrimination sont ceux ayant un impacte négatif sur les conditions de vie d'une frange importante de la population, notamment des prestations sociales liées à des préoccupations sanitaires. Nous y avons déjà consacré quelques paragraphes plus haut.

Toutefois, et comme l'on pouvait s'y attendre, l'état des relations entre les citoyens et les collectivités ne renvoie pas à une image homogène, ni pour l'ensemble des collectivités ni même pour les communes d'un même département. Ces écarts sont compréhensibles au regard du contexte sécuritaire et social dans lequel ces collectivités ont menées leurs activités durant l'année 2024. Alors que le

contexte général pourrait paraître le même à travers la région, force est de reconnaître que celui-ci diffère souvent d'une collectivité à l'autre du fait notamment du degré d'enclavement ou d'accessibilité de chaque collectivité.

En effet et comme ce fut déjà le cas pour l'année 2023, les services communaux du département du FAKO à l'exception de la commune de Muyuka, les collectivités urbaines des départements de la MEME, MANYU ou KUPE-MUANENGUBA ont affiché un niveau de fonctionnement estimé entre 75 et 80% de leurs capacités prévisionnelles. Ces administrations ont pu ainsi fournir des prestations au profit d'un nombre important d'usagers. Dans ces circonstances, l'on peut comprendre qu'en raison de ces interventions, les citoyens et Usagers estiment leurs préoccupations beaucoup plus prises en compte par les dirigeants à la tête de collectivités. Evidemment et comme signalé plus haut, il existe également au sein desdites collectivités, des secteurs de mécontentements en raison des performances jugées timides et en dessous des attentes des citoyens.

Par ailleurs, en dépit du poids négatif du contexte socio-sécuritaire dans les écarts enregistrés dans le fonctionnement des collectivités territoriales décentralisées, il existe d'autres facteurs ayant influencé ce fonctionnement. Les écarts importants en matière de capacités financières des différentes communes en est un facteur déterminant. A cet égard, les collectivités possédant des ressources financières plus conséquentes sont susceptibles de programmer et de réaliser plus de projets ou de fournir plus de prestations bénéfiques aux citoyens que celles dont l'essentielle des ressources financières proviendraient des subventions de l'état.

Dans le même sillage, l'enclavement avéré de plusieurs localités aura également négativement affecté le fonctionnement des collectivités, notamment du hinterland. En effet, souvent coupé du siège de la municipalité, les populations se retrouvent hôtages de leur enclavement et sans possibilités de bénéficier de toute

prestation de l'administration communale. Depuis quelques années déjà et au cours de l'année 2024, la quasi totalité des collectivités décentralisées du département du NDIAN ont été victime de cette situation.

Presque complètement privé d'accès par voie terrestre, la voie maritime, très contraignante et redoutée par beaucoup est devenue la voie exclusive de communication pour rallier les principales localités, notamment de la péninsule de Bakassi ainsi que les villes de Mundemba et Ekondo-Titi. La situation a été identique pour les communes d'Akwaya (département de la MANYU) ; WABANE dans le Lebiallem, MBONGE (département de la MEME) et certaines localités de la commune de NGUTI (département du KUPE-MUANENGUBA). Il convient de signaler que ces difficultés sont régulièrement exploitées par des opérateurs économiques et prestataires véreux pour abandonner ou mal réalisés des projets octroyés aux populations ; en étant sur de l'absence de suivi effectif de l'exécution desdits projets.

Dans ces conditions, il est peu surprenant d'entendre des citoyens résidants dans des telles localités déclarer ne pouvant citer aucune réalisation de leur collectivité, estimant ne bénéficier d'aucune prestation de la collectivité et nourrir ainsi des sentiments d'abandon. C'est pourquoi, il restera hautement souhaitable que l'entretien des routes rurales ou voies d'accès entre des localités soit inscrit parmi les priorités des interventions des communes ; ce d'autant plus qu'elles reçoivent régulièrement une dotation budgétaire à cet effet. L'entretien et la praticabilité de ces routes rurales est d'une importance évidente pour l'évacuation de la production agricole dont la commercialisation constitue une source de revenus devant permettre à ces populations paysannes de subvenir à leurs besoins divers.

PART I

STATE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND THE REGIONAL ASSEMBLY.

As observed in previous years, during the year 2024, the South-West Regional Assembly earmarked the execution of numerous projects in pursuit of its efforts and actions intended to contribute to improving the living conditions of the population in various localities of the Region. In many cases, these actions had a positive impact on the livelihoods of citizens, contributing in upholding cordial relations between inhabitants of such beneficiary localities and this institution.

However, because the available resources cannot enable the Regional Assembly to carry out projects and implement programmes in every locality of the Region compared to the numerous expectations registered from various collectivities, citizens of localities still awaiting the realization of projects allocated by the Regional Assembly expressed relative frustration about this situation and in some cases, the feeling that they suffered this neglect because they had no elected or influential official to canvass for their community to be amongst beneficiary localities.

Notwithstanding such expressions of relative discontent from segments of the population, an examination of the spread of projects earmarked for execution in 2024 by the Regional Assembly revealed that the institution ensured that its projects were carried out in all thirty-one (31) local collectivities of the Region and thus also covering all six (06) administrative Divisions. It should be underlined that this pattern reflected the trend already observed in 2023 although the major collectivities

such as Divisional headquarters always feature, whereas at the level of sub-divisional municipalities, beneficiary localities vary from one year to another.

From the perspective of content analysis or the structural classification of these projects, the South-West Regional Assembly earmarked the implementation of a total of Seventy-Nine (79) projects across the entire Region, essentially broken down into the social and economic domains. From this structural classification, the bulk of the projects fall under the social domain covering the fields of Education, Health, potable water supply and solar panel street lights while the projects under the economic domain were either for maintenance of some roads or the opening of farm to market roads in some localities.

In a region where the most persistent preoccupations of the citizens are usually expressed in terms of the absence of potable drinking water, poor equipment or neglect of hospitals or health centers, need for the improvement of educational infrastructure, absence of street lights as a factor of security and beautification of localities, these interventions of the Regional Assembly were favourably welcomed by citizens of beneficiary localities.

In this regard, carrying out its field actions within a context characterized by lingering or persistent insecurity in several localities of the Region, especially the less accessible or enclaved collectivities, it is important to acknowledge that this does not simply affect the effective implementation of some projects on the ground but also constitutes an important factor in determining the allocation of such projects. On this account, localities that are considered to be within “red or highly insecure” zones may have pertinent preoccupations deserving attention but found themselves unable to benefit from such amenities because there are no or inadequate guarantees concerning the safety of those charged with execution as well as the preservation of the facility upon completion. A sorrowful example that has remained

in the minds of many is the tragic assassination of two employees of a company while carrying out the execution of roadside clearing (travaux de cantonnement) along the Eyomojock-Ekok road in 2023.

Obviously, the level of satisfaction or favourable approval of the actions of the Regional Assembly was not homogenous throughout the Region but varied from one collectivity or specific beneficiary locality to another. Such variations in appreciation are equally an indicator of the state of relations between citizens and the Regional Assembly and were driven by the pertinence of the implemented project, assessed against the priority preoccupations of the beneficiary population. An analysis of feedback obtained through the administered questionnaire demonstrated that citizens reactions for a potable water project attracted an appreciation rating of over 80%, while that for the opening of a farm to market road was estimated at 75%, the equipping of a health center at over 70%.

On the other hand, the provision of solar panel street lights or the construction of a new classroom block were both rated at about 65%, an indication that in the majority of communities with several competing preoccupations, if given the possibility of expressing a priority scale, the provision of potable water and road maintenance would be given preference as concerns requiring urgent attention. In order to facilitate exploitation and understanding of the likely impact of such actions on the state of relations with citizens, the recapitulative table here-below highlights some high impact projects per division.

DIVISION	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	OBSERVATION
FAKO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Construction of an electric-powered borehole at Saker Street Newtown Limbe I. - Construction of a Pediatric Centre at the Buea Regional Hospital - Construction of a Pedagogic block of eight (08) classrooms, four (04) offices and four (04) toilets in GBHS Bonadikombo Mile 4. - Supply and installation of 11 solar street lights at Wovia Limbe 2 - Acquisition and installation of a transformer and the reinforcement of the electrical network of Limbe District Hospital Building. 	-
KUPE-MUANENGUBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Supply of accessories for the X-Ray machine at the Bangem District Hospital. -Construction of a Mother and Childcare unit at Bangem District Hospital. -Grading of the 10km road between Bangem and the twin lakes. -Rehabilitation of Muebah-Ebonemin water installation. -Construction of water supply scheme at Njuinyue village. 	-
LEBIALEM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Construction of a solar powered bore hole in Three Corners Nwasah-Fonjumetaw. - Water supply from Mbin to Ngoh, Essoh-Attah. - Maintenance of the stretch of road-Menji/Besali/Mayor's Office Wabane. - Supply and installation of 20 solar street lights at Azi, Njah, Njentse and Ndungallah 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supply and installation of 20 solar street lights in Mveh Area. - Supply and installation 11 solar street lights in Akeh/ Catholic Mission Lewoh. 	
MANYU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Construction of a surgery block in Mamfe District Hospital. - Construction of a Mother and Childcare unit for Mamfe District Hospital. - Construction of a lock-up Business Centre in Ekok Town. - Supply of computer Equipment and a standby generator to GHS Kajifu. - Supply and installation of 24 solar street lights in Bakebe, Tali, Akak and Bache villages (six each per village) - Supply and installation of 15 solar street lights at Mamfe Gendarmerie, Beach and Timber Road. 	-
MEME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Construction of a Pedagogic block of eight (08) class rooms, four (04) offices and four (04) toilets in GBHS Fiango-Kumba. - Construction of a cement paved road in Kumba Town-opposite presbyterian church to Asong garage phase 3. - Supply and installation of Hemodialysis Equipment in Kumba Regional Hospital Annex. - Construction of a Hemodialysis Centre in Kumba Regional Hospital Annex 	-

<p>NDIAN</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supply of Medical Equipment for Ekondo-Titi Health District (Bongongo I). - Construction of a Pedagogic block of eight (08) classrooms, four (04) offices and four (04) toilets in GBHS Ekondo-Titi. - Supply and installation of medical equipment for the Maternity Block of Ekondo-Titi District Hospital. - Supply of laboratory equipment for G.H.S Isangele (Chemistry, Biology, Physics and Geology Department) in Isangele Sub-Division. - The supply and installation of 18 solar street lights at Ikoi, Ilondo and Kilikele villages-Toko Sub-Division. 	
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Whereas the number of projects highlighted in the table for each Division is purely indicative as the total number of projects per Division is significantly higher, it can be observed from this table that each Division benefited from many high social impact projects such as in the health domain or realization of potable water supply projects responding to well-known priority needs of the population at the grassroots. To these two domains, one could also observe a few road construction or maintenance projects whose overall positive impact cannot be doubted.

From an analysis of the responses obtained through our questionnaires, more specifically the questions concerning the perception index of the Regional Assembly by citizens of the Region, it was observed that the commencement of the execution of projects such as a Pediatric center at the Buea Regional hospital, the supply of accessories for X-ray machine at the Bangem District Hospital, maintenance of the stretch of road from Menji-Besali-Mayor's office Wabane, the construction of a surgery block at the Mamfe District Hospital, supply and installation of Equipment

at the Hemodialysis center of the Kumba Regional hospital Annex, supply and installation of equipment for the maternity block of the Ekondo-Titi District Hospital, predominantly in the health domain, generated high enthusiasm and favourable reactions amongst the expectant beneficiary populations.

Obviously, it was not only projects earmarked and executed in the health domain that received a favourable reception from the recipient population. As indicated in a preceding section of this annual report, other pertinent projects either in the domains of potable water supply, road maintenance or education and solar electrification projects were also the subject of positive reactions, thereby establishing cordial relations between citizens and their Regional Assembly.

The supply of Computer equipment and a standby generator to Government High School Kajifu (Akwaya); the construction of a cement paved road in Kumba town, opposite the Presbyterian church to Asong garage; the construction of a Pedagogic block of eight (08) classrooms in Government Bilingual High School Ekondo-Titi (which was the target of a tragic separatist attack three years ago); the construction of an electric-powered borehole at Saker junction (LIMBE); the realization of a water supply scheme from Mbin-Ngoh (Essoh-Attah in Lebialem); the grading of 10km road between Bangem and the twin Manenguba lakes attracted similar favourable attention, endearing the Regional Assembly to citizens of various localities for identifying and executing pertinent projects with a direct positive impact on their daily living conditions.

However, in spite of the much-anticipated benefits of each project to its beneficiary community or user population, the late commencement of most projects was a source of relative disappointment to citizens who were eager to witness their completion and being put into use. Indeed, at the close of the year 2024, it was estimated that the actual physical execution rate of the overall number of estimated

projects was barely above fifty-five (55) per cent, with quite a good number at an even lower rate of execution. Citizens expressed fears that in the face of such delays, the quality of works could be sacrificed by unscrupulous contractors in the rush to meet the prescribed deadlines. One of such uncompleted high impact projects is the Pediatric center under construction at the Buea Regional hospital.

In the same light, there were expressions of discontent and frustration by inhabitants of some communities where projects were described as being very poorly executed. Some of these preoccupations were raised concerning solar street lights in Fontem, Nkong, non-functional water projects in Alou market area and Bamumbu (Magha area); the second said to have stopped functioning a few weeks after its inauguration to the joy and celebration of the local population. Similar sentiments of discontent were echoed about the quality of the road maintenance project running from Menji-Besali-Mayor's office in Wabane, described as not compacted or without proper gutters and likely to deteriorate as from the onset of the rainy season.

Indeed, while recognizing the pertinence or relevance of the above mentioned projects that ought to produce an immense positive impact for the beneficiary population, the inhabitants denounce the near total absence of any follow-up or professional monitoring of the project execution to ensure that the contractual terms of reference were respected and lamented that such absence of follow-up could be as a result of unhealthy or corrupt practices, allowing the contractor to become both executor and judge of the quality of works, while the project engineer becomes a mere formality.

The situation concerning the above-mentioned projects was described as not being peculiar to these localities since inhabitants of several enclaved collectivities such as Akwaya, parts of Upper Bayang and communities within Ndian Division

expressed similar concerns, leading in some cases, not just to the poor-quality execution but even to the abandonment of earmarked and commenced projects.

Another aspect where feedback revealed the necessity for the Regional Assembly to step up its actions concerns the visible absence of authorities of the Regional Assembly on the field to interact with and reassure the local population as well as listen, first hand, to feedback or recommendations about some of their actions and projects. Respondents to the questionnaire in numerous localities point out that they had never seen a member of the Regional Executive Bureau visit their locality and worse, some Regional Councilors have remained conspicuously absent from their constituencies which they reportedly represent within this institution.

In the same light, some shades of opinion amongst the population expressed the wish that the Regional Assembly extends its laudable initiative of supporting school resumption to other localities or functional schools in the hinterland as a measure of encouragement and recognition of the laudable efforts of parents, students and other local leaders. Indeed, such a request or desire is an illustration of the importance the population at the grassroots attached to gestures made in previous years by the President of the Regional Assembly and his Bureau Members in boosting the back-to-school campaign.

PART II

STATE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN USERS AND COLLECTIVITIES OF THE REGION.

STATE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND COLLECTIVITIES OF FAKO DIVISION.

During the period under review, relations between the citizens and the collectivities of FAKO Division were globally satisfactory although the degree of satisfaction varied from one municipality to another. As it has been highlighted in the general overview to this Annual Report, since the various collectivities continued to carry out their activities against the backdrop of the prevailing socio-security context, each municipality saw its functioning somewhat impacted, only differing by the extent to which this situation affected its activities.

Obviously, the councils of the urban centers that benefitted from a more conducive environment were able to attend to a greater number of citizens, envisage and execute more projects to the benefit of the citizens and consequently establish a more positive relationship with the latter. In order to avoid a generalized appreciation that may not depict the reality in individual collectivities, the analysis here-below will attempt an evaluation of the state of relations per decentralized local collectivity.

THE LIMBE CITY COUNCIL:

As a large collectivity that englobes the territory and citizens of the LIMBE I, LIMBE II, LIMBE III sub divisional councils and whereas each of these municipalities did envisaged and provided services or executed projects for the benefit of citizens of its specific council area; separate from the actions expected of the LIMBE City Council , the state of relations will be assessed for citizens of the

entire City because facilities provided in one part are usually beneficial to citizens residing in other parts of the city through their regular interactions.

From this perspective, one of the domains in which the administration of the LIMBE City Council attracted positive appreciation from its citizenry is in the fight against urban disorder with effective use of elements of its municipal police. This was most noticeable in the transport domain through the relocation of some motor parks from very busy or crowded areas of the city center to areas where their activities are less disruptive to the regular movements or activities of other city inhabitants.

This measure was saluted by city dwellers for having contributed to a better flow of circulation in previously crowded streets thereby providing a feeling of security and orderliness.

In addition to this positive action, the City Council administration was also commended by inhabitants of the city for a satisfactory level of provision of general services, most especially the establishment and delivery of various civil status documents without high supplementary costs or inconveniences to service users, even though with emphasis being put by state authorities on the gratuity of birth certificates, citizens are nursing expectations of seeing this become effectively implemented and a permanent reality within the administration of their City council.

The progressive payment of the outstanding bills of some service providers or contractors also attracted a favourable reaction from the beneficiaries and a segment of local opinion who viewed this action as an encouraging sign of the City Council administration paying attention to the plight of those who showed trust in the collectivity by accepting to do business with it. However, some amongst those with outstanding bills blamed the council administration for not establishing a chronological order of payment on the basis of how long such bills have been

pending or even settling some of the relatively small bills whose service providers could be considered as vulnerable compared to their colleagues expecting higher amount.

Whereas these positive actions alongside the active participation of the City Council in some sporting and cultural events organized within the city established warm relations with citizens, this bright outlook was severely dampened by feelings of discontent and expressions of frustration about the severe degradation of the hygiene and sanitation picture of this City. Considered by its inhabitants as previously one of the defining characteristics and source of pride of their city, the inability of the City Council administration to ensure an acceptable disposal of waste in all parts of the city became the source of lamentations and expressions of regret about how the city that was honoured as the cleanest in the nation a few years back could attain such a deplorable situation; describing it as not only a health hazard but highly negative publicity to the image of a city considered as a touristic destination attracting numerous visitors.

Such sentiments of disappointment about the sharp decline of hygiene and sanitation which seemed to be shared by the vast majority of city dwellers ultimately dampened the areas of commendable performances. Similarly, the enthusiasm generated among citizens of the municipality in the early months of 2024 following the implantation of solar street light panels in parts of the city in the operation baptized “Light Fako Up again” later gave way to mitigated reactions and even relative indifference from a segment of the population who consider the functional portion from community field along the road leading to the zoological garden as insignificant to the code name given to the programme.

As already highlighted in the 2023 annual report, another domain which constitutes a near permanent preoccupation to inhabitants of the city of Limbe

remains the perennial challenges of flooding affecting large portions of the city. The City Council administration has continued to take some mitigative measures in an attempt to respond thereto but the severity of the consequences of flooding recorded each rainy season leaves the victims and inhabitants of affected localities both bitter and angry at what they consider as a failure on the part of the City Council administration to provide a lasting solution to this well-known problem.

Notwithstanding the shortcomings observed in some domains or complaints recorded from segments of the population, it would be misleading to consider that all was bleak. Indeed, the actions of the sub-divisional municipal administrations contributed to establishing cordial relations in some localities through positive action to some previously identified preoccupations.

The Limbe I council administration can be commended for a good number of actions in this regard such as the rehabilitation of the road from Jumbo palace (Newtown) to Motowoh which is a part of the municipality usually plagued by challenges of inaccessibility or inconveniences of movement even through the use of motorbikes.

In the same vein, the council administration carried out a rehabilitation of the BOTA hospital, annex; a health facility which is the second highest solicited for healthcare in the City of Limbe after the Regional hospital. Obviously, such works contribute indirectly to the provision of healthcare in a hygienic and decent environment for both patients and medical personnel. The same observation can be made concerning the supply and installation of equipment at the Down Beach Integrated Health Center.

In the education sector, the construction and handing over of:

- Two classrooms, a toilet block and a Solar powered borehole at Government Nursery School (GNS) Mile 4;
- Two classrooms and a 3-compartment toilet at G.S Bossumbu;
- Two classrooms and a 3-compartment toilet at Government Nursery School (GNS) Mabeta New Lay-Out;
- Free birth certificates to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs);
- Issuance of fifty-six (56) free marriage certificates.

This brought joy to the local population in these localities that have witnessed a significant increase in their population either from the arrival of high numbers of IDPs or a normal evolution of the population.

These overall laudable accomplishments were almost mitigated by some pronouncement made by the Head of the Municipal Executive who was reported to have declared during budget orientation debates “Give me land and I will make Limbe I a paradise”, raising question marks about the quality of collaboration both with the City Mayor, local administrative authorities and even traditional leaders from her privileged position as Mayor, elite and indigene.

In the Limbe III Municipality, one of the domains in which the municipal administration was hailed was the provision of potable water to inhabitants of Man-o-war bay quarters in Bonabile village. This action followed the previous realization of similar projects in the localities of Mbonjo, Dockyard, Motondo and Mabeta. While some of these projects were carried out through the execution of manual boreholes such as in Mabeta and Motondo, the water project at Manga Hill witnessed an improvement through the provision of an electric pump and tank to ensure better functioning and sustainability.

The council administration equally accomplished a highly beneficial project through equipping a pavement fabrication workshop with two vibrator tables and accessories. The youths viewed this project as a practical contribution for their empowerment and skills acquisition. Judging from the positive reactions recorded, it can be imagined that in the event of proper follow-up, ensuring its continuous and effective functioning, the project could have a beneficial multiplier impact.

AS CONCERNS THE BUEA MUNICIPALITY:

Asides the cities of LIMBE and KUMBA, the Municipality of BUEA that hosts the Regional Headquarters is incontestably the biggest collectivity of the Region. On this account, this important municipality has always been given special attention as regards the state of relations with the citizenry.

During the period under review, the state of relations between the BUEA Municipality and its Services Users and citizens was commendably satisfactory although there were some domains in which citizens expressed disappointment, either concerning the inability of their collectivity to live up to expectations or what they view as the poor quality of services rendered by the council.

On the positive side, citizens lauded the sustained efforts of the council administration in the delivery of conventional services such as the issuance of various civil status documents as well as diligence in the issuance of building permits. It was highlighted that by actively taking part in recent initiatives by the government to ensure the establishment of birth certificates of children whose parents had failed to establish this important document, the Buea Council administration was addressing a preoccupation with far reaching implications in the life of each citizen.

Indeed, the Mayor and Council administration earned favourable reactions from the population in the satisfactory manner in which they managed the special operation decided by the government, baptized “My Name” and which coincided with registration for the Common Entrance and “Entrée en 6^e” exams, for which many pupils, especially of internally displaced parents were stranded without birth certificates. Some of these documents had been lost as a result of the prevailing socio-political unrest affecting the North-West and South-West Regions. Acting in partnership with UNICEF and BUNEC, the council established and handed out over 200 Birth Certificates during the first phase of the operation.

In the follow up of the implementation of this special programme that attracted numerous applicants, the Mayor regretted the negligence shown by parents in establishing this important document for their offspring, pointing out that of the total number of Birth certificates issued, less than 35% were duly declared within the then statutory period of 90 days.

Another domain in which the council administration received positive reactions was the commendable actions of the Municipal Police especially along the stretch of road commonly referred to as “OIC market area” which was a source of frustration to Users from long traffic jams in the past years but which, working in collaboration with regular police elements, they had been able to bring under control, significantly facilitating circulation.

Similar action by agents of the municipal police was equally observed around the Bwitingi market area and around the busy Mile 17 round-about where, acting once again in conjunction with the regular state police, they were observed deploying efforts to curb irresponsible parking of cars and obstruction of the highway in this vicinity which serves not only as the gateway into the Municipality but also plays host to the Buea motor park and a number of travel agencies.

In the field of the protection of the health of citizens, the council administration was also commended for its frequent sensitization actions against the slaughter and sale of livestock (meat in various forms) in unauthorized points because the veterinary and health services or inspection teams of MINEPIA are not present to approve such meat as fit or decent for consumption by the public. In the same light, the Council also carried out some sporadic actions to fight against the presence of stray animals in residential areas or the random creation of piggeries close to human habitations, thereby constituting a source of unhealthy smells.

The inauguration of phase 1 of the Buea central market in June 2024 by H.E. the Minister of Decentralization and Local Development was also hailed as an illustration of the determination of the Mayor and Council administration to equip the city of Buea with a befitting modern market as well as provide traders with decent space for their business activities. This phase comprising a block with 26 enclosed shops and two shed-blocks providing about 76 open stores and display units brought hope to the increasing number of traders to be able to secure one of these spaces at the appropriate moment.

However, while the population expressed happiness about this development, keen observers amongst them were quick to decry the absence of toilet facilities to accompany such an important infrastructure; a preoccupation to which the Mayor promptly responded by indicating that the construction of modern toilet facility is incorporated into phase 2 of the project. Although such a declaration could be viewed as reassuring, the implications are that, until phase 2 of the project will be executed and inaugurated, eventual occupants of the constructed stores and citizens who are buyers will find themselves without any toilets whose absence are a permanent concern in markets.

The organization of the holidays job initiative especially for the benefit of students within the secondary school bracket also received favourable reactions not only from beneficiary students and their parents but also from a segment of local opinion who considered it as likely to provide assistance to needy and relatively vulnerable parents who usually face challenges handling back to school preparations.

For the second consecutive year and in conformity with the directives of government in view of ensuring more effective citizen participation in identifying local development priorities, the Mayor of the Buea Municipality again organized town hall meetings and public town hall orientation discussions to listen to and better identify the priority preoccupations of inhabitants of the municipality. These actions once again attracted favourable comments from the public especially as the holding of these public orientation debates were given commendable sensitization by using the town-crier or public megaphone to make announcements.

Notwithstanding these laudable performances for which the administration of this collectivity established cordial relations with the citizenry, a few areas of vexatious under- performance or visible shortcomings severely mitigated this picture. One domain in which the council administration received the weakest approval rating or consistent criticism remains the hygiene and sanitation domain. Indeed, inhabitants of several densely populated neighbourhoods of the municipality repeatedly drew our attention to what they described as the indifference of the council administration to their plight and the serious health hazards posed by gigantic heaps of household waste. This was the regrettable situation in areas such as BIAKA hospital junction; Ndongo-Molyko (vicinity of GTHS Molyko); Mile 17 round-about, Mile 18 junction, Muea market, Bokwango market, Bonduma, OIC market etc which residents used as examples, alleging that if the situation could be

allowed to deteriorate along such accessible and sensitive areas such as road junctions, hospitals or market environs, it could only be a clear illustration of how deplorable the situation would be in relatively inaccessible or peripheral neighbourhoods.

In the same domain of hygiene and sanitation, market vendors and the general public continued drawing attention to the absence of toilet facilities in big markets that receive thousands of buyers and sellers each market day; describing the situation as proof of indifference on the part of the council administration that diligently collects markets tolls but disregards the welfare of those spending long hours doing business in these markets. To this preoccupation, handlers of items such as plucked chicken, vegetables or fruits equally lamented the absence of stand taps or water points to enable them wash these items as a way of preserving the health of consumers who run the risk of carrying home contaminated items.

Another area in which the Buea council administration was faulted during the period under consideration was the aspect of the absence of street lights in most parts of the municipality. After rekindling hope amongst inhabitants about a positive evolution during the formal launching in November 2024 of the local component of the “Light Up Fako Project”, this lofty initiative which was viewed as certain to contribute to safety, security as well as add to the night time beauty of the town was observed to have faded into inexistence, leaving numerous citizens in speculation over the real objectives of the project and the publicity surrounding its launching.

The rapid growth of the population of Buea whose relatively reassuring atmosphere of security has attracted an influx of new inhabitants from numerous other localities of the country has brought along its own frustrations and complaints from citizens. While many, especially automobile owners and commercial transporters complained about the recurrent phenomenon of prolonged traffic jams

in some parts of the township, many others went further to blame the council administration for doing almost nothing to maintain existing roads which could help decongest traffic. Similar criticism was directed at the Mayor and council for initiating a project like the construction of a new bridge to replace an existing narrow bridge along the area known as “Moki garage” but whose prolonged delay in execution has made the situation worse. Indeed, business owners and residents along the cut-off area describe what was considered as a positive initiative as more of sanction gift, claiming that some of them completely went out of business especially during the peak period from October to December, since the project earmarked to last three months went beyond six months with no imminent completion in view.

AS CONCERNS THE TIKO COUNCIL:

As one of the predominantly urban municipalities of Fako Division that enjoyed an atmosphere of peace perturbed only by sporadic incidents, the Tiko council administration was able to function in a relatively satisfactory manner, allowing it to provide routine services and basic amenities to a cross-section of inhabitants.

One of the most applauded achievements of the Tiko council administration during the year 2024 is the potable water scheme realized with the support of the German Cooperation mission and officially inaugurated in June 2024 by H.E. the Minister of Decentralization and Local Development. Considering rampant complaints from populations in most collectivities of the region about the scarcity or absence of drinking water, the high mobilization and participation of traditional rulers and the local population at the inauguration ceremony was a good indicator of the importance of the project to inhabitants of the towns of Mutengene and Tiko.

Another positive action which attracted a positive response especially from the youths was the completion of the construction of a multi-purpose youth

empowerment center. However, reservations expressed about the project concerned the quality of work done and this delayed its inauguration.

Alongside the initiatives highlighted above, the Mayor and Tiko council administration also undertook the opening up and maintenance of some peripheral roads. However, this programme sparked controversy in some localities such as Mutengene where misunderstandings or misinterpretations led to some acts of public protests and discontent. The regrettable incident concerning an otherwise beneficial project was a pointer to the need for better sensitization or concertation between local stakeholders and the council administration in identifying and determining priority actions intended for the benefit of citizens.

As regards the provision of conventional services such as the establishment and issuance of various civil status documents, the action of the council could be described as only partially satisfactory because several inhabitants or Service Users, as observed during a town hall meeting in the Tiko council hall, decried the persistent practice of the payment of money in return for the delivery of Birth certificates, citing tendencies of extortion of money by some council personnel.

In the same light, some market vendors complained about discriminatory practices in the allocation of market space and glaring cases of favouritism with some citing instances of other vendors being dispossessed of previously allocated spaces for the benefit of others who openly boast of being “protégés” of the Mayor. Considering the eventual unpleasant consequences of such allegations, we exhorted the Deputy Mayor who represented the Head of the Council Executive to pay prompt attention to that concern as it could jeopardize the policy of national integration and living together.

Beyond these areas where the actions of the council administration did not militate in favour of cordial relations with citizens, the sector which remains

probably the biggest source of contentious relations with the council administration was protracted delays observed in the payment of service providers. Some victims of this situation even disagree with the idea of ordinary “delay” and describe it as a blatant refusal to pay for their services in spite of formal reception of works; arguing that the indifference to repeated appeals for even partial payment constituted an illustration of bad faith or victimization.

It is important to indicate that after examining some complaints against the Tiko council administration and holding conciliation sessions in view of finding an amicable settlement, it became very embarrassing that the Head of the Municipal Executive who had demonstrated a spirit of collaboration during the process and even promised to effect installmental settlement of some outstanding bills suddenly adopted an incomprehensible attitude. This surprising change of attitude compelled our institution, acting in conformity with the provisions of Article 14 (4) of Decree No 2020/773 of 24th December 2020, to draw the attention of the Local Representative of the State.

AS CONCERNS THE IDENAU MUNICIPALITY:

Situated at the southern top of Fako Division and not geographically one of the cross-roads collectivities, IDENAU council is not frequently in the limelight. However, the relatively peaceful atmosphere that prevailed in this collectivity ought to be an adequate factor for the provision of expected services to the citizenry.

From various interactions including elaborate exchanges during a townhall concertation meeting, it was observed that the citizens were generally satisfied with the provision of conventional services such as the delivery of civil status documents and the issuance of building permits, at a moment when socio-economic activity was observed to be on a visible increase in various parts of the municipality. The council

administration also received favourable reactions concerning the organization of its motor park and follow-up of the functioning of the market stores.

The biggest challenge of the Idenau council administration during 2024 was in the domain of hygiene and sanitation especially the disposal or removal of domestic waste which was the source of complaints from nine (9) out of the thirteen (13) interventions taken from the general public during a town hall meeting in the presence of the Mayor. Some citizens such as the Head teacher of Government School group 1 appealed for a spontaneous field visit to ascertain the gravity of the situation. Fortunately, in a show of good faith, the Mayor explained the situation to be due to the breakdown of the garbage removal truck and on-going action to create a new garbage dumping or treatment site as a result of security concerns around the existing but isolated garbage dumping site.

IN THE MUYUKA MUNICIPALITY:

As it has been highlighted in our annual reports for the past years, amongst the councils of Fako Division, Muyuka municipality has been the most severely affected by the prevailing socio-political crisis. The direct consequence of this situation has been a drastic limitation of the sphere of intervention of the council administration to the urban center of the municipality, to the regrettable detriment of several large agglomerations such as Munyenge, Bafia, Ekona, Malende, Ikata, or Mpundu with a high population density and residents who have continued to live in these localities in spite of the current situation.

Under the circumstances, it was no surprise to observe that the council administration focused its activities on the provision of essential services to Users who were able to approach it for one purpose or another. From this perspective, citizens and Service Users welcomed with relief the resumption of activities by the council administration in its official premises contrary to what previously obtained

when, upon relocating to Muyuka from Buea, the functioning of the council was relatively unstable.

As it is the case with most municipalities, the delivery of birth certificates remained the most solicited amongst essential services, receiving the highest number of citizens. In addition thereto, the citizenry of Muyuka municipality expressed delight about the reopening and full operation of the municipal mortuary, helping them reduce both cost and the inconveniences of travelling long distances to either Buea or Kumba for the preservation and subsequent coffining of the mortal remains of deceased relatives.

In the same vein, the Muyuka council administration was considered as deploying commendable efforts towards the return of the population to their various localities and the optimal resumption of socio-economic activities especially in Muyuka town. Actions such as the holding of administrative and budgetary accounts session in the council chambers and its active involvement in the organization of the sub-divisional cultural festival baptized “Molatako” which has held two consecutive editions in the council premises were viewed as visible indicators of such laudable efforts.

However, despite these globally positive achievements, some actions orchestrated by the Muyuka council administration were a source of controversy and tense relations with some citizens and their sympathizers. This was the case with a situation the concerned describe as the unilateral and abusive termination of a contract for the collection of some local taxes entered into between the council and a certain Mr. OTTO TABE, a misunderstanding which was only peacefully resolved with the intervention of the Administration and which threatened to undermine the precarious peace within the locality in the event of prolonged wrangling between camps.

The non-completion of some earmarked projects such as the banquet hall also showed the limited ability of the municipal executive to attain pre-defined objectives. As the population commended the council administrative for some encouraging actions, a significant segment of citizens faulted the municipal administration for failing to take bold initiatives in encouraging the back-to-school drive within the municipality as seen in other collectivities through the provision of school kits, books and even financial assistance to boost the school resumption campaign. Similar criticisms have been labelled against the council administration for failing to take the initiative of providing solar street lights in many thickly populated neighbourhoods to step up security and encourage the return of more persons.

STATE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND THE DECENTRALIZED LOCAL COLLECTIVITIES OF KUPE-MUANENGUBA DIVISION

The year 2024 presented a mixed security landscape for Kupe-Muanenguba Division. While there were improvements in some areas, particularly urban centers, the persistent pockets of unrest in rural localities had a ripple effect on the effectiveness of local governance.

In Bangem, Nguti, and Tombel, relatively calm conditions in urban areas allowed councils to cautiously conduct operations and engage in basic service delivery. However, these urban-based improvements were in direct contrast to the reality observed in several rural localities, where insecurity remained a significant barrier to council activities. The instability in these areas hindered the mobility of council officials, disrupted the proximity interaction that are expected to create an atmosphere of trust between citizens and local collectivities.

BANGEM COUNCIL: THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINING GOOD PRACTICES IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

The Bangem Council pursued its activities aimed at bridging the gap between local collectivities and citizens. Its relative success in certain domains of governance has made it a positive example for other councils within the division, though it also faces numerous challenges.

One of the council's major achievements in 2024 was its performance in vital records and registry services. Civil status documents, such as birth, marriage, and death certificates, were issued with increased efficiency compared to previous years. This progress was largely attributed to the council's innovative approach of collaborating with traditional leaders and village representatives. These leaders

served as intermediaries, simplifying administrative procedures for citizens and eliminating bottlenecks that previously delayed the issuance of vital documents.

Another area of special attention for Bangem Council was agricultural revival. Recognizing that the majority of its citizens rely on subsistence farming as their primary source of livelihood, the council embarked on projects aimed at boosting agricultural productivity. These projects included providing farmers with improved seedlings, subsidized fertilizer, and training sessions on modern farming techniques. Additionally, efforts were made to rehabilitate rural electrification networks to enhance agricultural processing and storage facilities. These initiatives were well-received by the population and contributed to a gradual restoration of trust between citizens and the council like the case of the extension of electricity to Mbat village.

Despite these gains, Bangem Council faced criticism for delays in completing essential community water schemes. Residents of some areas lamented the lack of access to clean and potable water, a situation that poses obvious health risks. Furthermore, while the council has adopted participatory governance strategies by engaging diverse community representatives, these efforts were sometimes hampered by resource constraints and the lingering effects of insecurity in certain zones.

Another area of contention that occasionally cast a dark shadow over the relatively satisfactory relations between the council administration and citizens of the municipality is the controversial award of contracts as most service providers continue to express discontent at being side-lined in the process, decrying a conflict of interest between the status of the Contracting Authority and some economic operators described as featuring regularly amongst awardees of various council projects.

The people of Bangem, particularly service providers and contractors are outraged by what they describe as the Mayor's blatant disregard for meritocracy and transparency in the award of contracts. They demand a more inclusive and equitable approach to governance, particularly the respect of the provisions of the Public Contracts Code and the Cameroon Code Transparency and Good Governance in Public Finance Management and not a practice which may be considered as nepotism and cronyism.

NGUTI COUNCIL: GRADUAL BUT FRAGILE PROGRESS

Nguti Council's performance in 2024 revealed a mix of challenges and modest achievements. The council's jurisdiction, which includes both urban and rural communities, faced difficulties stemming from persisting insecurity and a lack of human resources.

A key challenge for the Nguti Council was its underperformance in the area of registry services, with some applicants complaining about delays in obtaining birth, marriage and death certificate as well as concerning allegedly unfair amounts of money collected from them for the production of birth certificates, a practice contrary to the regulations in force and more specifically, the pertinent provisions of Law No 2024/ 016 of 23rd Dec. 2024 to organize the Civil Registration System in Cameroon.

These delays were attributed to limited office hours, and the unavailability or absence of qualified registry staff. Compounding the issue was the inability of the council administration to access what they view as risk areas, leaving citizens in need of vital documents with no choice but to travel even out of the municipality for assistance. This situation significantly eroded public confidence in the council's ability to meet the needs of its constituents.

In terms of economic initiatives, Nguti Council attempted to mitigate the hardships faced by its population by supporting agro-pastoral groups and small businesses. A few subsidized initiatives were introduced to provide financial and material assistance to farmers and traders. While these efforts were commendable, the council's limited outreach to citizens and its failure to involve the community in the design and implementation of these programs undermined their overall effectiveness.

Citizens criticized the council for a perceived lack of effective follow-up in project execution. Many residents argued that funds allocated for development initiatives were not being utilized efficiently, leading to uncompleted projects and wasted resources. The lack of coherent communication between the council and its population further strained relations, creating an atmosphere of incomprehension with citizens blaming the council administration for not paying adequate attention to their preoccupations.

TOMBEL COUNCIL: ACTIONS MITIGATES BY CONTROVERSY

Tombel Council demonstrated notable progress in certain areas of governance, particularly in civil status registration. Efforts to streamline the registration process for birth, marriage and death certificates included the introduction of flexible procedures for delayed registrations. These measures were particularly beneficial for conflict-affected residents who had been unable to access registry services in previous years. However, the limited accessibility of the central council office remained a significant challenge, especially for residents in big peripheral localities such as Ebonji and Etam.

One of the most visible achievements of Tombel Council in 2024 was its investment in infrastructure development. On the 27th of January 2024, the council unveiled a fleet of heavy-duty construction equipment, including a tipper truck, a

front-end loader, and a bulldozer, announced to be used for road maintenance projects. This move was widely welcomed by the population, who viewed it as a commitment to improving rural infrastructure and facilitation of movement for the population. However, critics argued that the council's focus on urban-centric projects, such as street lighting and the beautification of the council headquarters, came at the expense of addressing the pressing needs of rural areas.

Whereas relative insecurity continued to plague several rural localities within the Tombel Council's jurisdiction, limiting the council's ability to extend its services to these areas, traditional leaders in affected communities called for greater collaboration between the council and local vigilante groups to enhance security and facilitate the implementation of development projects.

There were also expressions of discontent or disapproval at what a segment of the population view as the excessive concentration of prerogatives in the sole hands of the Mayor, rendering the deputies both ineffective and incapable of addressing any preoccupation. According to such complainants, such tendencies of excessive concentration of power makes decentralization a mere slogan especially as they allege the head of their council administration to be reputed for prolonged absences thereby frequently paralyzing the functioning of the collectivity.

EFFORTS TO FOSTER POSITIVE COLLABORATION

Despite the challenges faced by councils in Kupe-Muanenguba Division, some positive efforts were made to foster collaboration with citizens. Bangem Council's participatory approach, which included women, youth leaders, and community representatives in project monitoring, served as a laudable practice in local governance.

STATE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND THE DECENTRALIZED LOCAL COLLECTIVITIES OF LEBIALEM DIVISION

MENJI COUNCIL: THE NEED FOR SUSTAINED ACTION TO CONSOLIDATE FRAGILE PROGRESS.

The Menji Council, as the divisional headquarters of Lebialelem, played a commendable role in public service delivery and local governance in 2024, facilitated by the government's rehabilitation of the road leading into Menji which improved accessibility and connectivity to the municipality. After suffering severe degradation due to years of abandonment and neglect resulting from insecurity issues, the rehabilitation of the road leading into Menji had a visible impact on the council's ability to deliver services to its citizens.

With improved road accessibility, the council engaged its citizens more effectively and confidence in its leadership improved. Furthermore, the improved road connectivity stimulated economic activity, particularly in the agricultural sector, by enabling farmers transport their produce to markets more easily, thereby increasing their sales and revenue. This, in turn, contributed to improve the livelihoods of farmers and their families and boosted the local economy.

Within the municipality, the council utilized road maintenance machinery purchased the previous year to carry out some road maintenance work, ensuring that a few of the municipality's internal roads remained accessible and in good condition.

Despite these gains, the Menji Council is observed to have faced severe operational challenges in 2024. Administrative instability remained a significant concern, with council sessions held outside Menji the headquarter due to lingering insecurity. This weakened the council's ability to engage its citizens effectively and undermined confidence in its leadership.

Field data from 2024 indicated that only approximately 20% of residents access council services, highlighting the persisting gap between the council administration and the general population. The issuance of civil status documents, such as birth, death and marriage certificates, further illustrated the council's inadequacy. Citizens complained about exorbitant unofficial charges for these documents, a situation exacerbated by the council's inability to operate directly from Menji. The decried high expenses have been blamed on some council staff who work as middle men, collecting huge sum of money from locals for the production of these documents.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the council made notable progress in other areas in 2024. A water project extending from Njentsse to Menji brought relief to some residents by providing access to potable water. Expansion plans for this project could prove transformative if executed comprehensively.

In the economic domain, Menji's potential remained under-utilized. The paralysis of key markets, such as the Menji and Azi markets, was a major setback for local traders and agrarian communities. With relative calm gradually returning to the area, many citizens are hopeful that the council would take proactive measures to revitalize these markets, alongside the development of farm-to-market roads in some major production basins.

In a beacon of hope for the crisis- weary community of Menji, the decision to install solar powered street lights throughout the town in 2024 was very favourably received by the population. Reaction indicate that this project not only illuminated the streets, but is also reported to have revitalized the local economy restoring a sense of security and normalcy, enticing displaced residents to return home and begin rebuilding their lives.

The Menji Council's implementation of various development projects encountered some delays as the council is still to realize some key projects. This can be exemplified with the opening of a 12km farm road from Nchenallah to Takwa, rehabilitation of roads from Ngoh to three corner Nchefem, planting of mini solar power plant and poles at Njoagwi and the mini solar system and poles at Njentse Essoh Attah integrated Health Center. These eagerly awaited projects and others still pending execution or completion.

While this delay may be attributed to the various factors, it is essential for the council to prioritize communication and effective community engagement to ensure that the need and expectations of the population are met, the very basic tenet of the decentralization reforms in the Republic. By doing so, the council would reinforce trust and confidence in its leadership and ultimately deliver on its development promises.

ALOU COUNCIL: THE CHALLENGE OF THE EFFECTIVE PRESENCE OF THE COUNCIL ADMINISTRATION.

The Alou Council demonstrated an appreciable commitment to improving the lives of its citizens in 2024, despite facing numerous operational challenges. One of the council's most prominent activities was the adoption of its 2024 budget and administrative accounts, a session held in its jurisdiction and seen as an illustration of its readiness to function effectively as a decentralized organ within its natural jurisdiction.

However, the council's efforts to translate this positive trend into tangible benefits for the population were hindered by several factors, including the pervasive insecurity that continued to impede outreach efforts, leaving many residents feeling ignored and disenfranchised. The council's limited physical and relational presence was also a major concern, with residents criticizing its inability to deliver timely and

impactful solutions to pressing issues that had been plaguing the community for long.

In spite of these areas of discomfort from the population, the council achieved some successes in 2024, including the provision of potable water in the municipality, a development that significantly improved access to this essential resource with a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of residents. The council also demonstrated its commitment to the promotion of education by providing school materials, including text and exercise books, and school fees for numerous beneficiaries in government primary and secondary schools in Alou Sub-Division, a move that was widely applauded by parents and the beneficiary students or pupils.

The council equally recorded positive approval in the domain of civil status document especially birth certificate with a majority of the population of Alou affirming to the fact that they were issued civil status documents free of charge, with a few alleging to have paid huge sums to middle men who work along the corridor of the council, thereby demonstrating a persisting difficulty for many Users to access the council services directly.

Furthermore, the council organized a highly successful agropastoral show to encourage farmers in Alou municipality, an initiative that not only showcased the municipality's rich agricultural potentials but also provided a valuable platform for farmers to market their produce in an area where several periodic markets have become non-functional.

In addition to these achievements, the council has been pursuing construction works in the M'mockmbie Market, a vibrant and bustling commercial hub that should provide a much-needed economic boost to the municipality and create new opportunities for traders and artisans.

Notwithstanding these accomplishments in 2024, there is still much work to be done, particularly with regards to the pressing demand for the reopening of the once-thriving Alou market. This critical issue remains a major concern for residents, who are eager to see the market restored to its former glory and once again become a vibrant and bustling hub of commercial activity.

The Alou council administration is still reeling from the prolonged absence of the Mayor, despite the return of relative peace and stability in the sub-division. One of the most glaring issues is the deplorable state of the main round-about at Alou which remained overrun with grass. This is particularly disturbing given Alou's strategic location as the gateway to Lebialem, making it an indispensable entry point for visitors and commerce. A segment within local opinion was of the view that this unenviable situation is a visible illustration of the council administration in the locality and a negation of decentralization.

WABANE COUNCIL: LEADING WITH RESILIENCE

Among the three councils, Wabane's performance in 2024 stood out as the most laudable. Despite inherent challenges of operating in a conflict-affected area, Wabane council's leadership demonstrated resilience by fostering community-driven initiatives and maintaining a stable presence in the field. With its operations predominantly anchored in Nkongle, the council has managed to address priority needs in densely populated areas like Ntemzem and Nkongle.

A notable accomplishment for Wabane Council was its active involvement in rural road rehabilitation. By leveraging road maintenance equipment procured in 2023, the council successfully improved access to several localities. Nevertheless, this progress has not been uniformed, with peripheral communities like Besali, Bechati, and Folepi still awaiting the extension of such infrastructural developments,

highlighting the need for a more equitable distribution of resources through the realization of beneficial projects.

The Wabane council made an important move in line with the supply of water to its population. This can be exemplified with the completed water supply at Atukong and also the rehabilitation of water supply in Banteng and Basali.

The creation of Village and Neighborhoods development Committees (VNDCs) in various villages across Wabane was another highlight of 2024. These grassroots Committees were reportedly conceived to collaborate with the council in identifying and addressing specific developmental priorities within their localities. By empowering communities to take ownership of their development trajectories, the council could be considered as fostering a sense of inclusiveness that bodes well for future governance.

In the same light, the Wabane council was commended in the domain of civil status document especially the issuance of birth Certificates with the majority of locals attesting to the fact that they received Civil Status documents from the council free of charge, a practice which went a long way in fostering council relations with the population in 2024.

However, infrastructural gaps remain a concern. The lack of a slaughterhouse, for instance, has been a long-standing demand of Wabane's population. While the council has acknowledged this issue and incorporated it into its financial planning for 2025, effective execution will be crucial in maintaining public trust.

In summary, regarding council service delivery, Menji, Alou and Wabane municipalities are considered to provide relative council services [**positive but weak**] with Wabane and Alou showing more assertive performances above Menji in services delivery in 2024.

STATE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND COLLECTIVITIES OF MANYU DIVISION

The security situation in Manyu Division witnessed an overall relative improvement. Generalized insecurity has been a major handicap preventing the Councils from providing effective service delivery to the inhabitants of several localities of their collectivities. This visible return to stability created a conducive environment, enabling the Councils to focus on delivering essential services to the community, thereby improving the overall quality of life for residents. In a notable turnaround, Manyu Division witnessed a significant improvement in the functioning of its Councils in 2024 hence establishing positive relations with citizens.

Last year, only two out of four Councils were operating at relatively satisfactory levels. However, thanks to the enhanced security situation, all councils to the exception of Akwaya were able to deliver services with some degree of effectiveness, making substantial progress.

RELATIONS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND THE MAMFE COUNCIL

As the divisional headquarters, Mamfe Council emerged as a rare collectivity in Manyu Division, boasting a relatively favourable working atmosphere. This was largely due to its position as one of the areas not too severely affected by the ongoing crisis in the Division. Compared to other areas in Manyu Division, Mamfe Council managed to maintain a sense of normalcy, allowing Council officials to work with relative ease.

The relative calmness in Mamfe created a conducive environment for the Mayor to reside more regularly in the area. This, in turn, enabled the provision of routine Council services such as the delivery of Civil Status documents, the issuance of building permits and the follow-up of petty economic activities in the municipality.

With regards to hygiene and sanitation, Mamfe Council took proactive measures by providing a truck and employed a driver, whose salary was paid by the council. The initiative was highly laudable, as the truck regularly collected and disposed waste at the designated dumpsite in Okoyong, significantly improving the overall sanitation and cleanliness of the area. Unfortunately, some inhabitants continue to indiscriminately dispose wastes along roads and streams, such as the Besong-Abang road leading to PHS at Banya quarters and the Baku stream. This highlights the need for additional wastes management infrastructure as well as a greater sense of civic responsibility to ensure a cleaner and healthier environment for the community.

In a bid to improve infrastructure in the Mamfe main market, the council undertook renovations in the main market, constructing storey buildings to gain space above the ground and alleviate congestion. As a result, some traders were successfully relocated to the newly built spaces, enhancing the overall market experience and improving the livelihoods of local traders.

Still in the domain of infrastructure, the council constructed a modern commercial complex opposite the main grandstand, providing additional space for businesses to thrive. Also, another commercial complex was under construction adjacent to the main field, near the gendarmerie post in Mamfe, which will further boost economic activities and provide more opportunities for local entrepreneurs.

Regrettably, the absence of integrated health centres in Bachuo Ntai, Obang and Okoyong was a disturbing concern for the local population. Following the setting ablaze of the Mamfe District Hospital by separatist fighters, the lack of access to quality healthcare services created a dire need for integrated health centres in these areas. Residents were compelled to travel long distances to access healthcare

services, leading to delays in medical attention and poor health outcomes or increased mortality rates.

Similarly, the Obang community has also been grappling with a significant challenge in accessing potable drinking water. The closest water source is located in Okoyong, which is a considerable distance from Obang, making it difficult for residents to access this essential resource.

The communities of Eshobi and Berere equally expressed feelings of neglect and marginalization in the allocation of Council projects. Despite being part of the Council's jurisdiction, these communities claim to have been overlooked in the distribution of development projects, leading to a sense of disenfranchisement and social injustice. This is however attributed to the prevailing security concerns and unrest in these communities, which made it extremely challenging for the council to operate effectively.

As it has been highlighted for other local collectivities, the poor state of farm to market roads was a recurrent preoccupation. Within the Mamfe Council area, Nchang and Bessong-Abang farmers decry deplorable farm-to-market roads. This critical infrastructure remains essential for farmers to transport their produce to markets, but their poor condition hindered economic development, increased transportation cost and the loss of a substantial part of their agricultural production due to lack of means of preservation of perishable foodstuffs.

RELATIONS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND EYUMOJOCK COUNCIL

Eyumojock has continued to experience progressive calmness as the prevailing crisis evolves. Despite challenges and uncertainties, Eyumojock has demonstrated a steady trajectory towards stability, offering a promising example for

other affected areas in Manyu division. This allowed the Council to make significant strides in service delivery.

Notable results were registered in areas of routine Council services such as the few cases of building permits, support to local businesses as well as the follow-up of local transport activities.

The citizens of Eyumojock commended the Council administration for its efforts in the domain of hygiene and sanitation, expressing their delight and appreciation for the clean nature of their Council area, especially their public toilets which they consider a source of community pride. Their hope is to see the preservation of these standards as well as entreat the Council administration to extend these services to other localities with a high population concentration.

The business community of Eyumojock expressed satisfaction with the council's non-discrimination policy towards traders, comprising both Nigerian and Cameroonian citizens. This inclusive approach fostered a harmonious business environment, promoting economic growth and development. Overall, the non-discrimination policy facilitated cross-border trade between Nigeria and Cameroon, enhancing economic cooperation and development in the area which plays host to a non-negligible number of Nigerians.

Considering the likely positive impact that could be derived through the realization of several projects earmarked for Public Investment in Eyumojock in 2024, one could understand why citizens of this collectivity generally demonstrate enthusiasm towards the Council administration. The earmarked projects included:

- The provision of solar street lights in Eyumojock, Nsanaragati, Inokun, Afap, Kaembong, Ajayukandip;

- The provision of equipment to re-habilitate health centres in Eyumojock, Inokun, Ekok, Otu, Nsanaragati and Afap;
- The renovation of Nursery and Primary schools in Ekok and Eyumojock.

Unfortunately, this globally encouraging outlook was somewhat dampened by some service users of Eyumojock expressing concerns that some Council staff are occasionally rude and unwelcoming towards them. This regrettable behaviour had a negative impact on the overall experience of interacting with the Council. It is believed that, by addressing these concerns and implementing measures to improve staff behaviour, the Eyumojock Council would usher a more cordial atmosphere of interacting with the Council Users and preserve trust with the community.

Some villages like Ndebaya and Mbenyan, expressed impatience over what they view as the council's disregard for their needs and concerns, especially the expected maintenance of rural roads which was highly awaited after the Council administration displayed newly acquired heavy equipment. Similarly, a segment of the inhabitants expressed dissatisfaction with the Council Police's management of motor parks, citing disorganization and even fights among drivers.

In the same light, many who approached the Council for various documents indicated it was a challenge obtaining Civil Status documents, due to a lack of Civil Status Booklets in the area. As a result, residents were obliged to travel to Mamfe to acquire these essential documents, incurring additional expenses and inconvenience. To make matters worse, some unscrupulous council workers were accused of taking advantage of the situation, extorting money from residents under the guise of facilitating the acquisition process.

In another domain, the Lord Mayor of Eyumojock and other council executives demonstrated compassion and solidarity by extending a hand of solidarity to the less

fortunate within their municipality. The gifts they provided brought immense joy to the recipients, many of whom were Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

RELATIONS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND AKWAYA COUNCIL

In 2024, the relationship between the Akwaya Council and its service users was deemed problematic, with the majority of the local population expressing displeasure over its failure to provide many routine services. The poor state of relations between the Akwaya Council and the community may be attributed to the severe impact of the ongoing crisis in the Manyu Division, with Akwaya Sub-Division being the most severely affected.

The Mayor has been operating a temporary office in Mamfe Town. This decision aims to ensure the Mayor's safety while still allowing him to perform his duties and serve the community. However, the community's expectation is for the Mayor to make more regular visits to Akwaya, given the importance of his presence in rebuilding trust and addressing local concerns.

In this light, numerous inhabitants of Akwaya expressed frustration and disappointment over the general unavailability of their Mayor, some even pointing out not to have seen him on the field in 2024.

On a favourable note, some efforts were registered in areas of routine Council services such as the provision of Civil Status documents and related services delivered in the temporal office operated in Mamfe town.

The people of Akwaya felt being left in the dark about the Council's projects and programs in 2024. Akwaya Council envisaged some projects for 2024, including those funded by the Public Investment Budget. However, the Council did not communicate on these projects to the community and this led to a feeling of mistrust

and disappointment. It is essential for the Council to be more proactive in sharing information about their projects and programs with the community.

Not surprising, the farm-to-market roads in Akwaya were described as being in a deplorable state, hindering the transportation of goods and people. The dilapidated roads thus constituted not only a nuisance but also a significant obstacle to any initiative aimed at local development.

The people of Kenchi village also expressed sentiments of discontent because the Council failed to address their educational needs, the request of a primary school in their community. This is a significant concern because access to basic education is essential for the development and growth of individuals and the community.

As regards healthcare, the abandoned Kesham health centre was another source of frustration in this part of the Akwaya local collectivity. Constructed to provide essential medical services to the local population, the facility has been alleged by abandoned and deteriorating in the bush, sparking discontent within the community.

RELATIONS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND TINTO COUNCIL

The Tinto Council has been severely impacted by the ongoing socio-political unrest, ranking as the second most affected council after Akwaya Council in the division.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, the relations between the Users and Tinto council were relatively acceptable. In the year 2024, the Council of Tinto was able to conveniently provide routine Council services comprising mostly of the delivery of Civil Status Registration documents and the follow-up and issuance of building permits.

In a notable achievement, Tinto Council successfully organized cultural exhibitions in 2024. This initiative played a significant role in promoting the rich cultural heritage of the community and was observed as a contribution to encourage the population to return to their local communities and so ensure the preservation of their customs, folklore and values.

Despite the challenges faced in previous years, the Council successfully collected some routine taxes in 2024, marking a significant turnaround from the previous year. This realisation of revenue enabled the Council to execute a few beneficial projects and initiatives.

The Mayor of Tinto made laudable strides in completing some important projects for the community, such as the construction of a mortuary in Tinto and the Tinto-Bakebe Twin Hills project. The Tinto-Bakebe Twin Hills Project is an innovative initiative aimed at promoting sustainable development and environmental conservation in the municipality. By focusing on the Twin Hills of Tinto and Bakebe, the project sought to preserve the natural beauty and ecological bio-diversity of these sites, while also fostering economic growth, community engagement and direct participation.

In the domain of healthcare, the inhabitants of Tinto Council expressed disappointment regarding the deplorable state of health centres in Nchemba I, Nfiachang and Mbinjong villages, a situation they say is compounded by the acute shortage of healthcare personnel.

Another preoccupation affecting the population of Tinto Council area was the unclean and irregular flow of potable water in Tinto town and Mbio. This scarcity of clean water poses significant health risks to the residents, making them vulnerable to water-borne diseases.

While the absence of street lights in Mbinjong was also a serious preoccupation for its residents complaining of insecurity in the area, the residents of Bakebe drew attention to the hazardous conditions of the road leading to their market and motor park, a stretch of road which has earned a sad reputation among locals as a "death trap" due to the alarming frequency of accidents recorded.

Regrettably, some localities of the municipality, especially those enclaved and located in the hinterlands at a substantial distance from the municipal headquarters expressed worries of not benefiting from service delivery in 2024. The distance and lack of roads created significant barriers hindering their ability to benefit from services that are readily available to those closer to Tinto.

RELATIONS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND COLLECTIVITIES OF MEME DIVISION

The Councils of Meme Division demonstrated a significant improvement in their functioning in 2024, despite the persisting social tension. The currently prevailing environment is becoming more conducive to productivity as compared to what obtained last year.

Under such conditions, it is expected that service delivery should experience significant improvement in the Councils of Meme Division, hence enabling them to better address the needs of the local population and provide quality services.

Just like Fako Division, Meme Division has a City Council that includes the Kumba I, Kumba II, and Kumba III Municipal Councils. Because the City Council and these three Local Councils are interconnected in such a way that the City Council's activities affect the three local Councils, they will be reviewed collectively, unless particular observations are deemed appropriate.

STATE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE KUMBA CITY COUNCIL, ITS ATTENDANT LOCAL COUNCILS AND THE CITIZENS

During the year just ended, the Kumba City Council made notable strides in enhancing its relationship with service users, making a laudable improvement as per the year 2023, leading to an amelioration in the relations between the Kumba City Council and its Service Users.

As the Council engaged the execution of various works towards providing expected services, the city could be considered as poised for further growth and development. On this premise, the Kumba City Council was able to enhance its relationship with the populace of Kumba positively.

In one of these actions, the City Mayor organized a town hall meeting on November 21st, 2024, bringing together community stakeholders in a spirit of inclusiveness. This gathering provided a platform for discussing major concerns affecting the City, as well as highlighting major accomplishments achieved in 2024. Such town hall meetings were considered by participants as essential not only to promote citizen participation, but also for building trust and fostering collaboration between local authorities and the communities they serve.

A cross-section of the inhabitants of Kumba have been expressing delight with the recent developments in the City. The construction of an ultra-modern Kumba City Grandstand has been a major infrastructural improvement, and the ongoing PDVIR project has brought significant improvements to the City's infrastructure as well. These initiatives not only created a sense of satisfaction among the inhabitants but are also contributed in making Kumba a more beautiful City. This was corroborated by the Meme Senior Divisional Officer's (SDOs) tour on December 5th, 2024, to assess the progress of various projects in Kumba.

The Council equally undertook the rehabilitation and maintenance of several roads within the City, thereby improving transportation and facilitating economic activities. The Kumba City Council initiated a transformative road rehabilitation project, focusing on the main highway from 3/corners Ntam to the main bridge and beyond, eliminating potholes in the vicinity around St. Francis College Fiango and Brasseries. The upgraded road brought relief to residents, traders, and commuters who rely on this major route within the township.

Similar road rehabilitation works were also successfully completed from Azi Motel Street to Anglican Church, greatly improving the infrastructure and bringing joy to the citizens of Kumba. The roads in Alaska Street have undergone grading, so too was the road stretch from the Kumba 1 Council, passing through the Kumba General Hospital, towards Kumba station.

The City Mayor's inspection tour on 12th November, 2024, to review ongoing Public Investment Project on the roads leading to Lido Street was another commendable initiative. This demonstrated the City Mayor's commitment to ensuring executive follow-up to ensure effective project execution to specification.

The Mayor of Kumba I's announcement during the session held to unveil the 2024 budget was indeed another positive step towards improving the city's infrastructure. The allocation of funds from MINH DU for road rehabilitation and FEICOM for constructing low-cost municipal structures attracted favourable reactions from inhabitants of the town.

It's also worth noting that the Kumba I Council deployed laudable efforts to improve some of the City's infrastructure, with a focus on road maintenance and development. The Council's efforts, combined with the Mayor's recent announcement, suggest a promising trajectory for Kumba I's development.

Still in the domain of infrastructure, the Kumba II Council also initiated the realisation of an important infrastructural project, commencing the construction of a bridge over the stream at Mappe II, commonly known as Palm City. This was expected to greatly alleviate the challenges faced by the local inhabitants, who have long struggled with the difficulties posed by the stream, especially during the rainy season.

Once completed, the bridge will obviously improve accessibility and safety for the residents of Mappe II, facilitating easier movement of people, goods and services. This project demonstrates the Council's commitment to addressing the needs of its constituents and improving their overall quality of life.

The ongoing road construction on Limumba Street and Ndiba Street in Kumba was also a palpable achievement in the city's infrastructure development. The project was intended to improve the road conditions, enhance traffic flow and boost economic activities in the area.

However, despite the progress made, most of these projects remained incomplete. The ongoing construction works resulted in the obstruction of some roads, causing relative inconveniences to motorists and pedestrians. It is for this reason that the local residents have been appealing to the contractors involved in the project to expedite the completion of the road construction works to help alleviate the current challenges and ensure the road is safe and accessible for all users. While the road constructions on Limumba Street and Ndiba Street are in progress, the incomplete projects caused significant disruptions.

On the other hand, residents and business owners situated in Metta quarters expressed feelings of neglect and frustration regarding the lack of attention given to the road's rehabilitation. Despite the recent upgrading works on other roads in Kumba, they lamented that Metta quarters remained in a deplorable state.

Kossala IV faced a similar situation, a condition rendered more disturbing as a result of the absence of pipe bone water.

In the same vein, residents of Pulletin I and Ekemba II Quarters in Kumba II have expressed feelings of neglect due to the lack of development projects in their area over the past years. Despite this, they have praised the council's laudable actions in garbage disposal.

Those of Ekemba II felt even more frustrated as they witness the neighbouring Ekemba I quarters receiving attention and development from the Council. This contrast between the two neighbourhoods exacerbated the sense of abandonment and marginalization felt by the people of Ekemba II. The recently graded road project completed by the Council in Ekemba I Quarters has become somewhat of a painful reminder of the neglect faced by Ekemba II. Some even complained that their taxes were being used to develop other areas, while their own neighbourhood receives little or no attention.

In the domain of sanitation, the Kumba “keep clean days” initiative were widely welcomed and respected by residents, appreciating the effort to maintain a clean and healthy environment taken by the Kumba City Council. The initiative focused on community engagement, waste management, and sanitation which led to a cleaner and healthier environment, promoting community cohesion. During the 3rd Edition of the operation keep your quarters clean that held from August to December 2024, wheel barrows, spades and rakes were handed to the award winners with Palm City in first position, Mbanda II in second position, Njuki I in third position and Bamboka II in fourth position.

Reacting to these actions, numerous residents have saluted the City Mayor’s involvement in hygiene and sanitation activities. In a commendable display of community spirit, the City Mayor was occasionally observed participating with the

population in cleaning road drainage gutters. Obviously, such an initiative sent a strong message about the importance of community involvement and civic responsibility.

Notwithstanding such efforts in parts of the city, the residents of Kossala I and Makata are known to have experienced severe waste management crisis due to what they decried as neglect by the Council, more especially because HYSACAM failed to collect waste in these areas for long periods, leading to overflowing garbage bins and littered streets. The Council and HYSACAM were blamed for failing to provide adequate waste disposal facilities, resulting in the dumping of waste in unauthorized areas, causing environmental pollution, unpleasant odors, risk of diseases as well as an increase in pests and rodents in these environments.

In the same light, the Kumba Main Market also grappled with waste disposal challenges, posing significant environmental and health concerns. The lack of proper waste disposal facilities was a major challenge for the traders compelled to dispose waste in any available space, leading to an unsanitary and unfriendly environment.

Still pertaining to the follow-up and management of markets, the Barombi, Mabanda and Ntam markets were reportedly plagued by pressing challenges due to a severe shortage of market space. As the markets continue to grow and attract more traders and customers, the need for additional spaces has become increasingly urgent. These markets with the potentials of becoming thriving commercial centres require urgent attention by the Council to address the market space shortages and inadequate facilities. However, to mitigate the problem, Ntam Market should witness an improvement as new stores were under construction to create ample space for traders to display their products and for customers to shop comfortably.

Unlike the other markets in Kumba, the Fiango market stood out as a well-managed and organized market, offering a positive contrast to the challenges faced

by the other markets in the municipality. By prioritizing cleanliness, adequate facilities, effective management and security, the market provided a decent and supportive environment for traders and customers.

However, the Fiango Market Masters' alleged negative attitude towards store owners sparks concern, creating a tense and hostile business environment. Vendors raised concerns over what they perceive as unfair ticketing practices by some Market Masters. According to these vendors, some Market Masters impose multiple tickets on vendors with more goods, which they claim is an unfair and a perpetration of social injustice.

In 2024, the Mayor of Kumba I initiated a special holiday job program, which gave 100 students a chance to obtain practical work experience. This program was warmly welcomed and the students officially began the exercise on July 16, 2024. The community applauded the Mayor's effort, recognizing the positive impact it had on the youths by keeping them gainfully occupied and providing some income which was a welcome relief to some parents.

In another domain, in a commendable effort to promote environmental sustainability, the Kumba I Council partnered with the Program for Sustainable Management of Natural Resources to undertake a significant reforestation initiative. Through this collaboration, they successfully planted 300 trees in the Barombi Mbo Forest Reserve, aiming to restore portions of the reserve damaged by illicit and irresponsible exploitation. Many citizens within this natural reserve welcomed this action as a concrete step towards combating climate change and ensuring the preservation of the natural vegetation.

Similarly, Kumba II council made laudable strides in the domain of animal-health with the establishment of a Zoo Technical Veterinary Centre, portraying the municipality's dedication to ensuring that residents involved in animal breeding or

keeping pets have a professional care unit which in turn protects the population from diseases spread by unvaccinated animals.

RELATIONS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND THE KONYE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

The municipality of Konye has been one of the most severely affected collectivities in Meme as a result of the prevailing unrest in the North-West and South-West Regions, leaving a trail of destruction, displacement, and human suffering in Konye. As one of the most impacted areas, it is no surprise that the community was in dire need of support and development. The council, as a key stakeholder, is expected to play a vital role in addressing the challenges faced by the populace of Konye. Unlike the situation that prevailed last year, positive strides were made by the Konye Council to improve service delivery hence rekindling some degree of hope from the previous years.

In a bid to provide the Council administration with a befitting edifice, FEICOM approved a loan in April 2024 for the construction of a new council building, marking a major milestone for the Konye Council. In the coming years, this building will serve as a suitable space for community interaction in a reassuring environment which should be the pride of the inhabitants of this collectivity.

For the most part of the year, Konye Council Staff worked out of jurisdiction with limited access to Konye, previously functioning from a temporary office in Kumba, due to the ongoing crisis. The staff only occasionally visited Konye for work, and even then, they did so under military guidance. It was obviously challenging to work effectively when they are not based in Konye and their relatively brief visits to Konye made it difficult for them to effectively engage with the community. However, the Mayor made laudable efforts to partially rehabilitate the

Council premises and established a calendar of work at the office premises to enable service users access the Council Administration.

Amidst adversity, Konye Council demonstrated remarkable resilience and commitment to serving the community in 2024. One area where the Council made significant efforts was in the domain of the issuance of Civil Status Registration documents. Most users who lost their Civil Status documents during the crisis were able to obtain copies of them.

As of August 7th, 2024, Konye Council took the lead in the realization of Public Investment Projects in Meme Division for the year 2024. At that time, the Council had achieved an impressive execution rate of 55.27%, securing its position as the top-performing Council in the Division. The successful execution of these Public Investment Projects undoubtedly had a positive impact on the livelihood of Konye's residents, improving infrastructure and enhancing overall well-being.

Notwithstanding this reassuring accomplishment, it is regrettable to observe that two of these Public Investment Projects with a huge impact on the daily conditions of living within their localities were amongst those with a low execution rate of less than 25% at the moment of evaluation. This concerned the rehabilitation of farm to market roads namely Wone-Dipenda-Koba Ibemi and Kombone Bafaw-Lobange-Illeh farm to market roads.

As earlier highlighted, the delay or slow pace of execution was attributed to security concerns in these predominantly rural localities. Although the council administration may be blamed for delays, this is one of the areas wherein the local population could make an important contribution by carrying out sensitisation within their localities to create a suitable atmosphere for the execution of such projects with high benefits for the evacuation of both cash crops and food crops in the production basins as Konye is a fertile area with high production figures.

It was reported that some essential services remained in jeopardy due to jurisdictional constraints. While the council has managed to maintain some services, others such as hygiene and sanitation have been completely abandoned because they cannot be delivered out of jurisdiction.

Service users also raised concerns about Konye Council staff prioritizing paid services over free ones. As it could be imagined, this resulted in poor service delivery to users who expect free services, undermining the Council's mission to serve the community. Some users came to believe that a majority of Council staff was more interested in making money, rather than serving the community.

The relationship between the Konye Council, local traders and businessmen was far from smooth in 2024. Some businessmen took advantage of the situation to evade Council taxes. This included those occupying Council premises for business purposes. In this regard, the Council faced significant financial constraints due to widespread tax evasion, making it challenging for the council to operate effectively and deliver some essential services to the community.

On the other hand, traders decried lack of receipts for market space payments, expressing discontent over the failure of Market Masters to provide them with receipts upon payment for market spaces. To these businessmen, this attitude leaves them feeling cheated and demonstrates a lack of the desire for accountability.

A segment of the population Konye sub division voiced disappointment because the Konye Youth Multi-Purpose Centre suffered neglect and abandonment, calling for prompt action to rehabilitate this infrastructure whose present situation has left the community without a vital space for socialization, recreation and skill-building. While this complaint may sound plausible, it is fair to observe that the present neglect of the building could not have been deliberate but more as a result of the massive displacement of the population to relatively safer localities. It is also on

record that the Council administration took steps to continue training programmes for Konye youths in temporary facilities in the town or in Kumba.

In addition, thereto, the Konye Council has been empowering youth groups through agricultural support. In a bid to promote agricultural development and empower youth groups in Konye, the council recently donated farm tools to youths so as to support their farming activities including farm chemicals, spraying machines, cutlasses and farming boots.

RELATIONS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND THE MBONGE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

Almost similar to like the Konye Municipality, Mbonge has been severely impacted by the ongoing socio-political crisis, leading to significant disruptions to its social, economic and political fabric. However, the Council administration of Mbonge has been making positive efforts to deliver routine Council services to the population, maintaining friendly relations with the citizens. Despite these challenges, economic activities in Mbonge showed resilience and gradually gaining greater impetus.

Agriculture remains a vital sector in Mbonge, with many farmers continuing to cultivate crops such as cocoa, coffee and cassava. Under the encouragement of the Mayor, local markets in Mbonge remained operational, with traders selling essential goods such as food, clothing, and household items. The transportation sector also showed encouraging signs of progressive recovery, with some commercial vehicles and motorbikes operating in the area in spite of the severe degradation of the main road axis which has received no maintenance over the past years.

Free Civil Status document delivery was a beacon of hope for Mbonge residents. The Mbonge Council demonstrated its determination to serving the

community by delivering Civil Status documents free of charge. This initiative brought relief to service users and the people of Mbonge in general. The free delivery of Civil Status documents translated into increased access to essential documents, such as birth certificates, marriage certificates and death certificates. By providing these documents free of charge, the Council demonstrated its readiness to act in consonance with the laws and regulations in force on Civil Status Registration in Cameroon.

As regards the council efforts to derive some revenue from its encouragement of economic activities, most business operators in Mbonge indulged in the evasion of Council taxes, severely impacting the Council's revenue. The widespread tax evasion by business operators resulted in significantly reduced revenue for the Council, limiting its ability to provide various essential services and invest in local development projects.

One domain that had an overall negative impact on the state of relations with the citizens was the poor road networks, including farm-to-market roads with severe implications for the local economy, agricultural productivity and the overall quality of life for residents. The poor state of farm-to-market roads made it difficult for farmers to transport their produce to markets, resulting in significant losses and reduced income as well as restricting access to essential services such as healthcare, education and markets thereby exacerbating poverty and inequality.

In addition to this situation, many inhabitants complained that the Mbonge Council failed to provide adequate street lighting to some parts of the municipality, especially the enclaved areas, thereby leaving residents to navigate dark and potentially hazardous streets, with resultant implications for the safety and well-being of community members. As it is the case in all communities, the absence of

street lights creates an environment conducive to crime, as perpetrators can operate under the cover of darkness.

Another area that undermined positive relations with citizens was the displeasure with the Council over the absence of potable drinking water in the area, a basic necessity that has been lacking for an extended period in several parts of the municipality, causing significant hardship and health concerns for residents. The lack of potable drinking water exposes residents to serious health risks, including waterborne diseases such as cholera and typhoid. The populace of Mbonge expects the Council administration to seek and provide solutions to this preoccupation as part of its activities in the coming year(s).

Notwithstanding, some of the short comings expressed by citizens, the Mbonge council stood out once again in 2024 as one of the local collectivities whose Mayor is permanently resident and present in the municipality, ensuring close interactions with local inhabitants and highly commended for positive actions to support the back-to-school for parents, teachers and learners.

THE STATE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND COLLECTIVITIES OF NDIAN DIVISION.

During the year 2024, the local collectivities of NDIAN Division functioned within an operational context identical to that of the year 2023. As an administrative unit wherein the regular functioning of administrative services, local collectivities and the overall level of socio-economic activities are significantly determined by the volume of activity or frequency of movement of persons and goods along the Kumba-Ekondo Titi- Mundemba-Isangele-Akwa road corridor, the near-total paralysis of this major road axis as a result of the persisting socio-security crisis affecting the Region had a corresponding negative impact on the ability of the municipalities to deliver various services to citizens and Service Users.

For purposes of facilitating the exploitation of this portion of the annual report, the state of relations between the decentralized collectivities of Ndian Division and citizens thereof will be examined under five sub-rubrics as follows: The individual cases Ekondo-Titi and Mundemba as the council administration of the Divisional headquarters, the collectivities of the Bakassi peninsular to the exception of Bamusso which witnessed a relatively more stable atmosphere and the case of Dikome Balue and Toko Councils which suffered from an even more severe level of enclavement.

AS CONCERNS THE MUNDEMBA COUNCIL:

During the period under review, the Mundemba council was observed to have functioned at about sixty (60%) percent of its projected level of activity. This relatively weak functional capacity was essentially attributed to the weak level of collection of earmarked local taxes as a result of the globally timid volume of economic activities. Thus, handicapped by the lack of budgeted resources to accompany and facilitate the delivery of various services, the bulk of the activities of the Mundemba council administration was focused on the delivery of routine services such as the issuance of civil status documents.

In tandem with its activities in the execution of routine missions consisting in the delivery of various registry services to citizens, the Mundemba Council administration also laid emphasis on the payment of salaries to its personnel in a bid to ensure the continuous functioning of municipal services.

In this generally morose atmosphere, the resident population blamed the council administration for paying greater attention to their own benefits such as salaries and the reclassification of personnel to the detriment of the citizens with persistent concerns about poor hygiene and sanitation. This situation they claim was worsened by the council not deploying its personnel for routine inspection but rather

some council staff making sporadic unofficial outings to caution persons considered responsible for unhealthy habits such as directing sewage from their toilets into streams or open areas but without any firm corrective measures to put an end to such practices.

Also faulted for the absence of solar panel street lights in various parts of the town to sustain the timid revival of socio-economic activities, rendering the town almost totally inactive upon night fall. Thus blamed, council administration pointed to action carried out in this domain by the Regional Assembly, indicating that during this period of fragile peace when emphasis is on contributing to the full resumption of socio-economic activities, it views these actions as complementary and would be extended when the council administration is able to raise revenue from various local taxes as the situation improves further.

In spite of these shortcomings, the Mundemba council administration was applauded for ensuring regular functioning and access to citizens, the Mayor residing permanently and seen endeavoring to carry out his duties. This stability in its functioning was further confirmed by the holding of the budgetary and administrative accounts session at the scheduled period as well as the participation of the council in initiatives aimed at encouraging more effective resumption of schools although some citizens decried the non-completion of some earmarked projects, such as in Government Technical High School (GTHS) Mundemba; a project later identified as initiated by the Regional Assembly whose authorities had been alerted about the situation.

AS CONCERNS THE EKONDO-TITI COUNCIL:

Previously one of the council administrations recognized for its determined efforts to sustain it as the most thriving municipality of Ndian Division, the Ekondo-Titi council administration faced significant challenges during the year 2024 as a

result of inaccessibility and persistent pockets of insecurity in several of its peripheral or distant localities. The most direct consequence of this situation was an almost total limitation of the actions of the council administration to the accessible urban center of the municipality.

From this perspective, an assessment of the state of relations between the Ekondo-Titi council and citizens is almost invariably an assessment concerning essentially residents of the accessible urban center. To its credit, the Ekondo-Titi council ensured a relatively uninterrupted provision of routine services to Service Users seeking the establishment and delivery of birth certificates without charging high additional levies.

On the other hand, citizens complained bitterly about being today reduced to relying on wells for drinking water as a result of prolonged neglect and absence of any maintenance works on the previously existing pipe-borne water scheme which, funded by FEICOM under a previous Mayor in 2016 was the pride and joy of inhabitants who had access to good quality water.

In the same light, residents of Ekondo-Titi blamed the council administration for inertia as regards road maintenance initiatives, even with intensive human labour, a situation to which they attributed the incomprehensibly high cost of transport during the most part of the year from Ekondo-Titi center to Lobe at over 1000frs, to the Bekora at 2500frs, distances for which they previously paid barely 500frs and 1000frs respectively in the dry season. They further argued that the deplorable state of the roads within the municipality contributed to an increase in the cost of living through the high prices for consumer goods.

However, in spite of these shortcomings, residents commended the council administration for ensuring the holding of the administrative and stores account

session in its premises; an action viewed as a reassuring sign of the determination of the Mayor and council executive to remain in close interaction with the inhabitants.

CONCERNING BAMUSSO COUNCIL:

Whereas the Bamusso municipality continues to experience serious restrictions on its actions due to relative enclavement with accessibility now almost exclusively by sea as a result of the non-maintenance of the Mbonge-Boa Balondo plains road axis, feedback from citizens indicates that the council administration demonstrated appreciable dynamism during the year 2024.

The achievement which attracted the most favourable reaction from the population was the construction of another phase of the concrete embarkment from Yinda-Bamusso town. The positive reaction of the population to this project was understandable in an area of the Bakassi zone where rapid encroachment of the ocean into the mainland remains a major threat to both human life and property. Indeed, the severe erosive action of the ocean has sometimes resulted in the swallowing-up of both public buildings, private homes as well as enormous material damages, taking along boats and canoes along the ocean shore.

Similarly, the action of the Mayor and council services to provide pipe-born potable water to the residents of Ekombe-Mofako village was hailed as a solution to one of the recurrent preoccupations of the local population who had been complaining of health hazards and hardship inflicted on them as a result of the absence of potable water in the past. In addition to this, the Mayor was able to complete the construction of the new council chambers that will henceforth enable council services function in more befitting premises. This realization constituted a source of pride to residents of Bamusso in an area where infrastructural development remains timid.

Notwithstanding the challenges of accessibility, the Mayor and his collaborators are reported to have maintained a stable presence within the municipality and this proximity ensured close interaction with the local population, listening to their preoccupations and making attempts to address these concerns. This regular presence within the municipality was viewed as reassuring by the population who see the availability of the Head of the Municipal executive as a tangible illustration of concern and readiness to take actions to promote their welfare because he experiences the same realities with inhabitants.

In the midst of these accomplishments, the Bamusso council administration was criticized by some citizens especially residents of BOA Balondo area for not taking action in view of fully opening the road linking their villages to the headquarters of their sub-division, a distance of approximately fifteen kilometers which would also facilitate the evacuation and sale of their farm products.

AS CONCERNS COLLECTIVITIES OF THE BAKASSI PENINSULAR

As it was already highlighted in the 2023 annual report, the collectivities of the Bakassi peninsula comprising Idabato, Isangele, Kombo Abedimo (Akwa) and Kombo Itindi (NGOSSO) constitute a peculiarity in the decentralization landscape of our country, as the resident population is predominantly non-nationals and estimated to be over ninety (90%) percent made up of Nigerians in almost all the collectivities to the exception of Isangele.

In this light, an assessment of the state of relations with citizens is by extension, an evaluation of the relationship between these collectivities and a non-national resident population. Overall, acting in conformity with the policy of peaceful co-existence and living together, the council services of the various local collectivities continued, during the year 2024, to deploy efforts towards maintaining

cordial relations and an atmosphere of apparent social cohesion between the different components of the population.

However, in spite of these efforts, as it could be observed and deduced from the kidnap and detention in captivity in Nigeria territory of the Divisional Officer for IDABATO since 1st October 2024, the seemingly cordial relations were not genuine but rather nurtured by disguised or overt mistrust and mutual suspicions between these inhabitants and their collectivities. Indeed, although this regrettable incident has obvious administrative and security ramifications, it is useful to highlight that one of the overt reasons for the kidnap of the Divisional Officer by pirates was allegedly attributed to him lending the council active assistance in the collection of local taxes from a non-national population that has been known for its hostility or refusal to collaborate with municipal authorities for the voluntary payment of taxes.

Predominantly involved in transborder transportation, fishing and trading in various products including contraband goods from Nigeria, relations between citizens and their collectivities are frequently characterized by tension especially in IDABATO with direct access to the ocean and KOMBO ITINDI (NGOSSO) due to the very nature of these activities, observed to be generally in violation of the regulations in force and simply accommodated under the canopy of administrative tolerance.

Since over 95% of high consumer items are brought in from Nigeria, such products are naturally supposed to be subject to taxation, including local taxes collected from established traders, but these residents remain highly reticent to any positive collaboration for the payment of laid down taxes while benefitting from social facilities such as schools, health centers and even housing units constructed from state funds in some localities such as Shell Creek not very long ago. Similarly,

it was observed that over seventy-five (75%) percent of the products of fishing activities within this area was consistently taken back to neighbouring Nigeria for sale while the resident Cameroonian population faces de facto discrimination, purchasing only what is considered not to have a high commercial value in this neighbouring country.

This generally discourteous state of relations with collectivities is made worse by negative cultural habits or practices such as the construction of very precarious temporary homes, mounted on stick pillars in the mangroves and sea front with no latrines. Under these circumstances, inhabitants use the sea or creeks not only as natural toilets but also to bath, carry out laundry and various household activities. This phenomenon is considered by specialists in the health domain as the main cause for the frequent outbreak and rapid spread of epidemics such as cholera, diarrhea or other water borne diseases. Unfortunately, due to the entrenched nature of such negative cultural habits brought into this part of our national territory from their indigenous communities and upbringing in the maritime zones of their country of origin, these residents are usually also not very receptive to messages of sensitization even from health personnel about the risks to which they expose themselves and the rest of the population by adopting these indecent lifestyles.

Notwithstanding, against the backdrop of these observations, the populations continued to decry the absence of potable water as their most urgent preoccupation, since they are essentially surrounded by the sea whose water can only be rendered drinkable from very professional treatment. In the absence of potable drinking water especially for communities located along the shores of the ocean or large creeks, it was estimated that most of their residents resorted to drinking water fetched from distant small streams that empty into the sea but not considered as a source for healthy drinking water.

In relative distinction from this globally unenviable picture, the council administrations of Kombo Abedimo (AKWA) and Isangele deployed commendable efforts in providing conventional services such as the deliverance of civil status documents although concerns have continued to be raised about the protection and preservation of Cameroonian nationality in these border collectivities. Indeed, during town hall meetings held in various collectivities with identical characteristics, Mayors and their collaborators in charge of the Civil Status Registry raised concerns about establishing birth certificates in cases where only one parent (usually the mother) shows up and further acknowledges the birth to be from out of wedlock with a non-national.

In several instances, whereas the Regional Chief of Center for BUNEC provided adequate explanations and illustrations, the existence of this situation affecting hundreds or more new births to whom birth certificates are eventually delivered each year, subsequently paving the path for the acquisition of the national identity card and nationality constitute a pointer to a complex problem which requires deeper analysis and policy options without which our country may be faced with a highly detrimental perspective in the long term.

AS CONCERNS THE TOKO AND DIKOME BALUE COUNCILS:

As highlighted in the introductory part of this report, the Toko and Dikome Balue councils are being examined together because they present close similarities in terms of their level of functioning and nature of challenges encountered. Observed to have been, during the year 2024, amongst the decentralized local collectivities with the weakest levels of functioning within the South-West Region, the TOKO and DIKOME BALUE council administrations were deemed to have functioned at approximately barely fifty (50%) of their projected potential. In some circles

amongst the local population, the fifty (50%) percent functional level considered as rather optimistic.

From this perspective, it could be no surprise to observe from feedback that these collectivities were unable to provide essential services on a regular basis to citizens even in the urban centers of the municipalities, as a result of sporadic presences of the Mayors and council personnel in the council premises as well as within the territories of these collectivities. For their part, while citizens decry their rather occasional or sporadic presences in their council areas, the council administrations attribute this and their inability to meet the expectations of the population to the rampant insecurity that continued to prevail in many localities of their council areas.

Whereas, insecurity or isolated acts of violence remain major factors that have negatively impacted the functioning of several council administrations thereby jeopardizing their capacity to deliver expected services or amenities in many localities, it is important to indicate that for the cases of Toko and Dikome Balue Councils, this handicap was further compounded by their severe state of enclavement which rendered the respective areas inaccessible for over seven (7) months of the year especially during the long rainy season experienced in these municipalities characterized by dense forest and heavy rainfall.

This challenge of inaccessibility was certainly part of the reason for the sentiments of relief and satisfaction expressed by inhabitants of Difenda Balue following the construction of a bridge over the river Naribe along the Dikome Balue-Kombone Bafaw road connecting the citizens of this locality to MEME Division thereby facilitating the evacuation of farm produce and the movement of persons.

In this regard, for the most part of the period under consideration, the TOKO council administration functioned from its temporary offices in Mundemba where Service Users could approach it to seek routine services while the Dikome Balue council administration carried out most of its operations from Kumba (MEME DIVISION). The population of some localities complained about the neglect of their integrated health centers rendering them totally incapable of attending to the basic health needs of the population.

A segment of the population of Dikome Balue also raised complaints about prolonged durations in establishing court judgements to enable them apply for the establishment of birth certificates pointing out that some files sent to Mundemba in August 2024 had not been treated by November 2024. Although this was not directly in the jurisdiction of the council administration, it served as an illustration to difficulties encountered in the process

PART III

FUNCTIONING AND ACTIVITIES OF THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC INDEPENDENT CONCILIATOR

The functioning and activities of the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator will be examined and presented under four main sub-components as follows:

- I- Field activities carried out in the course of 2024;
- II- The performance of statutory missions assigned to our institution;
- III- Participation in other administrative or official activities;
- IV- Challenges encountered during the accomplishment of our missions.

Before a point-by-point examination or presentation of each of the rubrics outlined here-above, it is important to recognize that since the field activities of the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator were conducted in the same administrative jurisdiction in which the local collectivities operate, the choice of where to conduct each envisaged field activity was determined by security considerations not only for personnel of this institution but also for the envisaged participants. On this account, although the pre-established Action plan of our institution earmarked some sensitization activities in specific municipalities, it was not always possible to fully respect these projected activities.

However, from a more reassuring perspective, the positive evolution observed in the overall security atmosphere within the Region enabled the institution to carry out planned field activities in more municipalities than it was the case during the previous year. Indeed, thanks to the combined assistance of the Representative of the State, Regional Heads of the Defence and Security forces, especially the Commander of the 21st Motorized Infantry Brigade (BRIM) and the local

administrative authorities in the concerned units, our office was able to deploy itself in all six (06) Divisions of the Region. As a result of this laudable collaboration and facilitation, this time by the BIR forces, we held a town hall meeting in Mundemba in December 2024 with frontline community stakeholders of Ndian Division, including Mayors, Traditional and Religious leaders as well as local actors of the social and economic domains.

FIELD ACTIVITIES OF THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC INDEPENDENT CONCILIATOR

As outlined in the introductory paragraphs above, this institution conducted field activities in five of the six administrative Divisions of the Region in 2023, a situation that was improved upon as during the year just ended, with our activities were extended to cover all six divisions upon the holding of the maiden town hall meeting in Mundemba, involving the Mayors of the Division as well as community stakeholders drawn only from Mundemba and Toko Councils as a result of challenges of inaccessibility to ensure the smooth and safe movement of participants from other collectivities within the Division.

Beyond carrying out activities in all Divisions, over 75% of these field activities were carried out in collectivities other than the Divisional headquarters. The choice of the Municipalities in which to hold these activities was determined either by the strategic importance illustrated through bustling economic activities such as for the Idenau, Tiko and Eyumojock Councils or our ardent determination to brave all challenges to meet the population in their localities and listen to their preoccupations in conformity with our leitmotif of inclusiveness. This consideration informed the holding of our town hall meetings in Wabane, Konye, Mundemba and Nguti municipalities.

Overall, it was observed that in a context where the population of several administrative units neither receive radio coverage or television signals, these field exchanges constitute an essential component of efforts deployed for the accomplishment of the missions of this institution, considering that in spite of systematic sensitization activities on various media outlets including community radio stations or high audience FM stations in urban centers, citizens living in the remote areas and deprived of communication signals remain predominantly uninformed both about the existence of the institution and its missions or on how to access and make use of its services.

In this regard, one of the recurrent recommendations or appeals consistently registered during the questions and answers session of various town hall meetings has been the call for the creation of local branch offices of the office of the Public Independent Conciliator in each Municipality or at least at the Divisional headquarters in order to avoid complainants having to travel long distances to Buea- the Regional headquarters to submit their complaints or have their preoccupations attended to.

To this suggestion, we have also patiently explained that as a very young institution, it could not be expected to commence functioning with the immediate creation and functioning of satellite or liaison offices in each municipality and that the creation of local offices could eventually be envisaged based on the volume of complaints currently received and examined from its Head office in Buea.

However, beyond this explanation, we have also systematically sensitized citizens and community stakeholders about the need for them to also exploit and make use of our e-mail address and post office box to submit complaints, make use of our toll number 620770926 on which the office reaches all citizens to listen to their complaints at no cost to them or our website portal, in this era dominated by information and communication technologies. Similarly, it is pertinent to indicate that

conscious of the challenges that could be faced by the elderly or those with little knowledge in the domain of ICT, our institution has an active network of Community-Based Liaison Officers (CLOs) in all thirty-one local collectivities of the Region, enabling us to reach citizens within a relatively short timeframe and accordingly register any eventual complaints or preoccupations.

SYNOPSIS OF MAJOR ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC INDEPENDENT CONCILIATOR (OPIC) WITHIN THE YEAR 2024

DATE	ACTIVITY / VENUE	THEME	PARTICIPANTS / TARGET	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME
28 th February 2024.	Concertation seminar with Local Authorities Venue: Limbe I Council	Office of the Public Independent Conciliator: “Concerting with Frontline Actors of City and Local Councils to ameliorate the Quality of Services Delivery to Users.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S.D.O Fako Division • D.O Limbe I Subdivision • Mayor Limbe City Council • Lord Mayors of the 31 Local Councils of the South-West Region • Service Heads of City Councils • Bureau Heads in charge of Civil Status Registry, Town Planning and Hygiene and Sanitation 	Sensitization of Frontline actors of City and Local Councils on the free-cost nature of Civil Status Documents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayors pledged to ensure the respect of the free-cost nature of the issuance of Civil Status Documents.
21 st March 2024	Town-Hall Meeting with Community Stakeholders of Idenau Municipality Venue: CDC Fire- Burn Hall	Office of the Public Independent Conciliator: “Examining How Community Stakeholders of Idenau Municipality can Impact the Delivery of Quality Services to Users.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D.O West-Coast subdivision • Lord Mayor of Idenau Council • Deputy Mayors of Idenau Council • Councilors of Idenau Municipality • Bureau Heads of Idenau Council • Traditional rulers • Religious authorities • Quarter heads • Market Vendors • Bike riders, and Drivers • Women and Youth groups) 	Sensitization of Council and Community Stakeholders of Idenau Municipality on the missions of OPIC, the Obligations of the Council towards citizens and the rights and responsibilities of users of council services toward the Council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants elated to know about OPIC and its missions. • Both the Council and Community Stakeholders agreed to improve the state of Hygiene and Sanitation of the Municipality and to work in synergy.
July- September 2024	Communication campaign on Proximity Radio (Mount Cameroon FM, Dream FM, CBS and Chariot Radio	Office of the Public Independent Conciliator: “Raising Public Awareness on OPIC’s Missions and Activities.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Public 	Creation of awareness on the existence and missions of OPIC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General public is informed about OPIC’s Existence missions, mandate and activities, their rights as users of Council services and obligations

					towards the Councils.
7th June 2024	Town-Hall Meeting with Community Stakeholders of Nguti Municipality. Venue: Nguti Council Hall	Office of the Public Independent Conciliator: “Working with Community Stakeholders of Nguti Council Area to Enhance Services Delivery to meet the Expectations of Service users.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S.D.O Kupe-Muanenguba Division(represented) • D.O Nguti subdivision • Lord Mayor of Nguti Municipality • Deputy Mayors of Nguti Council • Councilors of Nguti Council • Traditional rulers • Religious authorities • Quarter heads • Economic operators • Market Vendors • Bike riders and Drivers • Women and Youth groups. 	Sensitization of Council workers and Community Stakeholders on the missions of OPIC, the Obligations of the Council towards users/citizens and the rights and responsibilities of the population towards the council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants engaged to create awareness about the existence of OPIC to other members of the community • The Council and Community agreed to work together in synergy geared towards the improvement of services delivery.
1st August 2024	Town-Hall Meeting with Community Stakeholders of Tiko Municipality. Venue: Tiko Council Hall	Office of the Public Independent Conciliator: “Pursuing Engagement with Community Stakeholders of Tiko Municipality to Enhance Services Delivery to Users.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S.D.O Fako Division • D.O Tiko subdivision • Lord Mayor of Tiko Council (Represented) • Deputy Mayors of Tiko Municipality • Councilors of Tiko Municipality • Traditional rulers • Religious authorities • Quarter heads • Economic Operators • Market Vendors • Bike riders and Drivers • Women and Youth groups. 	Sensitization of the Council and Community Stakeholders of Tiko Municipality on the missions of OPIC, the Obligations of the Council towards users/citizens and the rights and responsibilities of the population towards the council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants gained knowledge on the missions of OPIC. • Community Stakeholders delighted to know their rights and responsibilities as users of council services. • Participants committed to create awareness about the existence of OPIC to other members of the community • The Council and all Stakeholders committed to work in synergy to enhance

					service delivery to users and citizens at large.
14th August 2024	Mid-Term Meeting with Community-Based Liaison Officers. Venue: MINEPAT Hall, Buea	“Assessing the impact of various sensitization activities of Community Based Liaison Officers in the 31 Local Councils of the region.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff of the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator • Community Based-Liaison Officers • The Press 	Evaluation of the impact of various sensitization activities by Community-Based Liaison officers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback Provided to serve as indicators on the Relationship between Service Users (Citizens) and Local Collectivities of the Region. • Data generated to serve as input to define OPIC’s activities for 2025.
20-24th August 2024	Knowledge Sharing and Benchmarking Workshop on Complaints Management for staff of the Offices of the Public Independent Conciliator for the North-West and South-West Regions. Venue : Hôtel Prince des Galles, Douala	Offices of the Public Independent Conciliator for the North-West and South-West Region and the Office of the City Ombudsman of Cape Town, South Africa: “Sharing Best Practices on Complaint Management to Enhance Services Delivery to Users.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OPIC staff South-West Region • OPIC staff North-West Region 	Training of staff in Complaint Management Procedures based on the experience of the Office of the City Ombudsman of Cape-Town, South-Africa.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff capacity in Complaint Management procedures improved • Staff’s capacity in Digital complaint management platform enhanced.
27th August 2024	Concertation Seminar with Local Authorities. Venue: Buea Council Hall	Office of the Public Independent Conciliator: “Concerting with Frontline Local Authorities to Assess Recent Progress Attained in Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President of the Regional Assembly • City Mayors of Limbe and Kumba City Councils • Lord Mayors of the 31 Local Councils of the South-West Region 	Evaluation of the state of progress of local governance in the South-West Region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayors promised to improve the Hygiene and Sanitation of their localities. • Mayors pledged to respect the issuance of Civil Status

		Governance and Identify Challenges Encountered.”			Documents free of charge. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayors agreed to dialogue with Contractors in order to clear outstanding debts.
4th-6th September 2024	In-House Seminar on Administrative Writing and the Protection of Information at the Grassroots. Venue: Conference Room, OPIC	Office of the Public Independent Conciliator: “Strengthening Staff Skills in Administrative Writing Techniques and the Protection of Information at the Grassroots.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff of the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator • The Resource Persons 	Capacity Building of staff in administrative writing and on the protection of information at the grassroots.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills of OPIC staff in administrative writing and treatment of grassroots information enhanced. • OPIC’s Administrative writing practices harmonized and formalized.
9th October 2024	Town-Hall Meeting with the Population of Eyumojock Municipality. Venue: Eyumojock Council Hall	Office of the Public Independent Conciliator: “Complimenting Effective Council Services Delivery with Users’ Rights and Obligations for a Harmonious and Sustainable Community within the Eyumojock Municipality.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S.D.O Manyu Division • D.O Eyumojock subdivision • Lord Mayor of Eyumojock Council • Deputy Mayors of Eyumojock Municipality • Councilors and workers of Eyumojock Council • Traditional rulers • Religious authorities • Quarter heads • Economic Operators, Market Vendors, Bike riders and Drivers • Women and Youth groups 	Creation of awareness on OPIC’s missions and the enhancement of collaboration between the Eyumojock Council and its population.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants aware of the missions of OPIC. • Participants committed to sensitize their peers on the existence and missions of OPIC. • Promised improvement of collaboration between Users (Citizens) and the Local Council.
18th October to 2nd November	Administering of Public Awareness Questionnaire to evaluate the State of Relations between Regional and Local	Sample the opinions of major stakeholders on Council and Regional Assembly’s activities in the region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Users of Regional Assembly and Council services • Administrative and Municipal workers • Taxi drivers • Bike riders • Shop owners • Market vendors 	Assessment of the state of relations between Regional and Local Authorities and Citizens/users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data generated to serve as input for the 2024 Annual Report of OPIC.

	Authorities and Citizens of the South-West Region by Community Based Liaison Officer.				
30th October 2024	Town-Hall Meeting with the Population of Konye. Venue: Konye Council Hall	Office of the Public Independent Conciliator: “Seeking an Operational Partnership Between the Konye Municipality and its Users or Citizens to ensure Effective Services Delivery.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D.O of Konye subdivision • Lord Mayor of Konye Council • Deputy Mayors of Konye Municipality • Councilors and workers of Konye Council • Traditional Rulers • Religious authorities • Quarter heads • Economic Operators • Market Vendors • Bike riders and Drivers, • Women and Youth groups 	Sensitization of Council and Community Stakeholders of Konye Municipality on the Missions of OPIC, the Obligations of the Council towards users/citizens and the rights and responsibilities of the population towards the council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants are more aware of the existence and missions of OPIC. • Both parties promised collaboration and support for development in the municipality.
31st October 2024	Town-Hall Meeting with Frontline Socio-Economic Actors of Kumba III Municipality. Venue: Kumba III Council Hall	Office of the Public Independent Conciliator and Kumba III Council: “Putting the Preoccupations and Expectation of Service Users or Citizens at the Center of Local Governance Action”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D.O Kumba III subdivision • Lord Mayor of Kumba III Council • Deputy Mayors of Kumba III Municipality • Councilors and workers of Kumba III Council • Traditional Rulers • Religious authorities • Quarter heads • Economic Operators • Market Vendors • Bike riders and Drivers, • Women and Youth groups 	Sensitization of Council and Community Stakeholders of Kumba III Municipality on OPIC missions and enhancing collaboration between the council and the local population.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants delighted to know about the existence and missions of OPIC. • Participants committed to sensitize their peers in the community on the existence and missions of OPIC. • Mayor promised to publish information concerning the issuance of Civil Status Document on the Noticeboard of the Council. • Mayor promised to

					redeploy sanitary inspectors to the field.
October-December 2024	Communication campaign on Proximity Radio (Mount Cameroon FM, Dream FM, Dash Radio, and Radio Bonakanda).	Office of the Public Independent Conciliator: “Enhancing Public Knowledge of OPIC’s missions and services to citizens.”	General Public	Creating awareness of OPIC’s missions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OPIC visibility enhanced. • The General Public is informed about OPIC’s missions and their rights as users and obligations towards the Council.
28th November 2024	Meeting with Community-Based Liaison Officers. Venue: MINEPAT Hall, Buea	Office of the Public Independent Conciliator “Assessing the Impact of Sensitization Activities of Community-Based Liaison Officers in various municipalities of the South-West Region and Collection of Questionnaires”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff of the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator • Community Based-Liaison Officers • The Press 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of the Impact of various sensitization activities of community-based Liaison officers at the level of various municipalities. • Questionnaires collected will be analyzed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaires analyzed • Data generated to serve as partial input for OPIC’s 2024 annual report.
4th December 2024	Town-Hall Meeting with Community Stakeholders of Ndian Division. Venue: Mundemba Council Hall	Office of the Public Independent Conciliator: “Reinforcing Collaboration with Stakeholders of Ndian Division for the Improvement of Services Delivery to Users.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D.O Mundemba subdivision • Lord Mayors of Ndian Division • Deputy Mayors of Mundemba Council • Councilors and workers of Mundemba and Toko Council • Traditional rulers • Religious authorities • Quarter heads • Economic Operators • Market Vendors • Bike riders and Drivers • Women and Youth groups 	Raising awareness among Ndian Councils and Mundemba and Toko Stakeholders on OPIC’s missions, user’s rights and participation in local governance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants aware of the existence and missions of OPIC • Participants committed to sensitize their peers in the community on the existence and missions of OPIC. • Mayors pledged to enhance collaboration with users (citizens)

10th December 2024	Town-Hall Meeting with Population of Wabane. Venue: Wabane Council Hall	Office of the Public Independent Conciliator and the Wabane Population: “Strengthening Awareness on the Role of the Council and Users Services to Advance Local Governance.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S.D.O Lebialem Division • D.O Wabane subdivision • Lord Mayor of Wabane sub-division • Deputy Mayors of Wabane Council • Councilors and workers of Wabane Council • Traditional rulers • Religious authorities • Quarter heads • Economic Operators • Market Vendors • Bike riders and Drivers, • Women and Youth groups 	Informing and engaging the Wabane Council and its community on OPIC’s missions. The Council’s responsibilities towards its users and citizen participation in the development of the municipality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants elated to know about the existence of OPIC and its missions. • Participants committed to sensitize their peers on the existence and missions of OPIC. • Promised improvement of collaboration between user (citizens) and Local Councils. • Consultation of the population on development planning enhanced.
12th to 14th December 2024	In-House Workshop on Complaint Management Venue: Conference Room, OPIC	Office of the Public Independent Conciliator: “Strengthening staff Complaint management skills for Better Service Delivery.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff of the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator • Resource Persons 	Training of OPIC’s personnel on Complaints management procedures and the introduction of the Complaint management Digital software.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff capacity strengthened in complaints management procedures. • Staff knowledge enhanced in digital complaint management software (To be put in place in 2025.)

ACTIVITIES AND ACTIONS IN THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF OUR MISSIONS

Independently of various field activities presented above, during the year 2024 as in previous years, the accomplishment of the statutory missions assigned to our institution remained primordial consisting in receiving, examining and seeking to attain conciliation through the amicable settlement of disputes brought to the attention of the office.

It is also relevant to indicate that beyond this well-established duty of seeking amicable settlements, the institution equally carried out several advocacy actions not deriving from disputes but from preoccupations expressed by citizens about council administrations failing in the performance of their professional obligations. The single domain from which our institution received and acted upon such preoccupations was in the hygiene and sanitation domain.

Indeed, in probably the best-known advocacy case, following repeated complaints received mostly during town hall interactive meetings but also echoed during other public events not organized by the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator, we organized an advocacy working session with Mayors and their Deputies during which a short documentary of about fifteen minutes was presented to illustrate the disturbing situation (*état des lieux*) of hygiene and sanitation on the ground. Although the documentary was exclusively realized within five out of the seven municipalities of FAKO as an illustration of the larger picture across the Region, it was observed that the Municipal authorities acknowledged this preoccupation as requiring prompt actions and interventions to redress the situation.

As regards our mainstream activities, during the period under consideration, the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator received and examined a total of forty-three (43) complaints, thirty-one (31) of which fell within our mandate and

twelve (12) out of our jurisdiction. Whereas our standard practice remains the reorientation or referral of out of mandate complaints to the competent services or bodies, considering the peculiar circumstances surrounding some of such complaints which arose essentially from family misunderstanding, I undertook to resolve five (5) of the twelve (12). The rest were directed to the competent deconcentrated state services for appropriate attention.

In the same light, I consider it important to highlight that some of the thirty-one (31) regular complaints received and examined by our institution, a few were referred to us by the Representative of the State, H.E. the Governor of the South-West Region. I deem it useful to highlight this because I am convinced that even without holding any public meeting for that purpose, such actions constitute an effective sensitization towards the complainant and population by extension to make use of the services of our institution created and put at their disposal by the Head of State within the framework of the “Special Status”.

In terms of the origin or classification of the complaints examined, it was observed that over seventy-five (75%) percent were brought against council administrations of FAKO and over fifty (50%) percent were submitted by Contractors or Service providers to the concerned Councils. The bone of contention remains, as in previous years, the non-payment or prolonged delay in the payment of bill. Although it could be considered that the reason behind the high number of complaints against council administrations of FAKO Division is our proximity, it is also a strong illustration of the cause of strained relations between some of these collectivities and the local business community.

Out of the thirty-one (31) complaints examined, four were not resolved within the prescribed timeframe and remain pending, essentially due to the refusal of collaboration of the Mayors, some of whom leave the impression that theirs is an

action of deliberate defiance towards our institution as illustrated through their utterances in private as well as public events to the effect that “Go and tell her. I am an elected authority and afraid of no-one”. Out of four unresolved complaints, two concern the TIKO municipality, both from Contractors and two received from the Buea Council, one from a contractor and the other about the arbitrary withdrawal of a building permit.

Alongside these protracted unresolved complaints, it is equally useful to underscore that two out of the unresolved cases examined in 2023 have remained so, in spite of our efforts at pursuing conciliation actions from the point at which these efforts were stalled. Interestingly, in one of the cases, recent information made available to us by the complainant against the Tiko council administration reveals that out of frustration and harassment from his own creditors (the Bank), the concerned further submitted the same complaint to H.E. the Minister of Decentralization and Local Development as well as other authorities yet his plight remains.

In this connection, acting in conformity with the provisions of our organic instrument, more specifically the provisions of Article 14(4) of Decree N° 2020/773 of 24th December 2020, I accordingly drafted a special report to draw the attention of the Representative of the State over the local authority concerned. At the time of writing of this Annual Report, I am not aware of any relevant further action taken to alleviate the pain and suffering of the complainant.

OTHER ACTIVITIES: REGIONAL AND NATIONAL THAT THE PUBLIC INDEPENDENT CONCILIATOR TOOK PART IN

DATE	ACTIVITY	VENUE	CONVENOR
4th -5th January 2024	Budgetary session of the South West Regional Assembly.	Mt Hotel Buea	President of the South West Regional Assembly.
16th January 2024	Launching of the 2024 Budget in the South West Region.	Council Hall Buea	Minister of Finance / The Governor of the South West Region.
8th February 2024	Conference on the theme: “National Development Strategy within the Decentralisation and Local Development Context.”	NASLA Conference Hall	Director General NASLA.
11th February 2024	58 th Edition of the Youth Day Celebration on the theme: “Youth, Import Substitution and Economic Patriotism for Cameroon’s Development.”	Independence Square Buea	H.E. the Governor South West Region.
14th February 2024	Defence of the 2024 draft budget of the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator.	Directorate of Budget Conference Hall MINFI-Yaounde	Minister of Finance / Director General of Budget.
20th February 2024	First Ordinary Session of the South West Regional Assembly for 2024 consecrated to the presentation of the state of the Region.	Mt Hotel Buea	President South West Regional Executive Council.
23rd – 24th February 2024	29 th Edition of the Mt Cameroon Race of Hope on the theme: “The Ascension of Mount Cameroon, a formidable endurance test.”	Molyko Omnisport Stadium Buea	Minister of Youth and Sports / The President of the Cameroon Athletics Federation /

			The Governor South West Region.
18th -19th April 2024	Second Edition of the South West Cultural Year and the Celebration of the International Dance Day (Heritage Dance) on the theme: “Youth, Culture and Import Substitution for Cameroon’s Development.”	Independence Square Buea	Under the Patronage of H.E. the Minister of Arts and Culture.
20th May 2024	52 nd Edition of the National Day Celebration. Theme: “Army and Nation, Together for a United, Peaceful and Prosperous Cameroon.”	Buea Independence Square	H.E. the Governor South West Region.
4th June 2024	Inauguration Ceremony of the Tiko/Mutengene Water Project.	Brasseries Club Mutengene	H.E. the Minister of Decentralisation and Local Development / The German Ambassador to Cameroon / The Governor South West Region.
5th June 2024	Inauguration Ceremony of the Buea Central Market.	Bwitingi-Buea Central Market	H.E. the Minister of Decentralisation and Local Development / The German Consul General to Cameroon.
6th June 2024	Visit of the Site for the construction of the South Regional Assembly Headquarters. Site visit to NASLA to evaluate the construction works.	Site opposite the Regional Delegation of Labour South West Region. NASLA Campus	H.E. the Minister of Decentralisation and Local Development. H.E. The Minister of Decentralisation and Local Development /

			The Governor South West Region.
25th – 28th June 2024	Capacity Building Workshop for Staff of the Offices of the Public Independent Conciliators (OPICs) in Budget Formulation and Management.	Marcsons Hotel Limbe	The Minister of Finance.
9th -11th July 2024	Working visit of the Minister of Decentralisation and Local Development to the South West Region. Purpose: Solemn Opening of the first session of Municipal Police Agents Training Course. Commissioning of Administrative and Educational Buildings.	NASLA Buea	H.E the Minister of Decentralization and Local Development.
19th- 24th August 2024	Three days Benchmarking and Knowledge sharing workshop on Complaint Management.	Hotel Prince De Galles Akwa-Douala	Public Independent Conciliator South West Region / Public Independent Conciliator North West Region / Representative of the City Ombudsman of Cape Town, South Africa.
19th September 2024	Public Projection of the Documentary film: “PAUL BIYA”, A Great Stateman with a Prodigious Destiny.”	Molyko Omnisport Stadium Buea	H.E. the Governor South West Region / President of the South West Regional Assembly.
19th December 2024	Opening Ceremony of the 2024 Regional Agro- Pastoral Show.	Independence Square Buea	H.E. the Governor South West Region.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

From a general perspective, in spite of the relative improvement highlighted as regards the security context of the Region compared to what prevailed in 2023, the most obvious difficulty encountered during the performance of our duties in 2024 was the persistent atmosphere of relative insecurity in some parts of the Region. Whereas it is not necessary to elaborate further on this aspect, the situation made it indispensable to envisage travelling to and from organizing field activities in various municipalities without security escort.

As a direct consequence, in some circumstances, this constraint made impossible or ill-advised for our institution to carry out any field activities such as sensitization or public awareness workshops in such council areas. In the same vein and while reiterating our appreciation for the positive assistance and collaboration received from senior officials of the Defence and Security forces as well as their subordinates during the accomplishment of our duties in some administrative units, this assistance came with obvious inconveniences because in addition to requiring a high number of elements and military hardware, these same elements of the defence and security forces continued to be highly solicited for operational duties in various localities of the Region.

Closely linked to insecurity was the aspect of inaccessibility to several localities or council areas which have become totally enclaved due to the inability of public or local authorities to ensure the execution of road maintenance in such areas for over six (06) years today. The best illustrations of this situation are the councils of NDIAN, over 75% of which were only accessible by maritime transport, the councils of MENJI and WABANE (Lebialem Division), that of MBONGE (MEME) as well as TINTO and AKWAYA in MANYU Division.

Beyond these physical challenges we continue to face even more regrettable difficulties deriving from behaviour and mindset of several elected municipal authorities who are our principal interlocutors and whose activities as well as those of their administrative services have a vital role in ensuring quality services delivery. Some of these local authorities demonstrated an increasing tendency of high reluctance or visible refusal of collaboration in spite of the courteous and conciliatory approach which we have continued to adopt in our attempts to provide amicable solutions to complaints submitted to our institution by Service Users.

As reported in some sections of this report, some notorious cases of systematic refusal to collaborate or glaring “bad faith” were manifested by participating in the examination of complaints up to agreeing on the outcome but subsequently refusing to implement the agreed decision and were accordingly brought to the attention of the direct supervisory authority of the local councils who are the competent Senior Divisional Officers.

Unfortunately, as exemplified by the case of the Mayor of the Tiko Council, some of our elected local authorities who demonstrated disregard for directives even from higher public authorities also consider our reports as a mere formality with no consequences.

Obviously, such demonstrations of arrogance and negative public utterances, if allowed to remain unchecked, will eventually have a negative impact on the way citizens perceive this institution by undermining confidence due to municipal authorities or council administration officials against whom complaints are submitted viewing the institution as ‘a toothless bulldog’ which is helpless in the face of defiance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a direct response to the observation that the performance of most council administrations have remained below expectations in spite of the relative improvement of the security atmosphere, in order to ensure that the populations at the grassroots effectively benefit from the process of decentralisation through visible actions and achievements from their local collectivities, it would be useful for Hierarchy to request the Senior Divisional Officers who are the immediate supervisory authorities of local councils to pay greater attention to the inclusion in the budgets of their respective councils, of concrete actions capable of improving the living conditions of the citizens at the grassroots.

Indeed, a close analysis of the performances and achievements of a majority of local collectivities shows that there is an inexplicable disparity between the general tendency of validating or approving administrative and stores managements accounts whereas the grassroots populations continue to complain about the prolonged neglect of their priority preoccupations in spite of the transfer of significant financial resources to local collectivities within the framework of the transfer of competences.

As regards the deplorable attitudes and tendencies of recalcitrance or refusal to collaborate increasingly demonstrated by some municipal authorities, it is obvious that if no action is taken to put such attitudes in check, this will seriously undermine the efficiency and effectiveness of the Office of the Public Independent Conciliator in the accomplishment of its missions.

The evolution of this regrettable pattern was once again amplified during 2024 by irresponsible declarations by some amongst such recalcitrant local authorities to the effect that as local elected officials belonging to the ruling party, they are under no obligation to cultivate positive collaboration with our institution in view of

ensuring an amicable settlement of complaints since they feel that the Public Independent Conciliator has no prerogatives to either sanction or cause them to be sanctioned.

Consequently, it would be pertinent to envisage making new provisions either within the framework of the General Code of Regional and Local Authorities or the instruments governing the discharge of duties of Public Independent Conciliator for corrective or appropriate administrative or political actions against the concerned municipal authorities, where it is established that refusal to collaborate is a deliberate act of defiance or disrespect of the institution.

In the same light, at a time when several local councils continue to exhibit glaring difficulties in the proper management of garbage, sometimes accompanied by allegations of unpaid bills for the services of the garbage disposal company HYSACAM, it is our humble opinion that there could be an innovative possibility of providing a lasting solution to this disturbing situation through:

- Encouraging councils to set up their own autonomous garbage disposal arrangements under the council's hygiene and sanitation department. However, in order to ensure the availability of adequate resources for this purpose, councils could be authorized through municipal deliberations to institute a symbolic garbage disposal tax, for example CFA 1000 annually per household.

As regards the observation that several councils administrations remained incapable of ensuring a satisfactory level of functioning and could accordingly not have a verifiable impact on improving the living conditions of the citizens in these municipalities as a result of lingering insecurity, it may be important for the Government to review or reexamine the criteria as well as significance of amounts routinely allocated to several of these collectivities

under the transfer of competences and resources. One of the sectors most affected is resources allocated for maintenance of rural roads wherein field evidence shows that most are either never executed or summarily implemented, with such poor quality that within a few years, the population recommence petitions and agitation for the realization of the same projects.

Although such a measure may initially attract criticism, an allocation of resources using the criteria of effective and confirmed realization of previously earmarked and funded projects and proof of the effective functioning of the council administration, with Mayors residing in their municipal territories would certainly, in the medium and long-term, cause present recalcitrant Municipal Executives or future postulants to these positions to do more towards a return to peace and regular functioning of the council administration for the benefit of the local population than remain contented with “ giving impressions of functioning” in order to continue receiving financial resources through various allocations from the state for no corresponding activities to the benefit of the target population.

As concerns repeated appeals from citizens on the need for the setting-up of liaison or satellite offices closer to the population at the grassroots in order to guarantee a more diligent examination of their preoccupations or eventual complaints, whereas this could be envisaged upon the visible return to a more peaceful atmosphere accompanied by the more effective functioning of local collectivities, an appropriate solution could be an official review and increase of the staff strength of OPIC from the present twenty (20) to thirty (30) or forty (40). Such a review or increase in personnel would enable the Public Independent Conciliator to appreciate the pertinence of such a request on the ground and eventually designate liaison collaborators, at the Divisional

level for example, who are employees of the institution and fully committed to its vision.

CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding the constraints, specificities of several collectivities as well as the challenges linked to a persisting atmosphere of insecurity in some localities of our Region, the authorities of the Regional Assembly and several Municipal authorities demonstrated a commendable spirit of resilience during the year 2024 and carried out several beneficial actions and projects that not only projected a positive image of their collectivities but also contributed to the credibility of the state and government of our country.

However, considering that development remains a continuous and permanent quest, there is need for the major actors to show greater commitment to the promotion of the well-being of the citizens whose satisfaction remains the *raison d'être* for the systematic allocation of substantial resources to our local councils each year as well as the justification of government efforts to ensure the implementation and consolidation of the policy of decentralization.

The Public Independent Conciliator
South-West Region