

**Creating a New Spirit of
Commitment for Community
Development Among TACUDAns**

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Being a Talk Presented At the TACUDA General Assembly in Tombel on 16 May 2009

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The Guest of Honour, Prof Elvis Ngolle Ngolle

The Senior Divisional Officer, K/M

The Divisional Officer, Tombel Subdivision,

The Mayor, Tombel Council,

The President-General, TACUDA,

The Chairman, Organising Committee,

My Lords, Spiritual and Temporal,

Distinguished Guests,

My Brothers and Sisters of TACUDA.

I am particularly honoured to be given this opportunity to commune with my kith and kin of TACUDA in this history-making ceremony. History-making because, as I understand, this General Assembly is expected to signal a turning point for TACUDA which since creation on 24 November 1988, to foster peace, unity and progress among all people living within Tombel sub division and beyond, has not quite lived up to its expectations. In fact, some say that the initial euphoria that characterised its early days has since been replaced by long years of rancour and lethargy.

Again, history because, 21 years is a long enough period in the life of an association not only to take stock, reflect on its challenges and possibly chart a new road map, but also for members to renew their pledges to the cause itself. And history because, it is not, as they say, the number of times that an individual or group falters that matters, but its ability to rise up, retake its mantle and face its challenges anew. In today's ceremony,

TACUDA is indeed remaking its history as we reaffirm our collective commitment to TACUDA's cause!

When I was approached by the organisers to present a short, mind-searching talk on community development that would promote the creation of a new spirit of commitment and belonging among TACUDAns, I felt very humbled by the invitation, wondering what really qualified me for the assignment. As I mused on in my humility, it behoved on me that the one single attribute I had was the simple fact that I was from the same cultural extraction, indeed part and parcel of the people who make up TACUDA and therefore if TACUDA needed to be resuscitated, I too could and should join the committed minds and humble hands that are doing so.

As you would agree with me therefore, we are gathered here under one culture for the development of our community, Tombel sub division, and by all intent, the entire Bakossiland. As former President Ahmadou Ahidjo once said, "the culture of a people is the mark of their nobility". It is only noble of all of us that through our cultural heritage we can begin the process of revitalising our commitment towards community development. The series of cultural activities that preceded our gathering here are eloquent testimony to this fact.

But as I pondered over the never-dying ever complex subject of community development, I felt that it was like an old sore that has defied various prescriptions; an old song, an over-beaten path, a mere slogan that has remained unachievable. So I decided to try to put some life in it by choosing to discuss community mobilization, because I strongly believe that if we can successfully mobilise the community, the latter would take

up its destiny on its own volition and overcome the challenges that impede development. In other words, it is through the mobilisation of the community to actively take part in issues that concern them that we can actually get out of underdevelopment.

Community Mobilisation

What does this mean, and what is community mobilisation all about?

This is a process whereby a defined area or group of people, like TACUDA, have transcended their differences to meet on equal terms in order to facilitate a participatory decision-making process for development. In other words, it can be viewed as a process which begins a dialogue among members of the community to determine who, what, and how issues are decided, and also to provide an avenue for everyone to participate in decisions that affect their lives. It is an inclusive process that seeks to get everyone on board for the purpose of improving on ways of managing an area and its peoples in order to create wealth and improve livelihoods.

Concept of Development Associations

But if Community Mobilisation is the key to the development of the community, then what are the structures that can ignite and move forward the process of community mobilisation? This, in my view, is where the concept of Development Associations emanates. Development Associations like TACUDA come from the premise that government, private social services and charities cannot do it alone, or in some extreme cases, that they have failed. The concept of development associations takes strength from the notion that sustainable development gains greater ground when it is self, locally or community-driven. The existence of these associations also takes root from our traditions

and norms – in Bakossi, we say “when you bathe, you must send back the water,” – you need to plough back your gains! To these are added, government’s provision of an enabling environment for these associations to play complementary roles in the pursuit of community development.

It is against this background that a plethora of associations have and continue to spring up, be them at family, village, clan or tribal levels and diverse in age, sex, profession etc – all with the aim of fostering community development in varied areas. In Kupe-Muanenguba three of these associations sprung up in the late 70s and late 80s and stood out more like unifying umbrellas – BACDA, TACUDA and NGUCUDA. Their initiators, their founding fathers conceived these associations as rallying points, platforms for purposeful discussions and debates during which everyone would have a say and get a hearing.

Unfortunately, it soon proved, as we noted earlier, that the early enthusiasm that greeted these lofty ideals could not be sustained. They were bedeviled by all sorts of ills; certain individuals hijacked the associations for personal ends, those in positions of responsibility refused or simply couldn’t play their assigned roles, the development association became the new centres of rivalry and tussle for positions. The geographical entities and the local people for whom the associations were created were alienated while the power base shifted to the cities with Yaounde arrogating to itself leadership or even ownership.

Is it not shameful that our elite, who are supposed to forge oneness among our people, are the ones fanning embers of hate and separation both at their respective stations

and positions as well as back here at home? Is it not disgraceful that more than two years after the last elections, for example, many TACUDAns have refused to bury the hatchet? Any wonder therefore, that neither TACUDA nor its sister BACDA has lived up to expectations?

Strategies and approaches

So the question now is what does TACUDA need to do to rekindle the spirit of oneness, of belonging in order to enlist everyone's commitment to contribute meaningfully to the development of this community?

Firstly, every member of TACUDA must be self-motivated and mobilised to take interest in, and committed to the running and managing of TACUDA affairs. This can be done through sensitization in public meetings, reconnaissance visits, church announcements, canvassing during birth/marriage and death ceremonies and even internet for those living in the cities.

Next, TACUDA must endeavour to organise itself on the basis of geographical realities and areas of natural population concentration. This means that people living in particular areas should be encouraged to come together under TACUDA without necessarily moving from place to place. A contact person could be appointed to be the liaison between the people and the steering committee

Third, clans, age-sets, the elders' council, the women's council, etc should be revitalised and reinvigorated, with their roles broadened to involve participation in development work and related decisions.

All these community organisational structures will then become the locus and focus for community empowerment, skills training, service delivery and input into decision making at the level of TACUDA. The result will be increased participation in and informed decision-making by the TACUDA community in its own development process.

Again, all the important local cultural institutions must be recognised, included and brought on board in all development issues, matters and decisions. They must be trained and consequently given new, functional and continuing roles in the life of this community. TACUDA can do this through recognising small village meetings, youth groups, quarter heads, church groups, family meetings and all other associations that bring people together.

Fifthly, conflicts between centres of traditional power and development committees should be avoided. This means that traditional rulers must be given their due respect on matters concerning tradition, while development committees will work closely with and consult with them on the priority needs of the area. This will go a long way to prevent conflicts of authority.

At the psychological and attitudinal level, the villages and their inhabitants in most cases look condemned to exclusion. Being a "villager" is synonymous with being "primitive", "backward", illiterate, destitute, and so on. Since villagers are predominantly farmers, the derogatory connotations attached to a villager equally apply to a farmer. This institutional and cultural contempt for the village, villager and farmer is so ingrained in the minds of the elite that it has in fact come to be accepted by most villagers themselves

as an "absolute truth". TACUDA must look for ways of negating this trend by according to our villages and villagers their due recognition.

Effective Leadership

But let's not be idealistic here, to think that the aforesaid would automatically enlists the commitment of everyone. I think and very strongly too, that the bulk of the job of getting everyone on board would depend on the leadership of TACUDA. How effective the leadership of TACUDA becomes would determine which way the TACUDA ship would sail. This is because effective leadership is a prerequisite for the development of every community association.

The leadership of TACUDA should be able to provide direction, articulate a vision for Tombel, link the past to the present and inspire the future. If the leadership of TACUDA intends to succeed, then it must be associated with characteristics like creativity, charisma, courage, stamina, persistence and tenacity. They must exercise sound political judgment and present the needs of their constituents in a convincing manner to government and other potential stakeholders.

They should meet regularly with their subjects and carry out person to person contacts.

The time for slander, blackmail, arrogance, disgust, apathy, hate, jealousy, self deceit, side-lining, under-cutting is past. The time to throw over the towel is now. The time to look at each other in the face and make amends in brotherly spirit is now. The fight has been too long and grueling. The actors, it is now clear, are tired. We have lost so

much time and wasted many opportunities. TACUDA and BACDA must step in and save our people and our land

The Way Forward

In this vein therefore:

1. TACUDAns of all strata of our social fabric must be given an opportunity to have a say and feel strongly included in the running of its affairs. The leadership should endeavour to get all sons and daughters of Tombel register as members.
2. TACUDA must cease to be seen as being driven from Yaounde, and having only Yaounde issues as occupants of its caravan. TACUDA is for the development and promotion of Tombel sub division in particular. Anything short of a strong presence at home with full involvement of people back here cannot be taken seriously as it would be suspected as serving an agenda for a selected few.
3. TACUDA and BCDA have a shared ancestry and therefore a common destiny. Working in synergy is not a choice for them. It is as mandatory as it is urgent.
4. Political rivalry, unhealthy competition, backstabbing, gossip, petition writing, clamouring for government positions which is rife within TACUDA as within BACDA must stop now. Politics is not war. It is a game intended to be played for our collective good.
5. TACUDA, has probably created branches all over the country but it should, as a matter of principle take immediate steps to reactivate them. These branches have become rather mere social gatherings without any attachment to the ideals of

TACUDA. Recently, I was in Bamenda and asked a TACUDAN about this meeting and he told me that he was not aware. In fact the Bamenda Branch of TACUDA is supposed to be holding its own “TACUDA” (social meeting) at this moment.

6. Sons and daughters living in the Diaspora should be brought into this association through the creation of branches out of the country. Once these branches are created the members can come together and pool resources to assist in one way or the other.
7. Each and every individual in the organisation should be able to make direct contributions in his own area of expertise (Not necessarily financial) to make the organisation grow in various dimensions. For example a medical doctor should think how he can improve health in the area, the journalist on how to improve communication; a teacher should think about education, clergy should draw projects for spiritual and moral upliftment, farmers should also do something and soon. All these put together will create a significant revolution for our community development
8. Our traditional leaders are in a strong position to mobilise the population both at home and abroad. They should be able to use their traditional authority to mobilise their subjects to join TACUDA and promote its ideals.
9. TACUDA should try to build partnerships with other institutions, not necessarily government departments. This could be development organisations working on issues that concern our area, diplomatic missions and others. For example many sons and daughters of Lebialem have had the opportunity to visit and study in Italy through a firm partnership that LECUDO established with the Catholic Church,

then the Focolare Movement and then the Italian Embassy in Cameroon. In fact, the Fon of Fontem even visited Pope John Paul II in the Vatican under this arrangement and the benefits abound. The results of these partnerships are enormous. Today Italian students visit schools in Fontem and students in Fontem visit Italy. Our sons and daughters working in some of these places can help establish these kind of links.

10. Information on the activities of the organisation should reach all members.

11. It is necessary to carry out a need assessment of the area. If this is done, it will be easy for TACUDA to channel its resources to priority projects

12. TACUDA should organise annual or biennial cultural festivals that will bring all sons and daughters together. This will promote unity and the cultural heritage of the people as well as provide a common platform for debate on development issues.

13. Above all, TACUDAns across the board should fight vehemently all those ills – including witchcraft that scare the elite from regular visits and interaction with people at home.

In conclusion, permit me leave you with these inspiring words of the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968), “we must skillfully and intellectually prepare ourselves to live in an integrated society. Whatever you chose as your life work, do it well. Don’t be content with sheer mediocrity. Do your job so well that nobody could do it better. Do it so well that all the hosts of Heaven and Earth will have to say, ‘here lived a man who did his job as if God Almighty called him at this particular moment in history to do it’. We’ve come a long way, but we’ve still got a long way to go. If you can’t run,

walk. If you can't walk, crawl. But by all means, keep moving". TACUDAns, I urge you to keep moving as a committed whole.

Thank you for your kind attention and God bless us all.

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