

# **Self-Help, a Viable Non-Conventional Urban Public Service Delivery Strategy: Lessons from Cameroon**

**Ambe Njoh**

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Ambe J. Njoh is professor of Government and International Affairs at the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, Florida, USA. He has published several articles and half a dozen books on urban planning and development in Africa. His most recent book, *Planning Power: Town Planning and Social Control in Colonial Africa*, was published by the University College London (UCL) Press, London in 2007. Njoh can be reached by e-mail at [njoh@stpt.usf.edu](mailto:njoh@stpt.usf.edu).

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# **Self-Help, a Viable Non-Conventional Urban Public Service Delivery Strategy: Lessons from Cameroon**

*Ambe Njoh*

## **Introduction**

Although cities with populations in excess of 1 million receive almost all the attention from national and international development authorities, most urban dwellers in developing countries live in cities with populations below 50,000.<sup>1</sup> Neglecting such smaller- and medium-sized cities often means that they receive little or no support from the central government and international sources. Consequently, urban planners and municipal administrators in such cities are increasingly relying on non-conventional public service delivery strategies that depend less on central government and bilateral funds and more on inputs from the citizenry and other non-governmental bodies. The case study discussed in this report shows how, in the face of limited resources from the state and external sources, authorities in two small cities in Cameroon, namely Kumbo and Mutengene, employed self-help and other unorthodox strategies to address the potable water supply needs of their populations.

The report is organized into five sections. Following this introduction, section II provides background information on Kumbo and Mutengene. Section III presents details on the self-help potable water supply projects in each of the cities. Section IV reflects on the principal elements of the two projects in comparative perspective. Finally, section V deduces a few lessons from the two cities' experiences and concludes the report.

## **Background on Mutengene and Kumbo**

Also known as Kimboh, Banso, Nsaw, and Nso, Kumbo is the administrative headquarters of Bui Division in the North West Province, one of Cameroon's ten provinces (see Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> It is 110 km to the north-east of Bamenda, the provincial capital. Kumbo is a hinterland city located at an altitude of 1770 meters above sea level, about seven hours of driving through winding hilly terrain from the Atlantic Ocean. The town occupies a rolling mountainous terrain and constitutes part of the Cameroonian 'Grassfields' reputed for its scantily woody and predominantly grassy terrain. The town boasts two major rivers, Rivers Bui and Rookimbo.

Kumbo is neither an industrial centre nor a major seat of government. However, it has always served an important regional function as a major traditional kingdom, the Nso Kingdom. Within the formal governance structure of Cameroon, the town plays two minor roles as the headquarters of Bui Division. Kumbo Council was established in 1977, succeeding the Nso Area Council, which was part of the South Western Federation, headquartered in Ndop during the colonial era and almost two decades into the post-colonial period. The first inhabitants of Kumbo arrived there in 1820. These individuals originated from surrounding hinterland regions and present-day Northern Nigeria. The first European settlement was not set up in the area until about a century later, with the establishment of the German Sacred Heart Station in 1913.

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1 Satterthwaite, D. (2000)

2 Njoh (2006); Page (2005, 2003); Sendze (2002); Ngah (2000)



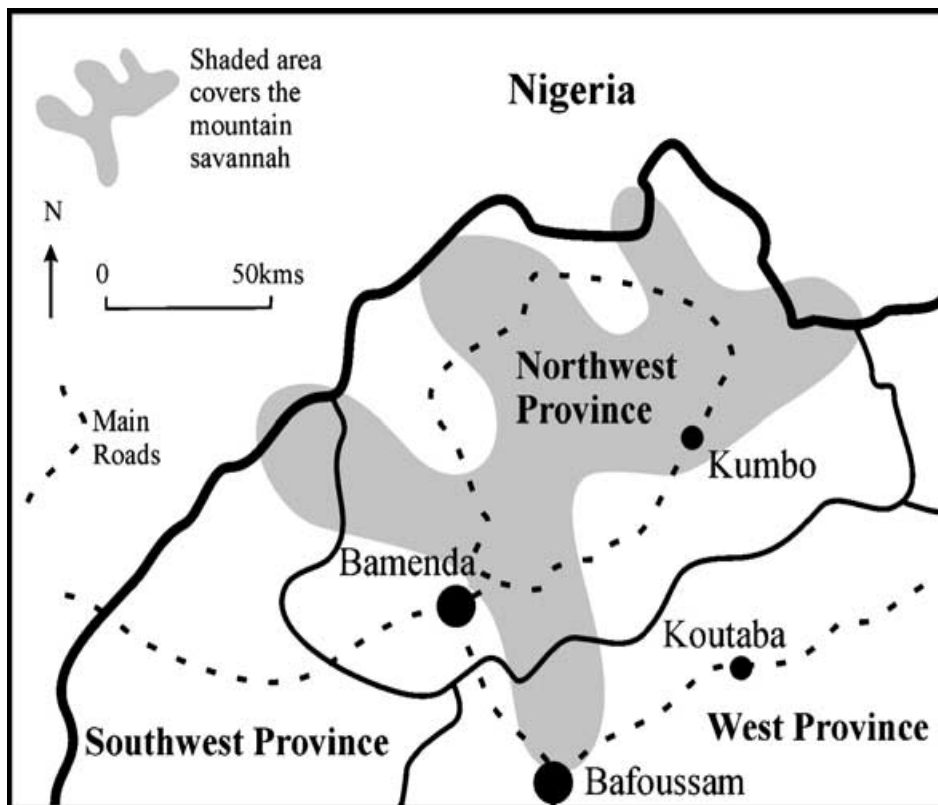
**Figure 1: Map of Cameroon in the Context of Continental Africa**  
*Source: Page (2003)*

The population of Kumbo was 12,533 in 1976 and 33,353 in 1987.<sup>3</sup> Current (2001-2007) population estimates for the town vary from a low of 92,700 to a high of 116,500 for an average of 104,100. This makes Kumbo the second largest town in the North West Province after the provincial capital, Bamenda.<sup>4</sup> Residents of Kumbo are mainly engaged in small-scale farming, handicrafts and petty trading. As a divisional administrative headquarters, the town offers a few employment opportunities in the formal sector, mainly in government, education and healthcare.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Republic of Cameroon (1986); Citypopulation.de (Online)

<sup>4</sup> The population figure is for 2001 as reported by the Kumbo Municipal Council (Online) as well as other internet sources such as travelingluck.com (Online)

<sup>5</sup> Kumbo is home to a major mission hospital and several educational institutions



**Figure 2: Map of Northwest Province, Cameroon Showing Kumbo**  
 Source: Page (2003)

The growing number of people from other regions of Cameroon and elsewhere notwithstanding, Kumbo's population is largely comprised of natives or individuals from proximate areas. Thus, like other towns in hinterland regions of Cameroon, Kumbo's population is relatively more homogeneous than most coastal towns. Kumbo has a well-established traditional administrative system, headed by a paramount chief, that operates concurrently with the formal government structure with a Divisional Officer at its helm.

### **Mutengene**

Mutengene is part of Tiko Sub-Division, itself a component of Fako Division in Cameroon's South West Province (See Figure 3). It is located at the lower reaches of Mt. Cameroon, and only 35 minutes by a well-paved road from Douala, Cameroon's economic capital city. The town is peculiar for its geographic location, which is the intersection of the highways from Douala/Tiko to Limbe, where the nation's oil refinery is located, and from Douala/Tiko to Buea, the first capital of German Cameroon (Kamerun), or to Kumba, the largest town in the South-West Province. Mutengene is 6 km and 16 km respectively from the seaports of Tiko and Limbe on the Atlantic Ocean.

A rapidly growing town, Mutengene's population grew from a modest 7,500 in the 1970s when work on its water project was ongoing to 20,000 in the 1980s when the project was

completed.<sup>6</sup> In 2001, the town's population stood at 47,478.<sup>7</sup> The town is a typical coastal town on account of its population diversity. The tendency of coastal towns in erstwhile colonial countries to have a relatively more diverse population than their hinterland counterparts is a colonial legacy. During the colonial era, these towns played very active roles in the economy as locales for seaports and/or agro-plantations. Consequently, the vibrant economies of these towns acted as a magnet to people from all over the territory in search of jobs. In some cases, people from the hinterlands were conscripted and hauled to the coastal towns by colonial governments or entrepreneurs who were badly in need of labour. Mutengene's status as a major highway junction town has also played an important role in attracting people from other regions of the country as well as neighbouring countries, particularly Nigeria. During its water project implementation phase in the 1970s, the town was comprised of thirteen different major tribal groups.<sup>8</sup> Mutengene residents depend largely on the informal sector, particularly subsistence agriculture and petty trade for economic sustenance. A few local formal sector enterprises, such as the National Police College, local educational and health facilities employ a small number of the residents as well.<sup>9</sup>

## **Tales of the Self-Help Water Supply Projects**

### **Evolution of the Kumbo Water Project**

From the time of its founding in the 1800s until when its piped water project was completed in the 1970s, Kumbo depended on Rivers Bui and Rookimbo to meet its water needs. From 1913 to 1960, colonial authorities operated a small pipe-borne water supply scheme, which served the offices and residences of colonial government officials. The system was very rudimentary as it depended on water from tanks mounted on roof tops that had to be manually filled by 'water-boys.'<sup>10</sup> At the twilight of the colonial era in the late-1950s, the town's water problem had grown exceedingly acute. At the time, the town was steadily expanding but depended on a single remote river and rain during the rainy season (mainly mid-June to mid-September) water sources.

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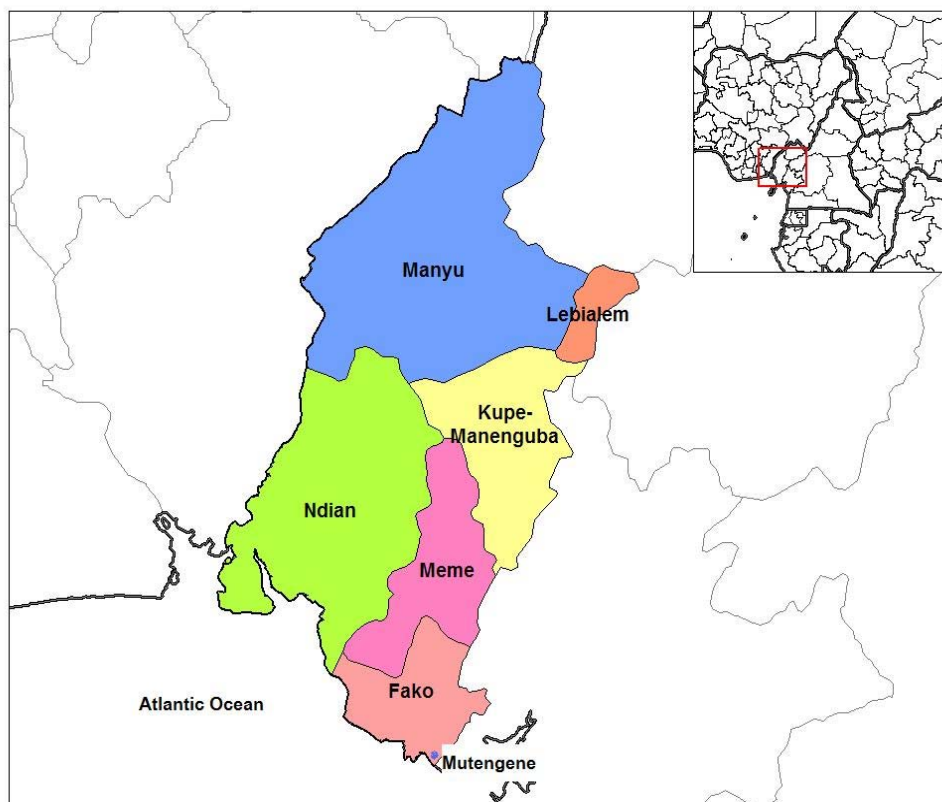
6 Njoh (2002)

7 The current population of Mutengene varies depending on the source. The figure reported here is from Travelingluck.com (Online).

8 Mutengene's population composition has since changed as there has been an influx of persons of other tribal groups.

9 Educational facilities include, primary, secondary grammar and technical schools, and police training centre; and the health centres include 2 mission hospitals (1 Catholic and the other Baptist), 1 private hospital (Atlantic Foundation).

10 As explained in Njoh (2006), the term 'water boy' is a pejorative word used in reference to water porters. Water porters or 'water boys' were common in colonial residential areas, plantations and other areas of formal employment.



**Figure 3: Map of Southwest Province Showing Mutengene**

Based on the orthodox planning model of the colonial authorities, water supply was considered the responsibility of the state. In colonial Cameroon and for about a decade thereafter, the government body in charge of water supply was the Public Works Department (PWD). The problem of resource scarcity dictated that only towns prioritized by the colonial government as economically and administratively important were furnished with pipe-borne water. Kumbo was neither economically significant nor administratively important and therefore did not make the priority list. Consequently, all requests for pipe-borne water from residents of Kumbo were ignored. When colonialism ended in 1960, post-colonial authorities, like their colonial predecessors, continued to ignore hinterland towns like Kumbo. At the same time, the population of the town continued to increase at a remarkable pace.

There are two equally persuasive but contradictory accounts about the origins and evolution of the Kumbo Water project especially with respect to who did what.<sup>11</sup> The first relates to the account of the public, which paints the project as a mainly community initiative with some assistance from the state and other external sources. This version of the project's tale tends to embellish the voluntary labour and financial contributions to the project made by residents of the town and natives of Kumbo and its environs based in other parts of Cameroon and abroad. Based on this account, members of the community have always considered the Kumbo water supply system as belonging to them and have been hostile towards any attempts on the part of

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11 Page (2003)

the state to intrude in the system's operation and management. The second version is that of the state, which considers the project as a government-led initiative that solicited the input of members of the community only on an as-needed basis and which for the most part compensated these individuals for their labour. Thus, the state has always considered the project as belonging to its portfolio of water supply systems for which it charges water rates.

The divergence in these accounts notwithstanding, there is agreement as far as the following points go:

- The water supply project was the brainchild of the people of Kumbo as opposed to a state-initiated activity;
- Well-placed Kumbo natives in the government bureaucratic and political establishments as well as others with international connections used their positions to ensure the project's success;
- Members of the community contributed in-kind (labour) and in-cash (men: 1,500 Frs CFA, and women: 1,000 Frs CFA) towards the project's realization;<sup>12</sup>
- The project involved inputs from many sources, including the Canadian government, the governments of the defunct Federal Republic of Cameroon and the State of West Cameroon.

As a self-help project, the challenge for those responsible for implementing the Kumbo Water Project revolved around how to effectively manage locally available resources and how to enlist the support of external donors with interest in community development in developing countries. Project authorities took advantage of one important attribute of traditional African society, namely the tradition of co-operating on a voluntary basis to complete projects of communal importance.

The huge cost of the project, initially estimated to be two hundred million francs CFA, but actually costing 572 million francs CFA, meant the voluntary input of members of the community alone was woefully insufficient.<sup>13</sup> Project authorities therefore had to turn to other sources. On this score, the community depended largely on the ingenuity of native sons of Kumbo to use their government and international connections to help realize the project. One of the native sons, the late Professor Bernard Fonlon, a personal acquaintance of the Prime Minister of Canada at the time, solicited and secured support for the project from the Canadian Government.<sup>14</sup> The Canadian Government agreed specifically to furnish the pipes that were necessary for completing the project. It also agreed to defray the cost of shipping the pipes to the Seaport in Douala but not beyond. The responsibility for transporting the pipes several hundreds of kilometers from Douala to Kumbo, the project site rested on the shoulders of the project authorities.

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12 The exchange rate for the dollar was 250 Frs CFA to US\$1.00 (1970s).

13 Sendze (2002: II).

14 According to the government account, the Canadian Government Assistance to the project was strictly of a regular bilateral nature. This claim is irreconcilable with the fact that Kumbo was not on the government list of priority towns on account of its hinterland location and the fact that it was not a major administrative centre.



**Table 1: Main Actors and Responsibilities in Kumbo Project**

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Main Role Played</b>
Canadian Government	Supplied the plumbing materials, piping and fittings; Compensation of supervising engineer
State of West Cameroon	Transportation of pipes and other construction materials
Residents of Kumbo	Manual labour supply for trench digging, transportation of portable construction equipment and materials

*Source: Njoh (2006) p. 389*

Table 1 identifies the major participants and their respective roles in the project. Another native son of Kumbo, Omar Sendze, who was at the time an Executive Engineer and Director of PWD, volunteered his time and expertise to serve as the project's consulting engineer. In this capacity and using the power and authority of his position in government, he employed government engineers and surveyors to conduct the project feasibility studies as well as provide the necessary technical assistance. In addition, he arranged with contacts in other sectors to freight the hardware for the project from the Seaport in Douala to the project site. Although Sendze's actions did contribute positively to realizing Kumbo's water project, such actions exemplify the endemic problem of misuse and abuse of power on the part of government functionaries in Africa.

The early-1960s were spent undertaking the feasibility studies, surveying the pipe lines, soliciting funds and conducting other pre-construction tasks. The construction phase of the project began during the dry season (October/November) of 1971. The self-help component of this phase of the project entailed the Paramount Leader, the Fon of Nso, using the powers bestowed upon him by his traditional position to call on all residents of Kumbo to volunteer their services, particularly their labour to ensure completion of the water project. Based on tradition, certain days of the week/month are set aside for communal work. The traditional leader issued an edict dedicating these days to the project. To avoid crowding in the field, the people were organized based on their quarters (i.e., neighbourhoods) of residence and assigned specific tasks to be completed on specific days. Different districts within the town took turns preparing food and supplying drinks for the project workers.

**Table 2 Major Source of Funding for the Kumbo Water Project**

<b>Source</b>	<b>Contribution (Frs CFA)</b>
Canadian Government	420,000,000
Federal Rep of Cameroon	60,000,000
State of West Cameroon	12,000,000
Residents of Kumbo (labour and cash)	80,000,000

*Source: Njoh, 2006, p. 389*

In addition to the in-kind contribution of labour, residents of Kumbo were required to make financial contributions to enable the project's realization. Women were levied the sum of

1,000 Frs CFA while men were charged the sum of 1,500 Frs CFA. Furthermore, the people were required to contribute towards a 1,500,000 Frs fund that was loaned to the Government of West Cameroon in April 1971. This amount was necessary to enable commencement of the project. There is no record that the Government of West Cameroon ever repaid this debt. Thus, this amount can be considered part of the community's in-cash contribution to the project. The project was completed in 1973, by which time the town boasted 74 public standpipes and several residential water services.

### **Citizens and the Water System's Management**

While the community leadership was still contemplating a possible framework for managing the water system, the state had speedily moved to subsume it under the administrative structure of the Public Works Department, which at the time, was a unit of the Ministry of Mines and Power within the defunct Government of the State of West Cameroon in 1974. This system existed and benefited from a lot of improvement as part of PWD for almost a decade, from 1974 to 1983. In 1983, against the wishes of local residents, the system was placed under the jurisdiction of the National Water Corporation, more popularly known by its French acronym, SNEC (*Société Nationale d'Eaux du Cameroun*). The National Water Corporation (SNEC) is a semi-public agency operating under a concession that was awarded in 1967 by the Cameroonian Government, the principal shareholder. Other shareholders in the corporation include the Government Electricity Corporation and the French Government Fund for Development (CFD). Before long, it was alleged that the Water Corporation (SNEC) was incompetent in managing the system.<sup>15</sup> Local residents considered SNEC's water rates exorbitant and the quality of its service woeful. Service interruption, the residents claimed, were commonplace and complete discontinuance of services were familiar in some neighbourhoods.

The residents' discontent with SNEC attained boiling point in the Spring/Summer of 1991 when they took to the streets to protest against the agency's ineptitude. The protest was led by students native to the area on holidays from institutions of higher learning throughout Cameroon and neighbouring countries. The protesters charged that SNEC was exploitative by charging for a service that they had developed for themselves. The response of the central government in the national capital, Yaounde was to dispatch armed military troops to the town with orders to bring the situation under control by all means necessary. The military succeeded in bringing order to Kumbo but not before six of the protesters had been shot to death. However, as evidenced by subsequent developments, the citizens had merely retreated to regroup but not to give up fighting to take over the management and control of the project from SNEC. In October of that same year (1991), the residents' persistence paid off and SNEC relinquished control of the Kumbo Water System to the town's traditional leaders.

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<sup>15</sup> See e.g., Cameroon Tribune (2002).

**Table 3: Rates and Other Disparities in Water System Management between SNEC and KWA**

SNEC	Cost/m <sup>3</sup> or quantity	KWA	Cost/m <sup>3</sup> or quantity
Domestic connection	271	Domestic connection	175
Public Standpipe	337	Public Standpipe	100
Number of domestic connections	Number in 1985: 104	Number of domestic Connections	Number in 1998: 1,920
Number of public taps	Number in 1991: 12	Number of public standpipes	30 + 10 planned (1998)

*Source: Page, 2003, p. 490*

These leaders moved rapidly to create the Kumbo Water Authority (KWA), which is a citizen-based agency that has since been responsible for operating and managing the town's water system. Citizens are directly involved in KWA and the day-to-day management of the water system. In this regard, citizens are divided up into committees with each committee assigned a specific responsibility and operating under a president. The committees are given the right to enact and implement their own laws as they see fit as long as the laws are in alignment with KWA's overall mission. In 2003, there were 68 functioning public water standpipes and an equal number of citizen water committees. Thus, each committee was responsible for one public water standpipe. The agency charges a nominal service maintenance fee ranging from 600 Frs CFA to 25,000 Frs CFA for water services. The authority charged only 100 Frs CFA per cubic metre for public standpipes and 150 Frs CFA and 175 Frs CFA to primary and secondary schools respectively.<sup>16</sup> As Table 3 shows, these rates are a far cry from what SNEC charged the citizens.

As one analyst has observed, KWA's success is a function of the fact that:

*It has a small active committee responsible for day to day operations, and a large democratically elected council which ensures both that the operations are guided by the community and that the water managers have a vehicle through which to communicate with the community. It has been operating successfully in terms of providing an effective service, maintaining the network and balancing the books . . . . Because of their confidence in the management, more and more consumers are paying to have a connection in their home.<sup>17</sup>*

Another indicator of KWA's laudable performance is the fact that the managers have been able not only to 'balance the books' but also to generate profit in a political atmosphere notorious for its culture of corruption. The organization has exceeded all expectations by extending the town's water network and convincing users of public standpipes to pay for the service.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Njoh (2006).

<sup>17</sup> Page (2003: 490)

<sup>18</sup> Page (2003)

## The Mutengene Water Project

Formal conception of the Mutengene Water Project occurred in 1959 by the town's residents who depended on the River Benyor, a swamp off the Mutengene-Tiko/Douala highway and rainwater for their water supply. As the town's population rapidly increased from 5,000 in the 1950s to about 15,000 in the 1960s, its water needs grew more serious. Particularly because the town was increasingly being settled by individuals relocating from areas with pipe-borne water, the demand for water became even greater. This compelled the town's leadership to embark more seriously on a water supply scheme. In February 1967, the authorities formed a water supply project development committee. The *ad hoc* committee comprised five members chosen for their strong connections to the government and international levers of power. In this latter regard, the presence of a European Catholic priest on the committee is worthy of special note. One week following its constitution, and as required by protocol, the committee formally contacted and informed the Divisional Officer of Tiko Sub-Division of the town's water supply plans. This was followed by a formal letter of application for the standard support rendered self-help development schemes by the Department of Community Development (DCD). This letter was part of an elaborate application dossier containing the results of the feasibility study and data attesting to the community's ability and willingness to contribute to the project's realization. One condition of government assistance through the DCD for self-help community development projects such as water supply schemes is that the community requesting the assistance agrees to furnish 15 percent of the total project cost in-cash and in-kind.

Mutengene has always enjoyed a highly active hometown associational life. Africans away from their native lands are well known for their willingness to constitute hometown associations. Thus, during the implementation phase of the Mutengene Water Project in the 1960s and 1970s, there were thirteen major hometown associations, each consisting of persons from the thirteen tribal groups identified on Table 1. These hometown associations served as critical elements in efforts to implement the project.

The associations served as work groups during voluntary communal work drives. Furthermore, the hometown association leaders were assigned the task of collecting levied dues from members of their respective associations and transmitting the dues to the project authorities. Similarly, manual tasks relating to the project, such as the digging of trenches, transporting of sand and gravel for concreting were assigned to hometown association leaders who in turn apportioned the work to members of their respective associations. Residents of Mutengene were required to pay different amounts towards the project's completion depending on their socio-economic status and gender. Table 4 shows the different levies by categories of persons in the town's population in the 1960s.

Another responsibility of the committee was to seek external sources of funding for the project. Efforts along these lines proved successful as can be gleaned from the many external entities, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Swiss Association for Technical Assistance (SATA), and the Netherlands Organization for International Development Cooperation (NOVIB), that contributed towards the project's realization. The project was initially projected to cost 5,600,000 Frs CFA, but was completed at the cost of 21,562,869 Frs CFA in 1978.

**Table 4: Levying Scheme for Mutengene Water Project**

<b>Scheme</b>	<b>Class of resident</b>	<b>Levy (Frs CFA)</b>
<b>Scheme One</b>	Businessmen	500
	Formal sector workers	500
	Informal sector men	400
	Informal sector women	200
<b>Scheme Two</b>	Businessmen	1,000
	Formal sector men	1,000
	Businesswomen	800
	Formal sector women	800
	Informal sector men	600
	Informal sector women	400

*Source: Compiled from project documents*

Two factors account for the disparity between projected and actual project costs, an endemic problem in developing countries as the cases reviewed here suggest. The first is the unreliable nature of the data upon which projections are based. The second is the protracted period between the commencement and completion dates for projects in resource-scarce economies. Residents of Mutengene contributed about 14 percent of the total amount and 100 percent of the manual labour, while the balance came from national and international sources as identified on Table 5.

**Table 5: Cash Contributions to the Mutengene Water Project by Major Actor**

<b>Major Actor</b>	<b>Amount Frs CFA</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
Government of Cameroon	4,900,000	22.9
Dept of Com. Dev. & SATA (in-kind contribution)	4,000,000	18.5
Local Community (Cash from Residents of Mutengene)	2,733,252	12.6
NOVIB Grant	2,716,840	12.5
UNICEF Grant	2,000,000	09.2
SATA Grant	1,770,000	08.2
Tiko Local Government Council	1,700,000	07.8
Local Community (in-kind contribution, town's residents)	1,500,000	06.9
Miscellaneous	235,599	0.09
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,562,869</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source: Compiled from Mutengene Water Project Committee minutes, notes, and from Abebe (1979); Muluh (1981)*

## Post-Project Management

Following the completion of the project, a water system management and maintenance committee was setup in 1980.<sup>19</sup> The committee is comprised of volunteers whose main responsibility is to maintain and ensure the efficient and judicious utilization of the water system. The committee was also assigned the responsibility of penalizing defaulters of relevant rules and regulations, collecting necessary fees, and responding to new water installation and extension requests.

To keep up with the growing cost of maintaining the system while ensuring the system's status as a self-help as opposed to a commercial venture, the committee devised a low-cost fundraising scheme. The scheme partially entails an annual levy of 7,000 Frs CFA (about \$18.00 US) on all local residents. This amount, which should not be misconstrued as a rate, is applied strictly towards a maintenance fund, part of which is used to pay two part-time plumbers and one clerk. These part-time workers are permanently responsible for ensuring the system's functioning. During the past decade, the system has been overburdened as it has not benefited from any upgrading even though the town has grown by leaps and bounds both demographically and spatially. Consequently water pressure became terribly low with total lack of water a frequent occurrence in many parts of the town. To remedy this situation, the water system maintenance team has devised a strategy in which neighbourhoods take turns receiving water. Thus, different parts of town receive water on different days of the week. Initially, residents found this arrangement unsatisfactory. However, over time, they have come to tailor their water needs to the water availability programme.

## Problems and Issues

The Mutengene water project encountered a few hitches during its implementation phase. For instance, there were a few problems of an inter-tribal nature. In this regard, members of the indigenous population, who have always been overshadowed by members of the so-called stranger population, felt that they were frequently marginalized during the project implementation and post-implementation phases. These concerns grew exceedingly acute and led to a temporary halting of the project at some point. The problem was serious enough to prompt members of the stranger population to present their grievances in writing to the Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) for Fako. In a letter dated 15 May 1971, members of the stranger population appealed to the SDO to intervene. It is only after the SDO's intervention that the quagmire was resolved. Other problems that arose but also successfully resolved include infighting among committee members that led to the dissolution in 1970 of the initial project committee that was setup in 1967. However, it must be noted that these problems pale in significance when account is taken of the fact that the project was successfully implemented and has since been successfully managed solely as an autonomous self-help initiative.

## Reflections

The need to supply potable water to the inhabitants of the rapidly growing cities of Africa is becoming more urgent by the day. Conventional models of urban development and especially public infrastructure provisioning are proving incapable as vehicles through which these needs can be effectively addressed in some context. This is especially true in resource-scarce

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<sup>19</sup> If SNEC has never made a meaningful attempt to take over the town's water system, it is mainly because such attempts elsewhere such as Kumbo have not been successful. In a good number of cases, such hostile take-over attempts have led to the corporation's offices being burnt down.

economies, where the revenue generating ability of governments appears to be increasingly waning. This dictates a need for more innovative and unorthodox public service delivery and infrastructure development strategies. Self-help, which entails the involvement of members of project beneficiary communities in the project planning and implementation processes, has been advanced as a potentially viable alternative to conventional schemes. However, it is often not clear what such an alternative entails in practice. This case study has reviewed the experiences of two Cameroonian medium-sized cities, Kumbo and Mutengene, with a view to shedding light on this alternative strategy.

The two projects were and remain remarkably successful. In both cases, citizens have demonstrated their capability in mobilizing resources from national sources, including the government; international sources, including philanthropists and development agencies; and local sources, including local residents. The two cases provide strong evidence attesting to the resourcefulness of ordinary people once they are given the opportunity to participate in the development process. The penchant to exclude the primary beneficiaries of development projects from the development process is a grave weakness of orthodox planning models. Such models view the provisioning of public infrastructure as the exclusive domain of the state.

To be sure, unorthodox strategies such as community self-help are anything but the direct converse of orthodox models, especially in the context of public infrastructure and service delivery. Accordingly, self-help should not be construed as a process involving exclusively members of the project beneficiary communities. Rather, it is a process involving members of such communities taking charge in efforts to identify, prioritize and ferret remedies or solutions to their own problems. The solutions may, and in fact, often require, as demonstrated by the two cases reviewed here, resources that are in the possession of organizations and other entities located outside of the beneficiary communities. In such cases, the self-help ethos demands that project beneficiary communities devise viable strategies for procuring the resources from their typically disparate locations. Within this framework, members of project beneficiary communities do not consider any outside contributor to the realization of a local project as having any ownership rights over the project.

Members of project beneficiary communities do not view entities assisting in the realization of local projects, including their national government, as owners of these projects any more than the government would consider bilateral donors as 'owners' of national projects such as major bridges whose construction these donors occasionally fund. Instead, while highly appreciative of any contribution towards such a project, members of the project beneficiary community view the project as theirs to control and manage. In fact, it is this sense of ownership and commensurate control over communal property that motivates citizens to contribute generously in-cash and in-kind towards the development of such property in the first place. This point apparently eluded Cameroonian government authorities as attested to by their decision to own and operate water projects developed with significant input from citizens. The failure of the state to take such projects for what they are—self-help projects—explains the bloody protests that culminated in the ousting of SNEC from Kumbo in 1991.

Questions about the ability of communities to plan, execute and manage capital improvement projects (CIPs) are without merit in the face of evidence of the genre presented here. It would appear that citizens emerge as better custodians of CIPs than governments and their surrogates in towns and cities in developing countries. In this regard, there is often a general feeling on the part of citizens that it would constitute an embarrassment were they to fail. This is because failure tends to undermine the principle of self-help and the citizens own reputation.

As the two cases discussed here suggest, self-help constitutes a cost-saving strategy, if nothing else. Its cost-saving prowess is a function of its heavy reliance on voluntary labour and other inputs into project development and management. Also, given the problem of bureaucratic and other forms of corruption in developing countries that has already reached astronomical levels, community self-help projects conceived, planned, implemented and managed by the people, have a better chance of winning the hearts and minds of donor agencies and like-minded entities. Seen from this perspective, the language of community participation holds relatively more promise when appealing for development funds from indigenes of the beneficiary communities resident in other parts of the country or abroad.

## **Lessons Learnt**

The two cases reviewed here hold many lessons for planners and others involved in urban management in developing countries in particular and other regions of the world in general. Four of these lessons are worth reiterating here. First, citizens see the state as hoodwinking them when it seeks to monopolize the management and control of projects developed with significant contributions such as cash and labour from them. This sentiment was manifested more in the case of Kumbo, whose residents rallied to seek the ousting of SNEC, the quasi-government agency that had taken over the management of what they saw as rightly theirs in the first place. The residents' success in taking over and successfully managing the project has contributed to putting to rest any doubts about the capability of citizens to execute complex management tasks. Bureaucrats are wont to believe that they monopolize such capabilities. Second, based on the experience of the cases reviewed, the best way to mobilize resources for community self-help projects is to employ existing structures as opposed to attempting to create new ones from scratch. In Kumbo, a town with a traditional paramount leader, there was already a structure based on districts or neighbourhoods within the town. In Mutengene, although there was no hierarchy involving a traditional paramount institution, there were vibrant hometown associations.

Employing these extant institutions for resource mobilization purposes proved immeasurably successful in both cases. Third, a sense of owning a piece of one's community is a principal reason why people participate in efforts to realize local development projects. Therefore, ensuring the participation of the people in controlling and managing the project once it is completed is indisputably an effective strategy for guaranteeing project success. Conversely, depriving people of this sense (of ownership) may result in people taking violent steps to restore the sense or reclaim what they believe is rightfully theirs. An important lesson that can be gleaned from these two cases, but particularly that of Mutengene is that people are prepared to tolerate glitches in the delivery process of any basic service when they are actively involved in the process than when they are not. It is basically for this reason that residents of Mutengene have been tolerant of the water rationing scheme that has been devised to meet the town's water needs. By actively participating in the process, the residents have become fully aware of the fact that the need to ration the water is a function of the town's rapidly growing population and an inadequate water source incapable of satisfying the entire population on a daily basis.

In the end, it is necessary to understand that, self-help projects are likely to be viewed as patently exploitative if they strive to enlist the input of citizens only during the project implementation phase while excluding them from the post-implementation phase, which involves controlling and managing the project.



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