

Citizen Diplomats: An Inside Look Of The U.S. Peace Corps And Educational Development In Mezam Division, North-West Region Of Cameroon, 1962-2017

Aloysius S. Chenwi
*Ph.D. Researcher, Department of History
The University of Yaoundé I*

Abstract: *This paper seeks to investigate and give a critical appraisal of the contributions of the Peace Corps with regards to community development in Mezam Division especially in the domain of education. This is met within a number of objectives; it traces the origin, objectives, evolution and implantation of the Peace Corps in Cameroon, as well as evaluates the activities of the agency in the domain of education. The central question in the study is to assess the extent to which the Peace Corps influenced the educational development of Mezam. Primary and secondary sources were the main sources used. Using the qualitative research method, our findings revealed two basic issues that in as much as the arrival of volunteers in the study area in 1962 opened a new chapter and marked a turning point in the history of the study area's educational development, volunteers were ill trained, ill prepared and ill equipped for services in Mezam and as a result did not completely achieve Goal 1 which calls on the agency to assist developing nations in gaining trained man power. This led to the conclusion that the educational development of Mezam was greatly influenced by the Peace Corps.*

Keywords: *Development, Education, Mezam Division, Peace Corps, Volunteers.*

I. Introduction

At the dawn of independence, most African countries relied on technical, financial, material and institutional support from western nations to chart their part towards development. Cameroon like other newly independent African nations faced a lot of developmental challenges which on its own could not be effectively addressed. The tendency was for these newly independent African countries, to start searching for a medium with which they could develop their economies. This state of affairs provoked them to turn to the West to negotiate in almost every respect to revive their socio-economic wellbeing. The rising interest to support the rural development process of developing nations led to the streaming in of international development agencies and non-governmental organisations. This trend witnessed a dramatic surge in the 1960s, as a rainbow of international donors championed rural development initiatives within the African landscape. In spite of the varying visions and statement of intent, these donors generally converged on the need to alleviate poverty especially for the vulnerable, poor and rural masses.¹In 1960, Cameroon opened bilateral relations with the U.S. and then proceeded with the signing of an agreement in 1961 which made it possible for the Peace Corps to intervene in Cameroon since 1962.²

Independence in Cameroon as in many other African countries, marked an important turning point in the history of education. Africans felt for the first time that they could determine the form of education that suited them. At independence, the control shifted from the direct to the indirect as Africans and Africanist scholars blamed the post-colonial problems on developed nations. Christian missions and colonial governments were blamed for providing education that neither integrated the individual in the society nor enhanced development. This tied with Kwame Nkrumah's view as in the course of trying to reform education in Ghana, blamed the British colonial education for being an ineffective means of integration and especially for being inappropriate in terms of economic development. Critics saw colonial education as the underpinning factor in the slow rate of African development for instance, when Julius Nyerere wanted to reform education in Tanzania, he regarded colonial education as the colonialists' attempts to refuse Africans the type of education that could ensure progress. Colonial education systems in particular were accused for being used by capitalists to exploit

the underdeveloped world and subjugate their peoples while missionaries were accused of being the lackeys of imperialism. Rodney and Fannon largely blamed the former colonial powers for the post-colonial education problems in Africa. They saw the educational systems and policies as well as the intellectual life of independent African states as aspects of neo-colonialism.³

African leaders considered colonial education to have separated the recipients from their society through the teaching of Christian European civilisation. They maintained that where colonial and mission education prepared the individual for life, it was life outside the mainstream of the African society, life as a servant of the colonial government, firm or mission. These criticisms led to reforms known as the Africanisation of education. Some nations changed their school curricula and teaching learning material. In Cameroon these concerns were widespread and there was anxiety, hope and expectations that a unique Cameroon education system would be established from a Cameroonian perspective after the country was a product of 3 changing regimes from the Germans to the French and British.⁴

It is on this basis that this article examines the influence of the Peace Corps in the educational development of the study area. The article is divided in to three parts. The first part traces the origin, objectives, evolution and implantation of the Peace Corps in Cameroon. The second part examines the influence of the Peace Corps in the educational development of Mezam Division. Lastly, the third part evaluates the role of the Peace Corps as an impediment to the educational advancement of Mezam. In order to achieve this, the volunteers were expected to help the people of Mezam improve the quality of their lives. They were to educate and assist the masses with development projects like providing qualified teachers and the maintenance of libraries.

The area under study lies between latitudes 5⁰ 20'' and 6⁰ 15'' N and Longitudes 9⁰ 7'' and 10⁰ 21'' E . It is bounded by Menchum, Boyo and Momo Divisions to the North and East, and in the West and to the South by the West Region.⁵ Administratively, it is divided in to seven sub divisions namely Bamenda 1,2,3, Bafut, Bali, Santa and Tubah. In its structural character and geographic location, Mezam Division has more than synthesised the varied characteristics of the North-West Region.

II. Origin, Evolution and Implantation of the Peace Corps in Cameroon

The birth of the Peace Corps (P.C) could be traced way back to 1960 when J.F. Kennedy in a speech challenged some 10.000 students in the early hours of the morning on 14th October 1960 at the Michigan University to volunteer to serve their country. From his third presidential campaign debate, the candidate had planned on heading straight to bed in a room at the Michigan Union building. But when he noticed that these students braved the cold night air waiting for a chance to glimpse the dynamic candidate, in an impromptu speech, Kennedy presented an idea to a crowd of restless students for an organisation that could rally American youths in service.⁶ Though the speech lasted barely three minutes, his germ of an idea morphed dramatically in to Kennedy's most enduring legacy-the Peace Corps.⁷ He challenged the students by asking them that:

How many of you are willing to spend 10 years in Africa or Latin America or Asia working for the U.S. and working for freedom? How many of you who are going to be doctors are willing to spend your days in Ghana? Technicians or engineers: how many of you are willing to work in the Foreign Service and spend your lives travelling around the world? On your willingness to do that, not merely to serve one or two years in the service, but on your willingness to contribute part of your life to this country I think will depend on the answer whether we as a free society can compete. I think we can, and I think Americans are willing to contribute. But the effort must be far greater than we have made in the past. We come to the University of Michigan-surrounded here by a new generation-to rededicate ourselves to meeting that challenge, for the challenge to each person to help and to work with their fellow man is as old as the world, and yet confronts each one of us in turn.⁸

Many of Africa's leaders who led their countries to independence and their successors recalled fondly their relationship with the young and dynamic American leader, who reached out to engage and help them. For his part, Kennedy's special relationship with the African continent was no afterthought but actually a campaign pledge redeemed.⁹ But it was an afterthought that excited the imagination of thousands of college students. The enthusiasm swelled with the admonition of President Kennedy's inaugural address.¹⁰ His famous words "And so

my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country" was part of one of the famous presidential speeches in American history.¹¹ For the first time in an American presidential election, Africa became a conspicuous issue. During the electoral contest, Kennedy chastised his Republican opponent for neglecting the importance of the emerging continent and vowed, if elected, to engage Africa and its people and before the campaign was over, Kennedy had made 479 references to Africa.¹² When Kennedy became president in 1961, he reinforced relations with the African states. By the end of that year, he opened embassies in most of the newly independent African states, while a steady stream of African Heads of States were also welcomed in Washington D.C. as follows; 11 in 1961, 10 in 1962 and 7 in 1963.¹³

Kennedy would not officially call for a Peace Corps of talented young men and women but his late night challenge is now cited as the programme's founding moment. He planted its seeds in that brief encounter at the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan in Ann Arbor even has a plaque on its campus marking the spot where Kennedy first defined the Peace Corps.¹⁴ The plaque now proclaims that: "Here at 2:00 a.m. on 14th October 1960, J.F. Kennedy first defined the Peace Corps."¹⁵ The definition was vague and tentative as his words, had no national impact.

From his offhand campaign remark, shaped speedily by Sargent Shriver in 1961, Kennedy established the Peace Corps on March 1st 1961, less than two months in to office and the first volunteers headed out in August to Ghana. The organisation since then ascended with remarkable excitement and publicity, attracting the attention of thousands of hopeful young Americans. His idea was to create a Peace Corps-a calling for Americans who were willing to volunteer to live alongside people of developing nations.¹⁶

Founded in 1961, although its historical background dates back to the end of the second world war, the idea of the Peace Corps was not totally new as the U.S. had begun in 1945 to use political, economic and military means to resist the spread of Communist influence. For example, as far back as 1945, Senator J. Williams Fulbright introduced a bill calling for the establishment of a cultural exchange programme based on the argument that the security of the U.S. cannot and should not rest solely on armies or on atomic bombs, no matter how powerful or destructive. The passing of the Fulbright bill led to the institution of the Fulbright Programme by which the development or the study of American subjects especially History and English were encouraged in foreign universities.¹⁷ Other strategies to restrain the spread of Communism were the Truman's Doctrine¹⁸ and the Marshall Plan or Aid.¹⁹

The immediate precursors of the Peace Corps were Richard L. Neuberger of Oregon and Representative Henry Reuss of Wisconsin in the late 1950s. On 5th June 1958, Neuberger in a debate to amend the Mutual Security Act,²⁰ called on the U.S. to help educate the people of the Third World. Congressman Reuss, a Democrat from Wisconsin joined the chorus when in July, he suggested the creation of a Point Four Youth Corps. Early in 1960, Congressman Reuss and Senator Neuberger each introduced a bill for the study of the possibility of establishing a Youth Corps. Kennedy learnt of the Reuss proposal during his 1960 presidential campaign and sensing growing public enthusiasm for the idea decided to add it to his platform.²¹ In June 1960, Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphrey coined and used the term "Peace Corps" for the first time advocating for a programme to send young men to assist the people of the underdeveloped areas of the world to combat poverty, disease, illiteracy and hunger.²²

On 20th January 1961, in his inaugural speech, Kennedy promised aid to poor countries of the world and by this period Kennedy's Peace Corps was one of the most talked-about aspects of his platform. On Wednesday 1st March 1961, President Kennedy issued an Executive Order 10924, establishing a temporal Peace

¹⁸ Truman's Doctrine was a speech made by Harry Truman in March 1947, who was the U.S. president from 1945-53 stating that the U.S. would support free peoples who are resisting subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.

¹⁹ The Marshall Plan announced in June 1947 was an economic extension of the Truman's Doctrine. American Secretary of State George Marshall produced his Economic Recovery Programme which offered economic and financial help wherever it was needed.

²⁰ The Mutual Security Act was signed by President Harry Truman in 1951 and was designed to enhance America's Cold War policy.

Corps as a new agency within the Department of State and Congress later made it official by authorising the organisation's budget.²³ Although Congress did not pass a legislation authorising a permanent Peace Corps until more than six months later, the date of the Executive Order Wednesday 1st March 1961 is considered as the official birthday of the Peace Corps. On the 22nd September 1961, Kennedy signed a congressional legislation creating a permanent Peace Corps.²⁴ This was after the Peace Corps Act sponsored by Senators Humphrey and J.W. Fulbright in the Senate and Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Thomas Morgan and others in the House, was enacted by voice vote in the Senate and by a vote of 288 to 97 in the House.²⁵ The Peace Corps now celebrating more than 55 years of success is surely Kennedy's most enduring legacy.²⁶

2.1 Objectives of the Peace Corps

Over the years, Peace Corps continued promoting peace and friendship by remaining true to its three goals established in 1961 in the Declaration of Purpose of the Peace Corps Act which are;

Help people of interested countries meet their need for trained men and women. Peace Corps volunteers joined the host country, individuals, groups and communities to advance local development outcomes. They engaged in project work and trained local partners in areas such as agriculture, community economic development, education, environment and health. This focus on local capacity building helped to ensure that the work of the Peace Corps volunteers was sustained long after their service was completed.²⁷

Also, the agency was out to help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the people served.²⁸ Volunteers promoted a better understanding of Americans among local people through day-to-day interactions with their host families, counterparts, friends and others. Over the course of their two years of service, volunteers shared America with the world dispelling myths about Americans and developing deep relations with local people.

Finally, the Peace Corps had as objective to help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of the Americans.²⁹ During their two years of service, volunteers learnt the languages, customs and traditions of the people with whom they lived and worked. They brought the world back home by sharing their experience with family, friends and the American public during and after their service. They directly connected Americans with local individuals both independently and through Peace Corps-supported programmes. Sustained interaction between Americans and other people promote mutual understanding and trust, increasing respect and human dignity in world affairs at home and abroad. Additionally, through their overseas experiences, volunteers developed language, intercultural, technical and entrepreneurial skills that prepared them for jobs in the 21st century.

2.2 Evolution of the Peace Corps

Sargent Shriver led the newest organisation in the United States but it had no request from any country, and of course no single Peace Corps volunteer. The trip to solicit invitations for volunteers from the Third World leaders soon started. The pace at which they worked was a clear prove of their determination as in three weeks, they rushed to nine countries among which were, Ghana, Nigeria, Turkey, Pakistan, Burma, Malaysia, Thailand, Phillipines and Singapore. Among the countries, the most important were Ghana and India. India was a hard nut to crack for Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was regarded as the leader of the non-aligned nations. Ghana was an even bigger prize as its leader Kwame Nkrumah regarded himself as a prophet of Pan Africanism and a natural leader of emerging Africa.³⁰ Of course Nkrumah's blessings would encourage invitations from the rest of Africa.

The agency headed by Kennedy's brother-in-law Sargent Shriver chose over 763 volunteers to serve in 13 nations in 1961, with the historic first contingent of 51 volunteers who landed in Accra, Ghana on 30th August 1961 and served for two years.³¹ The 51 volunteers sung the Ghanaian national anthem in the Twi language.³² In September 1961, Tom Livingston from Woodale, Illinois became the first Peace Corps volunteer

when he took up his post at a secondary school in Dodowa-Ghana.³³ The growth and expansion of the Peace Corps was both dramatic and fascinating for any bilateral institution. From a bare 763 volunteers scattered over 13 countries at the end of 1961, the Peace Corps grew in number as some 7,000 volunteers from all walks of life by 1963 were in the field, serving in 44 Third World countries. In 1966, the number increased with more than 15,000 volunteers in 52 countries and by 1980, there were some 80,000 volunteers that had served in Africa, Latin America and Asia. As of 1985, about 6264 volunteers were in the field but following budget cuts in 1989, the number of volunteers declined to 5,100, though subsequent increases in funding led to renewed growth in to the 21st century; and by 2011 there were over 8500 volunteers serving in 77 countries but today more than 165,000 volunteers have served in different sectors in more than 134 countries around the world.³⁴ In many of these countries, the Peace Corps left precociously for diverse reasons ranging from political instability in host countries, suspicion of the Peace Corps of espionage to connection with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Nevertheless, the Peace Corps returned to many of these countries when tempers cooled down.³⁵

In the early 1960s, Peace Corps programmes suffered a major setback as mostly college graduates without any particular skills were recruited and sent overseas. Emphases were on the cross cultural goals of the Peace Corps and the conspicuous ineptitude of the Generalist volunteers in carrying out development programmes requiring specific skills only led to widespread disenchantment with the Peace Corps. Many Third World countries saw the Peace Corps volunteers as just another pair of untrained hands incapable of effecting any change and therefore irrelevant. As the 1960s withered out, the demand for specialist volunteers increased unprecedentedly from 40percent of the total Peace Corps requests in 1969, to 59 percent in 1970, and then to 69.3 percent in 1971. The Peace Corps could hardly meet up with these requests.³⁶

Also, between 1967 and 1970, there was an increasingly turbulent international climate and as such the Peace Corps continued to adapt its policies and programmes to changing global conditions as during this period, there was the growth and development of national consciousness. In Libya and Somalia where military coups took place forced the Peace Corps to leave nine different countries. The Vietnam experience only served to further compound the situation. Not only did the U.S. Congress and American public opinion became increasingly skeptical of foreign aid and all involvement overseas, but Third World countries also began to question the wisdom of involvement with the U.S.³⁷ It shifted to a greater development assistance approach, consistent with the perception of changing needs of the Third World. This meant that many developing countries preferred self-reliant programmes to western humanitarian aid. Such changes opened the way for new initiatives in Peace Corps programming in other areas of human needs.

From this period, the organisation revived its programmes with priority being to meet the basic human needs³⁸ of most communities of developing countries. By the late seventies, the development plans of Third World countries began moving beyond a focus on investments of capital and large infrastructure projects to an understanding of the importance of food production, primary health care, energy, reforestation and non-traditional education as essential elements of the development process.³⁹ Interpreting development in these terms pushed host countries to ask for Peace Corps volunteers who can communicate the necessary skills and expertise at the local level. These requests became part of a larger strategy that reached out to two-thirds of the people who were previously untouched by development plans. In 1978, the statement of purpose in the Peace Corps Act was amended adding the requirement that volunteers help meet the basic needs of the poorest individuals in recipient countries.⁴⁰

The Peace Corps had to do something to safeguard its image abroad, and re-establish its relevance to Third World development. Peace Corps then director, Joseph Blatchford quickly announced the Peace Corps new Directions Mandate. Thus the main thrust of the New Directions Mandate was the recruitment of better qualified and technically skilled volunteers to revamp the Peace Corps developmental role which hitherto was somewhat lazy under the Generalist. The New Directions however, did not last long.⁴¹ The explanation for this failure was that most of the specialists desired by the Peace Corps were often married persons with limited mobility as a result of their family charges. Other hitches included career disruption, insecurity and loss of

³⁸ Basic Human Needs mandate are usually divided into seven categories; food and water, health and nutrition, knowledge and skills, economic development and income, housing, energy and conservation and community services.

income thus it was difficult for the Peace Corps to break with its tradition of recruiting generalist volunteers. By 2000, the agency moved towards a broader and flexible definition of basic human needs englobing English teaching to well and latrine digging, depending on the need of each programme to a particular host country.⁴²

In terms of sex distribution, the scale of volunteers in most countries was in favour of male volunteers. From 1973 however, the trend began changing but never quite led to a balance between male and female volunteers. Also, with respect to age, the average age of most volunteers was 28 with 25 as medium.⁴³ President Jimmy Carter's mother Lilian famously joined the Peace Corps at the age of 68 and roughly 7 percent of all current volunteers are over the age of 50. As of 2016, the Peace Corps oldest active member was Alice Carter, an 87 year old Boston grandmother serving in Morocco.⁴⁴ In 2017, 99 % of volunteers claimed to be single and 85% of volunteers started their service after college graduation.⁴⁵

At the creation of the Peace Corps, its principles stated that the agency served only in those countries where it was invited, and only in programmes the host country had described, so volunteers should feel welcomed upon arrival in the host country.⁴⁶ The invitations were to come from top-ranking government officials of the host countries which were sent to the Peace Corps headquarters in Washington D.C.⁴⁷ The existence of national development initiatives explains the warm welcome the Peace Corps received upon arrival in Cameroon in 1962 where the Peace Corps found fertile ground.

2.3 The Implantation of the Peace Corps in Cameroon

Relations between Cameroon and the U.S. date way back to May 1957 when Robert C. Foulon was appointed Consular Officer to Cameroon and a U.S. Consulate opened on 5th July 1957. On 10th April 1959, this Consulate became the General Consulate with Bolard More as interim Ambassador's Deputy and on 1st January 1960, the U.S. General Consulate was elevated to an embassy upon the formal attainment of independence by the former United Nations Trust Territory under French administration.⁴⁸ This process opened the way for a long, friendly and cooperative official relationship built on the close ties that Americans and Cameroonians enjoyed. After Cameroon's attainment of independence, the U.S. was one of the first states to recognise the sovereignty of the young independent state and established diplomatic relations. His Excellency Leland Barrows was named Ambassador on 20th April 1960 and he presented his letters of credence to President Ahmadou Ahidjo on 9th June 1960. This was going to act as a leeway to the uninterrupted diplomatic links between Cameroon and the U.S.⁴⁹

The work of the U.S. Peace Corps in Cameroon started in 1962 after the Government of Cameroon and that of the U.S. signed an agreement of cooperation and exchanged diplomatic notes. This agreement signed on 26th May 1961 was on economic, technical and related assistance. On the part of Cameroon, the agreement was signed by Charles Okala, the then Minister of External Relations while on the part of the U.S., it was signed by the U.S. Ambassador, Leland Barrows. Although this agreement was only reconfirmed by Presidential Decree N° 62/DF/111 of 3rd March 1961, it actually went in to force on 26th May 1961. In the note of the U.S. Ambassador, he outlined the understandings which if accepted by the Cameroon Government would provide the conditions under which his country would be furnishing foreign aid to Cameroon. It stipulated the conditions and procedures under which U.S. aid was supposed to be channeled to Cameroon.⁵⁰

On the part of the U.S., it will furnish economic, technical and related assistance as may be requested by the Republic of Cameroon. Such assistance shall be furnished in accordance with arrangements agreed upon between the mentioned parties. Cameroon on its part was to contribute its man power, resources and facilities and take appropriate steps to assure the effective use of such assistance. Cameroon was also to evaluate the effectiveness of the assistance furnished and also bear a fair share of the costs.⁵¹ In his reply, the Cameroonian Minister concluded as follows:

In the name of the Government of the Republic of Cameroon, I have the honour to signify my agreement to the provisions contained in the above note. That note and my reply constitute an agreement in good and due form between our two Governments, it being understood that the English text is authentic so far as

the Government of the United States of America is concerned, and the French text authentic so far as the Government of the Republic of Cameroon is concerned.⁵²

The Peace Corps is operating in Cameroon also under another bilateral agreement of 23rd July and 10th September, 1962 which allowed the Peace Corps to enter the country.⁵³ The U.S. Ambassador Charles K. Moffly signed on behalf of the U.S. while Jean Faustin Betayene and Nzo Ekhah Ngaky, Cameroon's Minister of Foreign Affairs and deputy respectively signed for Cameroon.⁵⁴ In his reply, the Cameroonian Minister concluded that:

In the name of the Government of the Federal Republic of Cameroon, I have the honour to give my consent to the provisions contained in the note above. Together with my reply, it constitutes an agreement in due form between our two Governments, its being understood that the English text is the authentic text for the Government of the United States of America and the French text is the authentic text for the Government of the Federal Republic of Cameroon.⁵⁵

The agreement stipulated that the U.S. was to furnish Peace Corps volunteers as may be requested by the government of Cameroon and approved by the former to perform mutually agreed tasks in Cameroon. It also stated that Peace Corps volunteers were to work under the immediate supervision of governmental or private organisations in Cameroon designated by the two governments. The government of Cameroon undertook to accord equitable treatment to the volunteers and their property, afford them full aid and protection. The government of the U.S. on its part was to provide the volunteers with such limited amounts of equipment and supplies needed to enable the volunteers perform their tasks effectively. With respect to duration of volunteer's stay in Cameroon, the agreement only vaguely stated that they were to serve for periods of time though within the Peace Corps, volunteers were expected to serve a normal term of two years.⁵⁶ Finally, the agreement specified that, it would remain in force until ninety days after the date of the written notification from either government to the other of intention to terminate it.

It was on the basis of these agreements signed about 55 years ago that the first group of 21 Peace Corps volunteers called "Cameroon 1" touched ground at the Douala International Airport on 13th September 1962.⁵⁷ These volunteers were mostly education and development volunteers who were among other things to teach Maths/Science and general studies. Requested by the government of the Federal Republic, these volunteers were to serve under the Department of Education of the newly independent federated state of the then West Cameroon. The first volunteer to serve on Cameroon soil was Christopher R. Hill in the present day South-West Region.⁵⁸ From this education programmes in the North-West and South-West, their activities gradually expanded to include other projects such as Community Development in 1963, Cooperative Societies in 1964, Aquaculture in 1969, Health in 1988, Agroforestry in 1991 and Small Size Enterprise Development in 2000.⁵⁹ Most, if not all Peace Corps projects and volunteers were concentrated in West Cameroon between 1962-1971. Even Peace Corps Cameroon office was located in Buea. As cited by Azoh Mbi, a Peace Corps Country Management Plan for 1975 explained this configuration with the following factors.

Before independence, West Cameroon had initiated a development plan that was in effect from 1955-1960. West Cameroon was in a position to easily identify its areas of need for foreign assistance. It was only at the time of independence in 1960 that East Cameroon began formally organising precise economic development planning on medium and long term basis. Secondly, West Cameroon led in regional investments in the sector of agriculture and education from 1966-1971, these being two priority areas in which volunteers could be recruited and trained. Finally, with English as the official language, a lower cost of living and favourable climatic conditions also contributed to the Peace Corps significantly higher presence in West Cameroon.⁶⁰

In most cases especially before USAID withdrew from Cameroon in 1994, it provided the largest financial support for these projects.⁶¹ Thus, the Peace Corps volunteers performed the functions of executing USAID projects on the field. This was after it was mentioned in section V. Article 1 of the Memorandum of Understanding that was reached between USAID and Peace Corps Cameroon in order to execute USAID's

activities in the North-West Cooperative Association.⁶² The activities of the Peace Corps cemented the ties that existed between Cameroon and the U.S. In fact, as early as 1964, the U.S. Congress reiterated that: “Cameroon was one of the most stable of the new African countries. Its economic recovery has been outstanding and has become a staunch supporter of continental cooperation.”⁶³ Similarly in 2009, the U.S. embassy defined relations with Cameroon by stating that: “U.S-Cameroon relations are close, although from time to time, they were affected by concerns over human rights abuses and the pace of economic and political liberalisation.”⁶⁴

During the 1960s, an average of forty volunteers came to Cameroon annually for their two years of service. The numbers peaked in 1967 when there were seventy-five volunteers in the country. In the 1970s, the number of volunteers for Cameroon increased because Cameroonians requested more volunteers and also because Peace Corps services were increased in French speaking Cameroon. In 1978, there were one hundred and forty-five volunteers in the country and that number remained stable at about one hundred and ten annually in the early 1980s when it began to decline. The reason for the decline was because Cameroon had requested fewer volunteers and also because the nation was in need of people with more specialised skills. Previously, Peace Corps recruited largely B.A.⁶⁵ generalists but that trend changed from the 1970s as the receiving nations became more interested in people with specific skills to assist the nation’s development. Since 1962 more than 3300 volunteers served in Cameroon and it is among the first Peace Corps countries in Africa.⁶⁶ Between 1977 and 1979, Cameroon occupied 40th⁶⁷ place but today Cameroon is the 6th largest Peace Corps mission in Africa and in the top 10 in the world. Cameroon is also one of the only 3 nations in Africa (with Togo and Niger) in which volunteers have served uninterruptedly since 1962.⁶⁸

Most of the volunteers who served in Cameroon were college graduates with Bachelor degrees in the sciences and liberal arts. Those with degrees in mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and economics generally worked as teachers. Volunteers in agriculture often had degrees in biology, economics, agriculture, rural geography together with some practical experience and training, while those with degrees in accounting, business administration, and sociology served the cooperative and rural or community development sectors.

III. The U.S. Peace Corps: An Engine of Educational Development in Mezam Division

Developing countries spent about \$80 billion annually on education yet the benefits of this sizable investment were not always fully realised. In spite of the large advances in education that were made throughout the Third World, there are massive numbers of children who do not have access to primary education in many countries. This is largely due to out spacing population growth, financial limitations and the problems of inefficient organisational systems. Consequently, more than 600 million adults today cannot read or perform simple mathematical calculations.⁶⁹ Cameroon like many other African countries understood that education was the gateway to freedom. Cameroonian leaders understood that educational progress had to be in the forefront of economic development. They mastered more than many African countries what Thomas Jefferson meant about education when he said that: “no nation can be both ignorant and free... education can illuminate the darkness and make them free. He added that any society or state that ignores its humblest citizens (education) is failing in its sacred obligations.”⁷⁰ Despite other problems, West Cameroon realised that the problems which needed urgent solutions were road improvement and education thus after independence, West Cameroon made education a key priority in its development plan as in its first five-year plan (1961-1966), education was given the second highest priority following road improvement. Nothing was undertaken with enough conviction and if any, to change the content of education, considering the principal options of the plan.⁷¹ The West Cameroon government expected that the situation in Nigeria where regional governments reformed their educational systems could be practised in Cameroon.

Education was a worthwhile investment and an essential pillar of development since it played a key role in poverty reduction and social development. According to Spicer, education for sustainable development involved changing people’s attitudes and customs. He argued that:

⁶⁵ A large percentage of Volunteers had degrees in liberal arts or their majors did not provide graduates with specific technical skills. They were referred to as B.A. generalists.

Changing people's customs is an even more delicate responsibility than surgery. When a surgeon takes up his instruments, he assumes the responsibility for a human life ...The Administrator of a program of technological change carries a heavier responsibility. Whenever he seeks to alter a people's way of life, he is dealing not with one individual but the wellbeing and happiness of generations of men and women. If his skill is poor and his judgement bad, he can destroy cooperative human relations and create hatred that will affect uncountable number of people. If on the other hand, his skill is equal to the task, the possibility is open for creating cooperation where it did not exist and for bettering the lives of generations.⁷²

Sustainability added a human dimension to development and productivity as increased yields, wealth and gross national product were no longer considered the ultimate measures of sustainable development. The primary goal of sustainable development was not the development of things but people. True sustainable development was measured by the quality of life that individuals and communities possessed and what their children will inherit in time to come because without skilled labour, the projects and the financial aid cannot be properly managed. In the 1970s, development experts recognised that in too many cases, massive transfers of capital to the governments of Third World countries failed to trickle down or ameliorate the condition of people at the lowest socio-economic level.

Ameliorating the living standards of Cameroonians was one of the main objectives of the Peace Corps. In order to achieve this, the volunteers were expected to help Cameroonians improve the quality of their lives. They were to educate and assist the masses with development projects like providing qualified teachers and the maintenance of libraries. Understanding and believing that education provided their children with the opportunities they never had, many parents in Mezam made enormous efforts in order for their children to attend school. The government on the other hand equally made efforts and committed scarce resources to make universal primary education a reality.⁷³ Mass education was a basic necessity for development in Cameroon. This tied with Margaret Read's view who in 1950 as Head of the Colonial Department of the University of London Institute of Education cited the examples of China and Russia by stating that: "...Mass education is one of the secrets of the great strength, achievements and endurance of our two great allies, it has helped to make them a great force in the modern world." She argued that: "education had to be something in which Africans were keen and not something put over them from on top. Literacy first, then agriculture, health and local development, for mass education is about the whole life."⁷⁴ Her view was in line with that of Viner when he stated that: "in many countries, if the masses of the population were literate, healthy and sufficiently fed...all else necessary for rapid economic development would come easily and of itself."⁷⁵

The Peace Corps believed that the people of Mezam needed to be educated for the area to develop and that the literate workers who constituted a catalyst in the changing nature of the area were a by-product of schools. In the process of accomplishing its mission, the goal of the education programme was to offer personal, professional and academic opportunities to students and teachers in Mezam. The volunteers had 3 main objectives which were; to help teachers improve the student-centred instructional techniques, help students improve English language and Science proficiency and to enhance community members' participation in their schools as well as library development.

3.1 Maths /Science Project

The greatest concentration of education volunteers, by almost seven folds is in programmes of assistance to secondary education. About 81 percent of education volunteers were in this domain in Africa.⁷⁶ The Maths/Science teaching was the largest single programming in the education sector. It accounted for over 30 percent of all education volunteers and 12 percent of all Peace Corps volunteers. The size of this programme area reflected acute shortages of qualified Maths and Science teachers in many African countries, a generally low level of student achievement in these subjects in low-income countries, particularly in Africa, and the perceived significance of knowledge in the physical sciences and mathematics to the process of modernisation and development. When the first wave of 763 volunteers was sent overseas in 1961 and 1962, Kennedy defined as their mission in Africa and Latin America to help foreign countries meet their urgent needs for skilled manpower. Among the 763 volunteers, 258 went in to programmes of education assistance, setting a pattern of emphasis on the education sector.⁷⁷

The Maths/Science programme sought to build skills of students and teachers and covered the following subjects, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Computer Science and Mathematics. The programme began in

1962 with 21 volunteers posted in the North-West and South-West Regions.⁷⁸ Though identified as one of the top priorities of Mezam's development plan, education was not without difficulties especially in the early 1960s. Prior to the arrival of the volunteers in the study area, the first difficulty was the inadequate number of schools since most of the educational endeavours were in the hands of missionary bodies. Before then, most parents in Mezam sent their children to secondary schools in Nigeria. By 1962, only three establishments could be called grammar schools preparing for the London General Certificate of Education. These secondary schools that aimed at providing: "...an education which, while complete in itself will fit students to become responsible citizens and provide the groundwork for further training."⁷⁹ Even though they were just three but they represented the brightest jewels of Anglophone education.⁸⁰

In West Cameroon in general and Mezam in particular, mission education was held in high esteem. This may be explained by the fact that most members of government were educated by missions and more importantly because of the inherited tradition from the British. About 85 percent of the primary, secondary and teacher training colleges were owned by the Basel, Roman Catholic and Baptist Missions.⁸¹ It is important to note that since these schools were few compared to the vastness of the study area, student enrolments were low and there was the shortage of qualified teachers. But for the Cameroon College of Arts, Science and Technology (CCAST) Bambili, all the other schools were created and operated by missionary bodies. This posed a serious problem as most parents in Mezam with their meagre incomes could not afford the tuition charged in these mission schools. The result was that most primary school graduates remained without secondary education because of the lack of money.

Also, most of the existing institutions were located in urban areas like Bamenda, Bambui and Bali and a large population of the study area who lived in rural areas characterised by poor educational conditions were neglected. In the same light, West Cameroon was modeled after the British system which consisted of junior primary, senior primary, teacher training, secondary school, technical college and the College of Arts, Science and Technology. It was no easy task to progress from one stage to another.⁸² Besides, the secondary curriculum was guided by the British Overseas School Certificate Boards (University of London and Cambridge Examination Boards). From the curricula, it was clear that but for a few subjects and local languages where there existed, African history was taught from books written from Euro-centric perceptions. The rest of the curricula was foreign to Cameroon students.⁸³ Under the British administration, the idea of a university was never thought of.

Faced with these setbacks, the assistance of volunteers in the improvement of the educational standards of Mezam was inevitable. As early as 19th August 1961, in a note handed to the U.S. Ambassador by A.N. Jua, West Cameroon Minister of Social Services, the government of West Cameroon requested the services of Peace Corps volunteers to assist in teacher training, technical training and secondary education beginning in January 1962. This request was further confirmed by J.N. Foncha and A.N. Jua on 25th August in the U.S. Embassy. In December, A.D. Mengot, the Director of Education in West Cameroon, stressed the need for Peace Corps volunteers in a discussion with the U.S. Peace Corps Representative in Cameroon. Following the preliminary discussion, the government sent an official request to Peace Corps Washington. In January 1962, the Peace Corps informed the Cameroon government of the decision to send fifty-four graduates in fulfillment of the request.⁸⁴ In his visit to Washington in March, Ahidjo reiterated to Kennedy the need of the Peace Corps to assist in the development of Cameroon.

Most education volunteers in Mezam were requested by heads of institutions because of the shortage of teachers. Even though, solicited as an education volunteer, most of them got involved in other cross sectoral activities like agriculture, health and community development especially upon the request of the community. Each community applied for one volunteer in each sector. The information filled on the application form that was sent to the Peace Corps office in Yaoundé included generally; the agency, type of institution, school, class, subject and number of hours and students to be taught. Requested volunteers were to have at least a Bachelor of Arts or Science and a teaching experience especially in the subject to be taught.⁸⁵

After the postings to the various schools, the volunteers worked with their local partners to improve learning conditions in the classrooms. At a time when illiteracy was high in the study area, the volunteers stepped in and contributed enormously to educating the people of Mezam. They provided quality instructions on

subjects like Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Biology and Computer Science. This was aimed at enabling the schools gain competencies in sciences in order to enhance the development of their communities. Volunteers struggled to wipe out the teacher-centred and introduce the student-centred teaching techniques. This improved student's proficiency in science and literacy since learning was in the hands of the students. The Peace Corps volunteers came to Mezam during a critical moment of the division's history. At a time when the study area was experiencing bilingualism, the volunteers ensured that the standards of English were maintained in Mezam. After the British expatriates left the area, English was at the verge of being eliminated in that area but the timely arrival of the volunteers rescued the situation.

The shortage of teachers pushed volunteers to teach subjects they had not prepared in college. They accepted the challenges of teaching several subjects. They planned timetables, started many libraries and social clubs in schools, encouraged a variety of athletic programmes and laid the foundation for the creation of a curriculum more attuned to the needs of Mezam students. Their presence created the urgency of opening new schools, their ambition, courage and friendliness were important qualities emulated by students in Mezam.⁸⁶In the Cameroon College of Arts, Science and Technology (CCAST) Bambili, volunteers played a great role in the growth of the school. Opened in 1962, a preliminary entrance examination preceded an intake of fifty-one Arts students and the pioneers underwent a two-year pre-university programme. Its first principal was Hugh Vernon Jackson who headed eight teachers among whom were six Peace Corps volunteers including J. Kellmberge, William Kane, A. Bridge, Miss Brickham, Miss Laws and Miss Cavas and two Cameroonians who were Sylvester N. Diah and William Mutchia. These six Peace Corps volunteers partnered with their counterparts and the effects of their activities were far reaching during and after their service.⁸⁷The arrival of the volunteers was very timely as the educational endeavours in CCAST especially in the early years were tethering on the brink of collapse. It should be noted that when the college was transferred to Bambui, a science department was introduced and in the 1964-65 session, the first set of science students enrolled. But unfortunately, the newly introduced science programme was handicapped by the lack of qualified teachers. The Cultural Delegate indicated that Dr. Aaron Bokossah who at the time was studying in Britain was to teach Physics, Miss Dorothy Efrange in the U.S. to teach Biology and Dr. Gregory Tanyi in Canada was to teach Chemistry. Things did not work out as planned as Dr. Bokossah's courses were extended, Miss Efrange had not yet graduated and Dr. Tanyi was doing research for the U.S. government.⁸⁸ Hence they could not teach in CCAST at the time they were dearly needed. This created a vacuum in the newly born science department and hampered its progress. However, Peace Corps volunteers intervened and rescued the situation by aiding the department for some time to teach these courses.

William John Kane who also served there between 1962-1964 left behind a very important legacy. Posted among the first volunteers in the study area and also the youngest of the six Peace Corps volunteers, Kane taught Economics and the skills with which he taught the subject transformed the school and gave it the popularity it enjoyed during and after his period of service. He also sponsored and coordinated the school history club. The effects of the volunteer's activities were not only felt in terms of results in the GCE but were also felt in the increase in student enrollment.⁸⁹ By 1963, the number of students in CCAST had increased from 52 in 1962 to 110 students in 1963 and between 1964 to 1966, the student enrollment increased to 390 students. The role of the volunteers in the creation and subsequent consolidation of CCAST Bambili was a landmark in the growth of education in the area.

Another school in which volunteers played a great role in its growth and development was Sacred Heart College Mankon. Bishop Rogan, the Catholic Bishop of the Southern Cameroons and Rev. Father Mathew Nabben, the senior priest of the Roman Catholic Mission Mankon were the architects of the new school that had to be a baby of the Saint Joseph's College Sasse. The entrance examination in to Sacred Heart College Mankon took place in October 1960 and a list of 30 candidates was published in Decemeber 1960.⁹⁰ It became the second grammar school in the area after the Cameroon Protestant College in Bali created in 1949. The school began as an all-boys institution on 21st January 1961 at 6 p.m. with Fr. Thomas Mulligan as the pioneer principal.⁹¹ Rev. Father Thomas Mulligan, John Nzeribe and Alphonse Ndenge were the first teachers to impact knowledge on the secondary school curriculum to the first batch.

When the second batch of 60 students were admitted, there was a serious need of more teachers coupled with the fact that one of the pioneer teachers John Nzeribe who was a Nigerian decided to go back home. Most of the initial teachers were not graduates since it was not easy to find graduates willing to teach in

catholic secondary schools for various reasons. The need for teachers pushed the school to shop far and wide for good qualified teachers. This search extended to Nigeria, Britain and the U.S.⁹² Among some of the early recruits of the school were two Peace Corps volunteers Bob Gurthrie and Bill Murphy posted in 1962 just after the creation of the school. Guthrie and Murphy taught Mathematics, History and French. Additionally, they assisted in the creation of an athletic programme, the construction of a school bank and the improvement of sanitation in the dormitories. When asked if his school needed more volunteers, Father Mulligan stated that: “send us more but make sure they are like Murphy and Guthrie.”⁹³ That spoke volumes of the Peace Corps’ reputation and the thumbprints left by volunteers in the school. Over the years, “Peace Corps teacher or white man teacher” became a familiar term in the classrooms of many schools in Mezam.

In 1963 and 1964, a good number of Peace Corps volunteers were posted to Sacred Heart College. They were Jim Herring, Stuart Kenny, Miss Delie, Barbara D’Estrade and Ray Hubeger. These five volunteers together with the initial two were graduates from American universities thus providing Sacred Heart College with a pool of graduate teachers. The volunteers were to teach Maths, Physics and other science subjects. The students regretted their departure as the volunteers had succeeded in demystifying the Maths and science myth. In September 1965, the pioneer batch graduated with the best results scoring above 60% pass and being at the top of the list of all the colleges that wrote the examination in West Cameroon at the London G.C.E. Ordinary level examinations surpassing all the other secondary schools in the federated state of West Cameroon. This was thanks to the efforts and the good foundation laid by the volunteers in the early and budding years of the school. None of the older schools had up to 40% pass with a pass in English being the measuring rod. The resounding success by the pioneer batch infused in to the younger generations, the culture and spirit of success.⁹⁴ The seed of love and hardwork that the volunteers planted is germinating continuously. Today Maths is the most cherished, most enjoyed and the best subject, for over 90% of Sacred Heart College students.⁹⁵ Volunteer Rupert was also posted in the school to teach Maths, Physics and Chemistry from 1970-1972. He continued with the good work started by his predecessors and greatly influenced the growth of the school.⁹⁶ Other volunteers like Adam Green taught Computer Science in Longla Comprehensive College (L.C.C) Mankon and was also involved in extracurricular activities. At L.C.C, Green taught scheduled classes to computer science teachers and assisted in setting up a new computer laboratory consisting of over 149 networked machines.⁹⁷ Volunteer Malesky taught Physics from 1964-1966 in the Cameroon Protestant College in Bali.⁹⁸

Moreover, some volunteers encouraged the education of the less privileged by providing scholarships and accommodation to those serious and intelligent students in their various schools. An example of this was the case of Mauricelle and Tharwtzman who were posted to teach in Sacred Heart College Mankon between 1965-1969. Mauricelle and Tharwtzman did not only provide knowledge of French and Mathematics, but went as far as making provision for some students to continue their studies. They provided accommodation to some students and paid their school fees. One of the beneficiaries of this gesture was retired colonel Weriwoh T. Godfred who testified that:

I am a product of the Peace Corps. Without the Peace Corps I would not have been what I am today and a million of other people that I have impacted their lives. My educational pursuit would have ended in Form Three in Sacred Heart College Mankon, Bamenda, if the Peace Corps volunteers were not there. Two of them paid my school fees.⁹⁹

In the same light, Volunteer Kathryn Reinsma in 2006, partnered with Care International to pay the school fees of 90 orphans and vulnerable children in Bafut. Volunteers also donated books to intelligent students of their classes.¹⁰⁰ These books which were mostly science textbooks enabled the beneficiaries who could not afford them, understand their courses. Volunteers also formulated a curriculum and designed textbooks more attuned to the needs of Mezam students.

3.2 Curriculum Development

Most volunteers were involved in curriculum development, often as an adjunct to their classroom teaching assignments. Volunteers helped to re-write national textbooks and also organised conferences for teachers at the regional, divisional and sub divisional levels. After five decades of rapid expansion in

enrollments, many schools in Mezam made strives to improve the quality of education. Placement for Peace Corps volunteers in curriculum reform was necessarily selective in terms of demand and supply but like the field of teacher training, this was an area where a few volunteers could produce results that reached large numbers of teachers and students. Improved curricula was a major area of Peace Corps contribution to education in Mezam. Volunteer Gabriel Albin organised in-service training workshops and seminars for teachers. He worked very closely with the regional delegate and inspectors on the direction of the Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) programme at the primary level and the design of trainings and workshops in the Bamenda area.¹⁰¹ Other volunteers like Rose Barah and Ruth Kelly organised in-service training workshops and seminars for the training of teachers in Bamenda. They also developed a Teachers' Handbook on ICT and trained teachers in nursery education and teacher training colleges as well as developed ICT training material for the regional and divisional delegation staff.¹⁰²

3.3 Volunteers and Teacher Training Colleges

Prior to the arrival of the volunteers to Mezam in 1962, most of the teacher training colleges were still experiencing the problem of crucial shortage of trained teachers. The demand was so much higher than supply that the authorities were desperate enough to recruit people with the First School Leaving Certificate Probationary Teachers. The shortage of qualified teachers in most primary schools in Mezam, pushed the missionary bodies to open teacher training colleges which could train and provide the needed teachers for their primary schools.¹⁰³ In Mezam, a large number of volunteers provided in-service workshops and demonstration projects for primary school teachers in Mathematics, Agriculture, General Science, Arts and Craft. Some of the teacher training colleges in which volunteers served in and contributed in their growth and development was the St. Peter's Teacher Training College Bambui opened in 1947 in which volunteer Richard P. Sugg served from 1963-1965. He taught English Language and Literature and also coached basketball. Other volunteers were Mary Prosser Bunton and Beth Essess who served in the Presbyterian Women Teacher Training College from 1965-1967 and 1989-1991 respectively.

3.4 Library Development and Provision of Books

Another key role played by volunteers in the education domain in the study area was the provision of books and maintenance of libraries. These libraries were to improve the learning conditions of students. Through the organisational efforts of the volunteers, books and other school items were donated by American agencies to various secondary schools in Mezam. The books were very important in equipping most of the school libraries which were lacking in material on various subjects. Many volunteers organised libraries and furnished them with books donated by American agencies, family members and friends back home. They donated athletic equipment and advanced sporting materials in the schools, while much of the sporting equipment has disappeared, the Peace Corps has not stopped its policy of assisting with books whenever possible. Books marked "donated by Peace Corps" are still available in many of these college libraries. Volunteer Ashley Elizabeth served at Our Lady of Lourdes College Mankon in the 2015/2016 academic year. After her posting to the school, she was to teach English but when she noticed that there were enough English teachers in the school, the school asked her to work in the library which she willingly accepted. She worked as a librarian and among some of the things she did was the registering of books, signing of books out to students and labelling of shelves. She also worked with the Arts Club for one year because of the socio-political crisis.¹⁰⁴

3.5 University Education

The efforts of volunteers in improving the educational standards of Mezam were not only limited to the secondary and teacher training colleges but were also extended to the higher or University levels. Volunteers qualified for university placement were not abundant among applicants but there was continued selective demand for Peace Corps university teachers in Mezam and a small supply of talented volunteers who strongly

¹⁰³ Teacher Trainees were recruited among First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) holders, after two years of fieldwork practice, they were put in the category of uncertified teachers. The best uncertified teachers were subsequently selected to pursue one year studies in the Elementary Training Centre where they could obtain the teacher' elementary certificate. After one more year of practice, holders of this first certificate could be reselected to pursue a two years course in Teachers Elementary Higher School where they could obtain the Teachers' Higher Elementary Certificate. After a period of one or two years teaching, the best of the Grade III were selected for the two years of Higher Elementary Course with the successful graduates qualified to teach levels up to standards five and six.

preferred these assignments. Besides, recruiting qualified volunteers and the adequate supply of qualified nationals were the most serious problems in this domain. Peace Corps programmes in university education were declining though there was a strong tradition of programme and placement in university education. This was because over the years most universities in the division increased their capacity to staff faculties with either nationals or qualified Africans from other countries. However, most young and developing universities in the study area still requested volunteers.

Cheryl and Albert Onega were some of the volunteers who created a positive impact in the development of education in Mezam in the Regional College of Agriculture in Bambili. Cheryl and Albert during their service period taught business systems and farming practices. Other universities quickly followed on the heels of the Regional College of Agriculture to request for volunteers. This was the case of the Bamenda University of Science and Technology which because of the shortage of qualified teachers requested the services of volunteers to give a helping hand to the school. As a result of this request, the Peace Corps reacted positively by posting Peter Tarkowsky. He served in BUST from June 2010-August 2012. During this period, he lectured a course on computer networking. Aside lecturing, he advised the school on the design of a new computer laboratory for students through making professional recommendations for the type and number of computers, networking equipment required, and calculating the electrical requirements for the new laboratory. With the aid of the students, Peter installed the laboratory and functional computer network throughout the school.¹⁰⁵

Ehrner Jacqueline, another education volunteer taught micro-teaching and methodology in the chemistry department of the Higher Teacher Training College Bambili, University of Bamenda between 2011-2013. She demonstrated to the chemistry student teachers how to present lessons in the “where there is no chemistry laboratory publication”.¹⁰⁶ The fruits of her labour were very visible as student teachers who were taught by Ehrner over the years gave positive feedback of her work and the reputation she left in the school.

IV. The Peace Corps: Drawback to Educational Development in Mezam Division

Despite the above successes, most volunteers were ill trained, ill prepared and ill equipped for services in Mezam. As Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman points out, many were motivated to enlist in the Peace Corps by a spirit of adventure that complemented their individual goals and objectives. Indeed, the young people eagerly wanted to leave a tangible legacy in the communities where they worked. When their personal ideals clashed with the complex realities they encountered, this impatience led to a high degree of frustration.¹⁰⁷ Training and selection methods suffered from many shortcomings. Programming, planning and organising volunteer assignments and projects in Mezam had some drawbacks especially in the days when large numbers of unskilled college graduates were sent to Cameroon. John Summer of the Overseas Development Council told Congress in 1977 that: “robo sure, there have been many failures, many disillusioned and ineffective volunteers, and a number of strained relations brought about in specific instances.”¹⁰⁸ The Peace Corps while adept at recruiting generalists and training them sufficiently to carry out useful assignments, had historically not prioritised attracting highly skilled professionals. This approach was for long a source of debate. In the 1960s, Peace Corps programmes suffered a major setback as mostly college graduates without any particular skills were recruited and sent overseas. Emphases were on the cross cultural goals of the Peace Corps and the conspicuous ineptitude of the generalist volunteers in carrying out development programmes requiring specific skills only led to widespread disenchantment with the U.S. Peace Corps. Many Third World countries saw the Peace Corps volunteers as just another pair of untrained hands incapable of affecting any change and therefore irrelevant.

Many host nationals were disappointed when they discovered that the skilled Peace Corps workers they were promised were inexperienced B.A. generalists. About 80 percent of the volunteers were B.A. generalists and they lacked the technical skills to perform the jobs assigned to them in Mezam. Because the policies of the new agency were amorphous, the ideal volunteer was seen as a recent graduate with a B.A. generalist degree able to adapt to do almost anything since nobody knew what exactly they were training the volunteers for.¹⁰⁹ The Peace Corps idea caught on quickly especially among younger Americans. Shriver and his staff conceptualised that: “... a cadre of new pioneers would help cure a malaise among the American youths of the 1960s.”¹¹⁰ Everyone connected with the Peace Corps knew that the image of the super volunteer so often depicted in American magazines was a false one. In the early 1960s the influence of Burdick and Lederer’s *Ugly American* was pervasive. Basically, the book said that Americans were not liked overseas and the image of

young Americans, dressed in T-shirts, Levi jeans and tennis sneakers living in hovels and feeding starving children was a perfect antidote. This pushed many volunteers in to the field too quickly.¹¹¹ Compounding this problem was the weak training programme Peace Corps Washington created for volunteers. Not enough attention was paid to training volunteers to do specific jobs, that too many volunteers were sent abroad without a specific task to do and that sending too many volunteers overseas too quickly ran the risk of sacrificing Peace Corps quality to quantity.

In the domain of education in particular, not enough attention was paid to technical instruction, there was too much emphasis on academic subjects and an inordinate amount of time was spent on physical exercise and psychological tests. Also, some volunteers were not very successful in their academic life. Daniel Seck, the secretary general of the Cameroon's Ambassador to the U.S. reacted to this in 1966 when he confirmed that:

Their level of knowledge is very difficult to determine since the recruitment is among 1st to 3rd year students of the Bachelor of Arts. One thing that is certain about them is that we rarely find students who successfully completed their studies. On the contrary, most of them were those that repeated courses and were late in the progress of their studies.¹¹²

Again, despite the high demand for maths/science volunteers, their number sharply reduced. The total number of maths/science majors among American college graduates is declining which makes recruiting Peace Corps teachers of these subjects much more difficult. Some volunteers because of the shortage of teachers agreed to teach subjects or disciplines which they were not trained or had never taken in college thereby exposing themselves to criticism. Seck added that: "they lacked professional training. In the domain of education, these youths are less trained than our instructors with BE or D.M.E.G. Considering them in Cameroon as technical assistance therefore seems absolutely ironic to me, especially since most who come to Cameroon are obliged to return to school."¹¹³ Volunteers who heard of Cameroon only in the training session found themselves teaching Cameroon history. These problems were complicated by the absence of textbooks and other teaching aids. For example, volunteer Douglas Dorr was assigned to teach a course which he had flunked in college. Also volunteer Bill Kane was asked to teach economics, a subject he never studied in college.¹¹⁴ In the same light, the education volunteer Peter Ryder had a Bachelors of Arts (B.A) in History but when he was posted, he taught Biology and Chemistry.¹¹⁵

In the classrooms, volunteers were found wanting especially with respect to their teaching methods. This can be justified by the letter sent to the U.S. Ambassador in 1965 by the Minister of External Relations. In the letter, the minister declared that: "the way in which this teaching is dispensed shows a total absence of any valid pedagogical method. The results from this lacuna is a great inefficiency generating discouragement on the part of students."¹¹⁶ In the same light, the flaws of the volunteers did not go unnoticed by Bernard Fonlon, the then deputy minister of foreign affairs who remarked that: "the level of education provided by American volunteers in different secondary schools of our country feels at an insufficient qualification for the most part."¹¹⁷ As a result of the pitfalls of the volunteers, the government advised that: "its desire is to see in future that, the work of volunteers be oriented towards sports and physical education activities where it will be much more effective."¹¹⁸ The teaching methods of volunteers also posed serious problems. Lacking experience with the Cameroonian educational system, certain errors continuously surfaced in the services of the volunteers between 1962-1966. Many volunteers lacked the commitment to their jobs. The Peace Corps attracted the volunteers for many reasons and many were not interested in teaching after they arrived Cameroon. It was common for volunteers to inform their students and co-workers that: "I am teaching for this tour only. I am not a teacher. I never intend to teach again."¹¹⁹ Such remarks adversely affected their performance and discouraged students who viewed educational achievement as the only road to paradise.

V. Conclusion

During the past fifty-five years, Peace Corps volunteers served in Cameroon uninterruptedly. In 1960, Cameroon commenced diplomatic relations with the U.S. which evolved with time and the signing of the cooperation agreement on the 26th of May 1961 and the Peace Corps Programme Agreement on 23rd of July and 10th September, 1962 between the U.S. and Cameroon acted as a take-off point in the relations between the two

countries. When the Peace Corps came to Cameroon, its activities were extended to the North-West Region and particularly to Mezam division where the U.S. was very influential. Volunteers operated as connectors of diverse forums where the problems of community development were discussed. They have fought and often conquered illiteracy, hunger and illness in Mezam and their efforts dedicated to world peace through international goodwill, have done much to replace fear and mistrust with mutual understanding. In some small village, J.F. Kennedy once said, volunteers will lay a seed which will bring a rich harvest for us all in later days. On the Peace Corps 55th anniversary in Mezam, it seems just timely to ask just how those seeds were laid and what harvest they have in fact produced especially with respect to educational development in Mezam.

The arrival of the volunteers in Cameroon in 1962 marked a turning point in the history of the area's educational development and opened a new chapter as the revival of schools and the replacement of British expatriates were new assets. After the British expatriates left Mezam, the educational system just emerging from the dark colonial days tethered on the brink of collapse but the timely arrival of the volunteers rescued the situation. The volunteers taught in different secondary, teacher training and universities in Mezam as well as wrote textbooks more attuned to the Cameroon context. An important feature of these new educators was that all of them had at least a first degree or its equivalent. Gone were the days were British high school drop outs assumed important teaching positions. The paper also argues that not everything about volunteer service in Mezam was exciting as volunteers were ill trained, ill prepared and ill equipped for services in Mezam and as a result did not achieve Goal 1 of the Peace Corps Act which calls on the agency to assist developing nations in gaining trained man power. Perhaps the bit that can be said about the programme is the coming of volunteers and their friendship with the people of Mezam. To conclude, the paper proposes that the Government of Cameroon should be able to define its priority areas in which they need volunteers to intervene especially with issues that have to do with technology rather than just bringing in volunteers to teach what thousands of trained teachers and university graduates languishing in poverty and unemployment can teach. To this effect, the area of technology would be one of those that will be very important and could be of interest because technologically, the volunteers are more advanced.

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