

NELGA Mission Report to the University of Douala

By

Mme. Mbenda Rosette and Dr Tende Renz

From the 3rd to the 6th of September 2020



Introduction

The NELGA Douala mission with respect to the terms of reference issued by the coordinator for Central Africa Prof. Paul Tchawa was to explore and reflect on the possibility of expanding collaboration with other State Universities in Cameroon. This mission was slated for the 3rd to the 6th of September 2020. We took-off from Yaounde on Thursday 3rd September 2020 at 9:45am and arrived Douala at 2pm where we began the first encounter to meet-up with our objectives as planned. Objectives of the mission were:

- i. Present the NELGA project to the authorities of the Douala University, explaining its approach to land tenure governance and the action plan with respect to the first face which was getting to its completion.
- ii. Secondly to discuss on the possible opportunities of including the Douala University in the second face of the project and creating a network of follow-up from the university.
- iii. Lastly to present to the students working on issues of land governance varied opportunities of obtaining research grants, expanding their research networks as well as be exposed to available online documentation to facilitate their research.

Report of Activities

Following the program drawn with the authorities of the University of Douala attached to this report, the first encounter was with the Vice Dean in charge of Programs at the Faculty of Law and Political Science.

1. Meeting with the Vice Dean (PSAAC) at FSJP

Our first encounter on the 3rd of September 2020 was with Pr Auguste Nguelieutou at 3:30pm. He received the team in his office and Mme Mbenda briefed him on the objective of the mission. She explained the interest of NELGA in land governance and showed how the first face of the project had been successful thus far. She told the Vice Dean the reason for collaboration with other State Universities and how it would benefit both the staff and students who are working on issue of land governance. Haven briefed the Vice Dean on the objective of NELGA, he thereafter thanked the team for coming while extending the appreciation to the project initiators for the



wonderful idea. He confirmed that land governance is a recurrent issue in law. He further explained that it is taught as a compulsory course to both private and public law students though in greater detail in the department of public law. The Vice Dean made mention of their interest on land governance and quoted a seminar organized in 2014 on urbanization and cadastral control where, land governance issues were highlighted. Further research they have carried out on issues of land governance was in 2018 through a seminar still on urbanization and sustainable development. It is worth nothing that the encounter with the Vice Dean was of great importance as he extended the invitation to other members of his staff who were concerned with land governance issues. He was delighted and ready to partner with NELGA so that the opportunities presented can be shared with his students and staff. The encounter ended with a group photograph and we left to settle in preparation to the other encounters (Fig. 1).



Figure 1: courtesy photo with the Vice Dean/ PSAAC of FSJP

2. Meeting with the Head of Department Geography of FLASH, University of Douala at 8:30 to 9:00 am

The program on Friday 4th September 2020 began a bit earlier than slated and had a wonderful result at the end. Our first encounter was with the HOD of the Department of Geography, Prof. Mbaha Pascal who was of great help to our team. He welcomed the ideas presented by Mme Mbenda and was very happy to hear such an opportunity was available since land governance issues are very rampant in our Cameroonian setting. He explained how his department was envisaging having a research seminar with the students of first year doctorate and masters to re-orientate them on the issues of land governance. He highlighted that with colleagues they will



introduce a co-supervision of thesis on issues of land governance which cuts across several disciplines. He had made arrangements for the team to meet with first year PhD and masters 1 students who were in the process of selecting research topics so that the issue of land governance can be their focus of interest as well. An end of encounter photograph was taken as we moved to meet students in the hall (Fig. 2).



Figure 2: Plate with HOD Geography at the University of Douala

3. Meeting with Geography students at the ESSEC Hall from 9:00 to 10:00am

After the meeting with the HOD of Geography, he took us to level 4 masters and 1st year PhD students who were ready to listen to the team (Fig. 3).



Figure 3: Plate of the cross-section of students receiving lectures from the NELGA team

As usual, Mme Mbenda explained the objective of the mission to the students and the opportunities which they can have if they are interested in issues of land governance. She explained to them how she was not happy with Cameroonian students due to their absence in obtaining grants for research from the NELGA/DAAD scheme. She briefed the students on the mode of operation and advised them to grab such an opportunity which can help finance their research from masters to PhD if they are serious. She went ahead to explain how such grants range from 180 to 200 thousand CFA per month which is enough money to finance research. Emphasis was laid on the financing this year which has increased and any student working on land governance issues will be incorporated in the young researchers group which was already in existence. Prof. Mbaha reiterated on the issue of land governance to the students as he cited areas such as Moungo, Ntem, Mbam and others which could be veritable research areas for the students. He introduced some research topics on land governance which the students could think



about and concluded to have a seminar with them in due course.

The students were then given an opportunity to raise questions of any doubts so they are clarified. They raised the problem of language of expression since they were predominantly of the French expression to which Mme Mbenda said it was not an issue as both French and English were accepted and are used in applying for the research grant. Other worries such as a language proficiency proof and period to apply for the research grant were as well raised. Detailed explanation of the process was given to the students with flyers that carried additional information to facilitate their understanding. Furthermore, Dr Tende Renz who benefited from the DAAD grant on the staff exchange program testified to the students that it was real and promised to help when ever need arises. A total of 41 students were present at the encounter as a group photograph was taken at the end (Fig. 4).



Figure 4: Plate of Geography students and NELGA team

4. Meeting with the Dean of the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences at the University of Douala at 10:05 to 11:00am

The next stop of the team was with the Dean of FLASH Prof. Kpwang Robert who was ready to receive the NELGA team. Mme. Mbenda briefed the Dean on the objectives of the mission and explained why it was necessary to meet the head of an establishment. The meeting with the Dean of FLASH was very interesting because he welcomed the idea and explained how his area of origin is victim of serious land governance issue between industries and the local population. As a historian, he promised to do some research through students in the area which will be beneficial to the people and help the student to seek for reasearch grant. He even highlighted a burning issue on land dispute in his area with a French dignitary and the late former president of Cameroon which almost instigated rebellion in his village. He thus concluded that projects as such should be done to help settle land disputes in Cameroon which is a major problem. He was very happy with the idea and promised to support in any way so that students and staff can benefit from this grant, and research on land governance can be valorized. He however raised one very important plea which was to strengthen the teaching of German as a foreign language to Cameroonians. He explained that if it cannot be done like in the past were the students were sent to Germany for a year, at least the first five could be selected to do some three months training in Germany. He explained that this will improve on the teaching of German as a foreign language



in Cameroon and will help strengthen Cameroon and German relationship. He wished the team success in the work being done and a courtesy photograph was taken at the end (Fig. 5).



Figure 5: Photo with the Dean of FLASH, University of Douala

5. Meeting with the HODs of Private and Public Law at the F.S.J.P, University of Douala at 13:30 to 14:30pm

With the busy schedule of the rector of the University of Douala and his immediate collaborators, the teams encounter with him could not be possible, however, he had received the letter from the coordinator of NELGA and was happy with the idea. We had a little break and met with Prof. Moneboulou Herve, HOD of private law and Prof. Momo Claude, HOD public law at the University of Douala. Mme. Mbenda Rosette explained the objective of the team as usual to the HODs in the presence of Prof. Sara Naudjip one of the lectures involved in land governance issues. They confirmed of haven received correspondence on the meeting and explained the interest of their departments on the issue of land governance. The HOD of private law had informed students about the encounter and one by name Mr Bilong Bernard had already developed a research proposal on land governance. However, when they found out that the offer was very interesting and the students could benefit more from it, the HOD of private law scheduled a meeting with the students and the team for Saturday 5th September 2020 at 11am at Amphi 100 ESSEC. A group photograph was taken at the end of the exchange as the HODs promised to send the message wide (Fig. 6).





Figure 6: Photo of team with the HODs and colleague of Private and Public Law

6. Meeting with HOD of Sociology at the University of Douala at 14:30pm

The next encounter was the meeting with the HOD of Sociology at the University of Douala. Even though the HOD was absent, he had arranged with a cross-section of his staff to receive the team at the set time. We met with three members of staff in the persons of Dr Damaigue Daniel, Harouna and Mballa Elanga of the sociology department to discuss the objective of the mission. Mme Mbenda briefed these lecturers on the importance to conduct research on land governance and the opportunities offered by DAAD. They welcomed the team and were very happy with the idea. They explained how the issue of land governance is current and that at the level of their department they have introduced a course on land governance crisis. They were interested in the creation of a platform of discussion for lecturers too, just as that created for student researchers which could help disseminate information as time goes on. They promised to channel the report to their HOD and the encounter ended with a group photograph (Fig. 7).



Figure 7: Photo with the lecturers of Sociology at the University of Douala

7. Meeting with the Vice Dean in charge of Cooperation at the FLASH, University of Douala

The meeting with Prof. Ba'ana Etoundi Marie Louise, Vice Dean in charge of cooperation at the FLASH was at 4pm. She was briefed of the objectives by Mme Mbenda Rosette and how it was necessary for students to benefit from this opportunity. She was told that the second phase of the project needs expansion to the State Universities and that her faculty was chosen to be part if they are willing. She was happy to receive such an information and being an urban geographer, she has been working on issues of land governance and cadastral control as her area of research. She is concerned with land governance in the urban milieu and has encouraged most of her students to work on current issues as such. She explained how a course on land governance dynamics in the urban areas has been introduced in the geography curricula and thinks that their department could re-orientate the first year masters and PhD candidates on such issues. She welcomed the idea and promised to give a report to the Dean and will keep the collaboration as the encounter ended with a group photograph (Fig. 8).



Figure 8: Photo with the Vice Dean of Cooperation, FLASH

8. Meeting with the HOD of Anthropology at the University of Douala on Saturday 5th September 2020

The meeting with the HOD of Anthropology Prof. Njikam Savage was scheduled for Saturday 5th September 2020 at 10am. In her office, Mme Mbenda Rosette briefed her of the objective of our mission and the opportunities which could help her staff and students. Thereafter, Dr Tende Renz shared his experience in Rwanda on the staff exchange program as proof of the opportunities offered by NELGA/DAAD. The HOD then presented her department and what they offer and explained some of the difficulties they have with respect to the teaching staff. However, she presented some of the topics she had been discussing with her research students which focused on land governance. Topics such as women and land management, aging widowhood and land disputes, problem of access to land, family property and conflict in Douala, as well as transfer of family property in the Sawa area were presented to the team. She was very



happy to hear there is an opportunity for research grant which can facilitate work for students and was willing to collaborate. She had invited students who were to meet with the team after her own encounter which ended with a courtesy photograph (Fig. 9).



Figure: Photo with the HOD of Anthropology, FLASH, University of Douala

9. Meeting with students of Anthropology at 11:00am

After the meeting with the HOD of Anthropology, she invited the research students who were available to meet with the team. As usual, the objective of the mission was presented to the students and the opportunities they could have if their research is focused on issues of land governance. When Mme Mbenda finished with her presentation, the students were given the opportunity to express their worries in order to be clarified. They raised the problem to understand how the training of young researchers was done, is the research grant only for masters and doctorate students, if granted a grant how will the work evolution be assessed, can already researched work be funded, does the project not propose topics for students and can it be trans-disciplinary? These questions were carefully answered by Mme Rosettes Mbenda who in addition invited the students to work with their supervisors and also the DAAD online team which will be ready to give answers to their questions. The exchange with the students, the HOD and the NELGA team yielded much fruits. Some research topics orientation were given by Dr Tende Renz upon request from the HOD of Anthropology and the students present were satisfied with the encounter which ended with a group photograph (Fig. 9).





Figure 9: Group photo with young Anthropology researchers

10. Meeting with students of the Department of Private Law at 12:05pm

The meeting which was scheduled by the HOD of private law department with the students began at 12:05pm on Saturday 5th September 2020. After discussions with the students of Anthropology, the team moved over to Amphi 100 in ESSEC and had a briefing with the students of private law. The students were briefed on the objective of the mission and opportunities offered by DAAD with respect to research grants. They were then given the opportunity to ask questions for clarification to which they did. Questions as to why the research grants was only for land governance, does the grant cover past research works as well can the team help to propose a topic for students and can the research work be done out of the country amongst others were asked. Mme Mbenda gave some clarification to the preoccupation of the students as she encouraged them to select topics with their academic supervisors, request for grants which will sponsor their research while in their home country and that past research works could be published as articles in international journals through the project. The twenty two students present were satisfied with the responses and promised to apply for grants as the encounter ended with a group photograph (Fig. 10).



Figure 10: Photo with researchers of private law at the University of Douala

Conclusion



The NELGA mission to Douala from the 3rd to the 6th of September 2020 was in one word successful. Under the leadership of the coordinator Prof. Paul Tchawa, Mme Mbenda Rosette and Dr Tende Renz were mandated to carry on this mission of exploration and eventual collaboration with other State universities. Letters were issued prior to this encounter and administrative and teaching authorities were contacted to help mobilize the staff and students for an exchange with the team from Yaounde. It is interesting to note that Prof. Mbaha Pascal, HOD of Geography worked hard to facilitate the mission of the NELGA team. The objectives set before the mission that were geared at exploring and creating awareness which will permit young researchers and staff to benefit from the research grants offered by DAAD were well attained. The number of persons with which the exchanges were done and the student population met served as proof of a remarkable success in the explorative face of the mission. Feedbacks had so far in the course of the encounters revealed that much research is needed at the level of land governance in Cameroon and that the objective of NELGA is heartily welcomed. Even though the team did not meet the Rector of the University of Douala because of his busy schedule, news from his cabinet testified that he was happy with the initiative and is ready to offer his support to foster the project. The encounter part ended on Saturday as the team left for Yaounde on Sunday 6th September 2020.

For the NELGA team to Douala, humbly written by
Tende Renz Tichafogwe (PhD)

