

BELLAH NGEH

DEVELOPMENT INSIGHT

Nkemnji Global Tech

Wisconsin, USA

BELLAH NGEH: DEVELOPMENT INSIGHT

Copyright © 2008 Nkemnji Global Tech

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, electronic, electrostatic, magnetic, or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the author or publisher.

Published by
Nkemnji Global Tech

*1102 Frisch Road
Madison, WI. 53711-3120
www.nkemnjiglobaltech.com
info@nkemnjiglobaltech.com
Tel: 608 239-3994
Fax: 707 268-7703*

ISBN: 0-9755261-03

LCCN: 2008933886

Editors:

Timothy Mbeseha

The views expressed in contributed works are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the publisher, the editors or BNDA.

Printed in the United States of America

DEDICATION

We dedicate this book to Fobellah Nkeng, all Bellah Ngeh family members and friends, living or dead, who have sacrificed much for the development of Bellah. Your hard work has not been in vain.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge the assistance of Mr. Camillus Nkemnji who acted as the information-technology contact person between BNDA-USA and BNDA in Cameroon. He secured, typed and e-mailed articles from Mr. Julius Fobellah. Mr. Camillus Nkemnji and Mr. Richard Morfaw assisted in setting up and conducting the interview with HRH Fobella Youchembeng II for the book. Dr. Fidelis Achenjang and Mr. Felix Leke proofread of the manuscript. We thank Ms. Pamela Khumbah and Mbe Nkemamin for expressing the need for a book as a tribute to Fobellah Nkeng prior to the memorial celebrations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Dedication
2. Introduction -- Professor Nkemnji & Mbeseha
3. A Chat with HRH Ret. Col. Fobellah Nyochembeng II

PART I - Geography of Bellah Ngeh

- Cameroon in Brief
- The Geography of Bellah Ngeh -- Mbeseha
- The 1922 Boundary Dispute as resolved -- Cadman.

PART II - History of Bellah Ngeh

- Immigration in Bellah Ngeh -- Julius Afendia Fobellah.
- Bellah Ngeh Dynasty -- Nkemleke -- J L Asonganyi)
- Fobellah Nyochembeng 1st -- Julius Afendia Fobellah.
- 1922 Cadman Assessment - A review -- Mbeseha
- Bellah Ngeh - Our Land -- Aminateh John Atabong

PART III - Integrated Development

- Development and Investment Incentives – HRH Fobella
- Bellah Ngeh Integrated Development -- Mbeseha
- Education In Bellah Ngeh – John Nkemnji
- Health Care in Bellah Ngeh -- Dr. Hilary Aroke
- Importance of Family Unity -- Mankemnkeng Fobellah
- Traditional Dispute Resolution -- Margaret Mbeseha

PART IV – Culture.

- Nkwa and its Origins -- Julius Afendia Fobellah.
- Preservation of Aloachaba -- Danilo Aletanu.
- Fuandem and Ancestral Worship -- Mbeseha
- Spirituality in Bellah Ngeh -- Julius Fobellah
- Believes in Witchcraft -- Julius Fobellah
- Bellah Ngeh. The Land of My Ancestors -- Mbeseha

PART V. HISTORICAL FIGURES OF BELLAH-NGEH.

- Fobellah Nkengafac Dominic -- Nkemeleke Joseph
- Asonganyi, Julius Afendia Fobellah & Mbeseha.
- Manfred Nkafu Ashu -- Mbeseha Timothy
- Nkemamin David Amingwa -- Margaret Mbeseha.
- Nkematemfua Francis Tateh -- Stella Nkimbi
- Nkengafac Dominic Asong -- Ndem Asong
- Nwafua Richard Fobellah -- Richard Aminkeng Fobellah
- Mathias Nkengbeja -- Nkemeleke Joseph Asonganyi

Introduction

The publication of Bellah Ngeh Development Insight has three main goals. First, it is meant to document the rich culture and history of the people of Bellah Ngeh. For the most part, the rich culture and history of the people of Bellah Ngeh and wealth of knowledge about this culture remains undocumented. Second, the publication is meant to showcase Bellah Ngeh development efforts within Lebang and the overall development of Lebialem. Third, it is believed that this publication will be a useful planning tool for future development of the area. The publication analyses the development challenges that face Bellah today and which are likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

The idea for this book was first conceived a few years ago, but some people voiced reservations. A few people feared that trying to document what has hitherto been in oral form might bring controversy because of the unreliability of oral history. Others were reluctant because of lack of resources in both time and finances. While respecting all these different opinions, we believed that the document is a good starting point and that critiques will have reasons to change their views or correct any errors in the book.

It has not been an easy task gathering and putting together historical facts essentially from limited sources. Oral history is not very reliable mostly because of the weakness in human memory and the subjective manner in which some narrators view and assess different events. Despite these weaknesses, we have the responsibility to try as far as possible to document salient facts or events that influenced our lives. If we fail to record history, a time may come when precious knowledge will be lost through the passing away of our wise elders or those who had the opportunity of learning from those with some knowledge of what happened. Most of our elders (and even the youth) who are reservoirs of our history are moving on faster than we like. Another compelling reason for documenting our story is the fact that so many Bellah Ngeh people today live out of the village. Most of their children are born far from home. This young generation knows very little about their home, Bellah. One thing

they know however is that their parents came from Bellah Ngeh and that they themselves are Bellah Ngeh children. Our children need a document like this to serve as a reference for constructing their family tree.

This volume is an attempt to give an insight of Bellah Ngeh and its people. Contributors have researched most aspects of what is documented. Maybe, one person could have written the entire book. However, we did not want that to be the case. We wanted it to be a joint effort or collective endeavor of the people of Bellah Ngeh. We are thankful to those who devoted time and resources to do the research on different aspects of Bellah Ngeh society. Over all, the contributions have given a rare insight of Bellah Ngeh. Articles such as those on the history, genealogy, immigration, geography, and land disputes can help the younger generation of Bellah Ngeh people understand where they came from and why Bellah Ngeh is where it is.

Although much of what we know of Bellah Ngeh before the arrival of the European colonizers is oral, the first detailed official document on Bellah compiled by Cadman in 1922 reveals an interesting inside of the life of the people of Bellah Ngeh. A careful analysis of the 1922 Cadman Assessment Report on Bellah Ngeh published in this book will make for a better understanding of what Bellah Ngeh was like almost a century ago. In addition to all these, students of history will find it interesting to read and understand some of the land boundary claims and counterclaims that exist between Lewoh and Lebang Fondoms today. No where else will one find those insights except by reading the document titled “Fontem-Fotabong Land Dispute” contained in the Cadman Report of 1922 and published in its entirety in this book.

Part of this book has been devoted to some “historical figures“ in Bellah Ngeh. The names included in this section are not exhaustive. There are hundreds of others whose names we could not include for a variety of reasons, time, no research on them and worse still, their pictures could not be found for possible inclusion. We hope that in subsequent editions we will be able to document many more people in his regard.

Like many traditional societies affected by modern urbanization, Bellah Ngeh might be in the process of losing its original identity. We consider the fact that Bellah Ngeh is fast merging with Menji - the Divisional Head Quarters of Lebialem. This is one of the reasons why we must as far as possible preserve what we can before it is too late. More than two decades ago, the Bellah Ngeh people constituted themselves into a development association known as Bellah Ngeh Development Association (BNDA). In this book, we have included an in-depth analysis of the achievements and failures of Bellah Ngeh Development Association. That section of the book is intended to serve as a guide to our future development endeavors. In addition to finishing the unfinished projects listed in this book, there is room for us to initiate new development projects that can have meaningful positive impact on all the residents of Bellah Ngeh.

Because most of the articles have been based on oral history, some errors/incorrect facts may be discovered. To those who might be affected by such errors or incorrect facts, we apologize in advance for any embarrassments that such inaccuracies might cause. It is our honest belief that this initial adventure should encourage us to undertake bigger projects. Criticisms (if any) should only motivate rather than discourage us. Finally, each contributor is responsible for the information contained in his or her piece.

John Nkemnji
President, BNDA-USA

Timothy Mbeseha
Editor

A Chat with HRH Ret. Col. Fobellah Nyochembeng II

Recently, a representative of Bellah-Ngeh Development Association [BNDA] met with HRH Fobellah Nyochembeng II to talk about some pertinent issues concerning Bellah Ngeh. BNDA wanted to have the chief's vision for Bellah Ngeh and the Menji Municipal Council over which he presides as Mayor. Below is an excerpt of the discussion.

BNDA: Good day Your Royal Highness. We are happy to have this conversation with you. First of all, we thank you for accepting to grant us this interview despite your busy schedule.

Your Royal Highness: Thanks a lot for coming to talk to me. As usual, I shall always try to make time to attend to any persons whether they are acting for the Menji Municipal Council, Bellah Ngeh or Lebang.

BNDA: Your Royal Highness, Will you kindly help us locate the position of Bellah Ngeh in Lebang.

HRH: You know that Lebang Fondom is made up of several chiefdoms. Bellah Ngeh happens to be one of the chiefdoms that make up Lebang. It is one of the original chiefdoms having been created very early when Lebang was founded.

BNDA: Your Royal Highness, we understand that it may not be easy to double as a traditional leader and an elected Mayor of Menji Council at the same. Are there any special challenges you face in this dual capacity?

HRH: Yes, it is not easy managing the two functions at the same time. One must know what each of those functions entails so that there is no conflict of interest. However, for now I do not have very specific problems.

BNDA: Before retiring and taking up these dual functions you spent a long time in the Cameroon military. Do you think your long experience in the military helped you in carrying out your functions first as a Chief and secondly as a Mayor?

HRH: Sure. My long experience in the army has been very useful to me in my present duties. You know that one of the things emphasized in the army is discipline. That personal discipline has been very helpful to me when I deal with my subjects in the village and collaborators in the municipality.

BNDA: Certainly BNDA at home must be an important instrument that helps you in the overall development of Bellah Ngeh. Is there any specific thing that you need the Bellah Ngeh people living out of the village to do to help you in your duties?

HRH: Yes, I very much appreciate all the efforts both BNDA at home and abroad are making to make life in the village better. I believe that they will continue to be a force to be recon with when it comes to the development of the village and the entire municipality.

As far as Bellah Ngeh is concerned, I suggest that Bellah Ngeh people both at home and in diaspora should continue their efforts and most particularly

- a). Construct a more befitting residence for the chief in the palace
- b). Do everything to rehabilitate the water supply to the village. The water supply catchment that was built does not appear to be sufficiently resistant. It needs to be improved upon.
- c). The entire Bellah Ngeh ring road needs regular maintenance. The road needs to be graded and gutters cut and maintained at least once a year.
- d). The extension of electricity to cover the entire village of Bellah Ngeh.

As far as Menji Council is concerned, I will suggest that we look for funds to:

- a). Construct a bridge at Teba-Teba. It is really very dangerous especially for children who use that road to attend different schools and colleges that are located across in Menji. Presently the river has to be crossed by the use of a hammock.

b). It is equally my suggestion that we try to repair and maintain the Nwenchem -Mbin Bellah road. You know this road is very important to Bellah Ngeh people who have cocoa farms in Mbin Bellah. If the road is maintained it will help the people to evacuate their produce easily to Menji from where there is easy access to other markets where such produce can be sold at better prices.

BNDA: Right now Menji town appears to be just at the backyard of Bellah Ngeh. What is the present status of Bellah Ngeh vis a vis Menji town?

HRH: As a matter of fact, Bellah Ngeh is considered as part and parcel of Menji. This means that any development that we carry out in Bellah must reflect what is going on in Menji.

BNDA: What message do you have for the Youths and people of Bellah Ngeh?

HRH: To all the Bellah Ngeh people my message is that they should continue to be hard working, law abiding, as far as possible avoid conflicts and continue to show respect for their elders, their mothers and wives and for themselves.

BNDA: Over the years, Bellah Ngeh has been having land disputes with its neighbors. What recommendations (if any) do you have in this area?

HRH: I know that sometimes disputes with neighbors are just natural. As far as possible Bellah Ngeh will try to avoid such disputes. However, if disputes cannot be avoided we should always try an amicable resolution of the problem first. If we cannot resolve the issues amicably with a neighbor, my recommendation will be that the matter be taken to Achem a lemoh for a possible settlement. Going to court should be the very last resort.

BNDA: Of all the projects you mentioned earlier, which do you consider more urgent for Bellah Ngeh people [BNDA] to tackle?

HRH: I think the maintenance of the ring road, repairs and maintenance of the water catchment, the extension of electricity and the building of a befitting residence is the most urgent projects that need immediate attention for now.

BNDA: We thank you for making time to attend to us. We equally wish you success in your exacting roles.

HRH: Thanks a lot for the concern and interest you have shown in the development of Bellah Ngeh and Menji Council. I pray that the Gods of Bellah Ngeh always be your guide.

PART I - Geography of Bellah Ngeh.

CAMEROON IN BRIEF

Cameroon is located on the West coast of Africa, surrounded by Nigeria, Gabon, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo and Equatorial Guinea. It has a 400km coastline to the Atlantic Ocean. It is usually referred to as “Africa in miniature,” because of its diverse land and people. The Belleh Ngeh people are dedicated, hard working Cameroonians.

The climate ranges from tropical rainforest to open savanna, with high mountain ranges on the North West border with Nigeria. Mount Cameroon located in Buea near the port of Limbe rises to 4,100 meters and is an active volcano. From the main commercial, entry port of Douala, the land rises to 700 metres near Yaounde, the national capital. The mountain range bordering Nigeria climbs to over 2,000 metres. Throughout Cameroon there are areas of thermal springs, and indications of current or prior volcanic activity.

The population of the country is about 15,000,000, comprising of over 200 tribal groups. Bellah Ngeh is in Lebang, Lebialem Division, in the Southwest Province. The country has ten provinces. No tribe or religion has dominance, and the country has been typically peaceful throughout its history.

The land area is 475,440 square kilometres, or 183,638 square miles.

French Cameroon was granted independence from France in 1960. The Southern part of British Cameroon joined the Republic of Cameroon in 1961, to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon. In 1984 the name was officially changed to The Republic of Cameroon. In 1992, the first multiparty elections were held.

The system of government is the French model, with a powerful office of President (elected for seven year terms), a Prime

Minister and Ministers appointed by the President, and the Chamber of Deputies elected by popular vote every four years.

The official languages are French and English, although French is dominant. English is most strongly represented in the former British Cameroon region. Bilingual schools are common throughout the country, and increasing numbers of people realise the importance of learning English in the new global economy. The Lebang and Bellah Ngeh people speak Nweh, which is closely related to the Dschang and some grassfield dialects.

The currency is the CFA Franc. The CFA is linked to the Euro through a guarantee by France that parity to the old French Franc will be maintained. The currency thus fluctuates against the world currencies in line with the Euro.

Main cities are; Douala, the principal seaport and commercial capital, with a population of over 2,500,000; Yaounde, the capital with 1.2 million, and other major cities or provincial capitals at Garoua, Maroua, Ngounderie, Bamenda, Bafoussam, Foumban, and Kumba. A large proportion of the population (47%) lives in suburban areas. The Camerounians are very good farmers, and produce a surplus of diverse crops.

Major crops for export and local use include: rubber, palm oil, cotton, cacao, coffee, tea, bananas, pineapples, haricot beans, sugar, potatoes of various varieties, and a variety of fruit and vegetables.

Ports other than Douala are Kribi, a developing port, and holiday resort. This is also the shipping port for the new Chad to Cameroon oil pipeline, currently being built at a cost of four billion dollars; and Limbe, the export point for locally produced oil, and the location of the country's oil refinery, which has a production level of 100,000 barrels per day. Unrefined oil is the country's prime export.

Resources: The country has an extraordinary range of resources, both mineral, and forestry, most of which have yet to be exploited, although timber production is a major industry.

Apart from oil, the only two other mineral based enterprises in operation are; A large cement plant at Douala, and a 39-year-old aluminum smelter at Edea, between Douala, and Yaounde. Despite known bauxite deposits in the billions of tonnes, most of the supplies for the smelter are shipped in from Guinea.

Government schools in Cameroon are structured on the Western curriculum, with primary and secondary schools. Whilst French is the dominant language, parents can now specify that their children attend an English speaking school.

Cameroon's National Day is on the 20th of May each year. This is the date the two sections of Cameroon became united. The youth's celebrate 11 February.

Geography of Bellah NGEH

Background:

Lebialem is one of the youngest administrative Divisions of Cameroon. It was created by Presidential Decree on September 1, 1922. It has three administrative subdivisions - Wabane, Alori, and Menji. Each of the subdivisions corresponds to a local council area. The administrative headquarters of Lebialem is Menji. The Menji subdivision is made of Njogwi, Essohattah, and Lebang cheifdoms. Lebang is the largest chiefdom in the Menji subdivision - making up more than 50% of its land mass and more than 80% of the overall population. Although the decree creating the units describes these cheifdoms as villages, I prefer to call them Kingdoms due to the history of each of these cheifdoms. This makes sense if we understand that smaller components of these Kingdoms like Bellah rightfully should be called villages.

Bellah Ngeh has an interesting geographical location. It has three main land masses each separated from the other by a few or several kilometer of land belonging to other villages. The Efem-Bellah stretching from the stream called Nase Nehu extends to and includes Beleuh (Catholic School Fontem) and sharing boundaries with Lebang, Nveh and the river Begueh to the south; Mkin Bellah located some 20 km further west, and mainland Bellah - at Ngeh.

The appellation Efem-Bellah is totally misleading because it suggests that it is abandoned. This is not true because many people live there today, and Leret does not modify their association and involvement in Bellah Ngeh matters.

However, the majority of Bellah people live in the mainland Bellah Ngeh where as the Mbin Bellah is mainly used for planting economic crops like cocoa. As the name suggests the area is still mainly forest [Mbin].

Location of Mainland Bellah-Ngeh

Mainland Bellah Ngeh is situated in the northern part of Lebang. It shares boundaries with Tansh and Njeieh villages of Lewoh to the north, Ncheberiri to the south, Nchembin to the west and Letia to the east. It is located about five kilometers from the Menji metropolitan center.

Topography:

Mainland Bellah is generally low lying to the West (Ngeh) and gradually ascends to a more low lying middle belt area covering the Palace, Ncho Tanju, Atungorg and extending to Aroci-Tabi to the south.

Some parts of the land are very rocky. This is found along the Njereh-Tano boundaries. From Nehstanju there is a steep ascend of about five kilometers to Ntesah plateau. This plateau is equally very beautiful and on a clear day it is possible to see as far as Balabe with the naked eye. The area bordering Nchembin is also famous for heavy rocks. These rocks could be a subject of an interesting geological analysis, leading up to important information on the ancient tectonic earth movements in this area some millions of years ago.

Efem-Bellah on the other hand is generally undulating and low lying. One of the reasons for opening the first Catholic school in this area must have been for this seemingly good topography. Mlsin Bellah further south is very low lying and forested except for recent clearings and farms.

Because of the nearness to Menji, the areas of Efem Bellah and Bellah Ngeh are quickly becoming mainly residential areas. A large portion of the land, at Efem Bellah is presently being exploited by the Bellah Ngeh women as a communal farm under the Bellah Ngeh women common initiative group. They grow casoava, bananas, plantains, and vegetables.

Rivers and Streams

Bellah Ngeh has no big rivers or streams, but the streams like Ntselebe and Atiamoh could be a source of pure drinking water

for the whole Menji town if tapped or harnessed. There are plans underway to tap one of those streams for drinking water for Bellah Ngeh village.

Lebialem Falls

Lebialem waterfall has a direct and natural link to Bellah. It is quite accessible from Ngeh and if harnessed, could be the source of hydroelectric power capable of serving the entire Lebialem division and beyond.

Roads

The Njenbeti Nveh road passes through Efem Bellah, thus making it easy to move in and out of Lebialem. A seven kilometer road has also been constructed to link mainland Bellah either through Nchebenri or Nchembin and Menji. Drivers may choose to take the axis below or above seat of Wisdom High School-Fontem.

The whole road was dug through communal efforts. The state assisted in the financing of a few culverts. It is important to note that most of the technical work on the road was done by Bellah Ngeh sons through expertise acquired in engineering and construction fields elsewhere.

Tourism

There are a lot of features in Bellah Ngeh which if developed could be of great tourist attractions. These would include Lebialem Falls, Ntesah Plateau, and the interesting rocks found between Tanoh, Bellah, and Njaeuh.

Bellah Ngeh in retrospect: A critical look at the Cadman Assessment Report of 19th November 1922.

Timothy Mbeseha

Almost all what we know of Bellah Ngeh about a century ago is embedded in oral history. Because the stories are essentially handed down through oral tradition, it is clear that not all the facts can be relied on. After all, unwritten history often has flaws. This is because human memory is short and facts get jumbled up with the passage of time thus making it less reliable.

The German colonial administration of Cameroon lasted just from 1884-1916. Infact, when German rule ended the Germans had just begun to have a strong foothold on the interior of the Bangwa land. German colonial records on Bellah Ngeh are to say the least sketchy. When the British took over the territory under mandate of the League of Nations in 1919, several colonial administrators visited the area. However, the most senior of these colonial visitors was the Provincial Assessment Officer in the person of Mr. Cadman. During these visits, official records of any official business done were kept. Most of those documents can be found today in government official archives kept in Buea. In the case of Bellah Ngeh, two of those official documents prepared by the British colonial administrators and found in the Buea archives today shed some light on Bellah Ngeh at the time. In all those documents, Bellah Ngeh is generally referred to a hamlet of Fomila. The first of those documents dated 27th of September 1922 was the demarcation of the contested land boundaries between Fomila (Fobellah in Lebang) on the one hand and Fonge Njeh and Fonkem of Tanu both of Lewoh in Fotabong chiefdom on the other hand.

The second document dated November 19th 1922 is dedicated entirely to what is describes as “The assessment report.” This report is the first written detail report of Bellah Ngeh that we have been able to lay hands on up to date and contains important information on the area. This is part of the reason why we thought it necessary to make some analysis of the said

document. A careful study of that report reveals that Bellah was a very vibrant community with a population of about 290 people. It is our belief that the population might have been much more than that given the perception that the people had of any census at the time. There was always a tendency to declare as few people as possible because the general perception was that a higher figure would mean a heavier tax burden to the chief who had to account to the colonial master. On the record however, Bellah Ngeh tax assessment totaled sixteen pounds five shillings. Bellah Ngeh together with Fossung came second only to Fonge which was assessed a tax of seventeen pounds five shillings. In any case of the 290 people declared 64 were taxpayers, 19 farmers and 19 traders. A good number of people were involved in animal breeding, keeping goats, sheep and pigs.

Another interesting thing revealed by this report is the fact that the administrator identified at least 5 people who spoke the English language fairly well. Even though the report does not name the 5 persons who could speak English fairly well, the unanswered question is where these persons learnt the English language. The only credible possibility of where these persons learnt English is that they were certainly amongst the 19 traders, some of whom traveled far West to Nigeria to buy and sell goods including slaves. This is because our nearest English-speaking neighbor was and still remains Nigeria. The story has been told elsewhere how the Bellah Ngeh people acquired Nkwa that was originally an Efik dance. The Efiks are an ethnic group in Nigeria. This point of view is further buttressed when we look at the claims that some Bellah Ngeh people acquired foreign names like Defang, Jonny, Taku, Bechem, Tabi, Jam and Ashu when they had contacts with the Efiks and other Ejagham and Ibibio tribes of Nigeria. Almost everybody will agree that those names are not Nweh generic names. In any case, if this story of name acquisition has any reliability to count on, the Cadman report of 1922 will go further to confirm that the Nkwa dance was acquired by Bellah long before colonial rule.

A closer look at the report gives us an idea on how population movement has occurred in Bellah Ngeh since 1922. The report shows for example that Tache Ajenanyi was a taxpayer under

Bellah Ngeh. Tache Ajenanyi was an immigrant from Attah of Forcha. Apparently, when he first arrived he was settled by Fobellah and recognized as a Bellah Ngeh man. Today, the descendants of Tache Ajenganyi and more specifically his heir Tache Njemteju pays allegiance to Nche Beruri. There is no convincing evidence as to when and why the descendants of Tache Ajenganyi switched allegiance from Bellah to Nche Beruri. The report lends further credence to other immigration/migration issues in Bellah Ngeh. Ndifua Tazanu for example who is listed as number 42 in the report has since migrated to Nveh-Forchap. The same story can be told of Mbencho Tazisong who is listed as number 4. He too migrated to Lewoh and today lives there. In the same vein, people like Nquifua Ndanne (the father of Charles Ndanne) migrated at a later date to East Cameroon. An important thing to note here is the fact that despite the migration of some these people to different areas, in the majority of cases their descendants have continued to maintain close ties to Bellah Ngeh. Another important significance of the report is that it helps some of us to trace their roots and or attachments to Bellah Ngeh.

BELLAH-NGEH: THE PEOPLE, ORIGIN AND MIGRATION

J. L. ASONGANYI

His Royal Highness Chief Fobellah, the traditional head of Bellah Ngeh people is a direct descendant of the Azi dynasty. Indeed he is the first of “Befua nkiangeh” a ruling class in Lebang that owes its origin to Azi. The other ruling classes i.e. the Befua Nteh are believed to be the founding Chiefs of Lebang clan – most of who settled in Lebang earlier than the founding father of Azi dynasty – Njiteh. Njiteh begot Njikeng (Mbe Nwet- Azi) who begot Makemkeng, who later became known as Fontem. Fontem translated simply means “ chief who shoots” apparently due to the fact that he was perhaps the first person to own a gun. In those days the most common hunting tool was the spear.

The patriarch of Bellah – Ngeh, Atemkeng was a son to Makemkeng the third ruler of Lebang clan. At the disappearance of Makemkeng, another son Fuabeh (Abahatu) became the successor to the Azi throne while Atemkeng one of the beloved sons, became Nkwetta. It is alleged that their father before his death had instructed that Atemkeng should leave the palace to establish his own territory autonomous and independent of Azi palace. As a symbol of that autonomy, he was given a “ tiger knife”. The ownership of a tiger knife meant that Atemkeng and his successors would have the right to kill and slaughter tigers. The right to slaughter a tiger is a prerogative reserved only for autonomous Kings in the Nweh culture.

With this in mind, Atemkeng then moved and settled at Njenbetiu with all the royal belongings allocated to him by his late father except the “Tiger knife.”

Unfortunately Atemkeng died young allegedly as a result of a struggle that ensued between him and Abahatoo to recuperate the “tiger knife” Atemkeng was survived by two sons and three daughters; Yanga, Tayemjou and another daughter who was married to a man from Mbindia. One of the two sons of Atemkeng died young and Nkengbeja who was the only

surviving son was still very young. Under these circumstances Nkengbeja had to return to Azi palace. All the royal belongings of Atemkeng were then taken back to Azi palace for custody.

On growing up Nkengbeja was very intelligent and wise. He became very serviceable in Azi palace during the reign of his uncle Abahatoo. He appears to have been specially gifted in the act of dispute resolution. His ability to resolve disputes eventually earned him the title of “Nwetbelleh” a noble who settles disputes. He continued to play this important role in Lebang even after moving to his “efem” at Njenbetiu to succeed his late father. In Njenbetiu his name was changed to Fuabellah (Fobellah)

Legend has it that Abahatoo no longer wanted Nkengbeja who had become a real pillar of the palace to leave Azi. However some closed elders to Nkengbeja hinted the young man that he had to go back to Njenbetiu in order to succeed his late father Atemkeng. On a certain (Azi) Lebang market day the young Nkengbeja rolled up his sleeping mat and started moving out of the palace towards the market place. Abahatoo was immediately alerted that Nkengbeja was leaving the palace and when asked Nkengbeja said he was a grown up man and had to go back to succeed his father at their “efem” Abahatoo then instructed that the big drum Nkiangeh be sounded to summon all and sundry that market day. The big announcement was that the clan had to construct a palace at Njenbetiu for Nkengbeja to return and succeed his father. One of the most precious things that Nkengbeja is said to have successfully smuggled out of Azi palace back to his new palace at Njenbetiu was the “tiger knife” his grand father had allocated to his late father.

Nkengbeja is said to have had over thirty wives and many children. Some of his direct descendants are Nkemnjiamin, Tanyiatem, Mbeseha Aminkeng, Mbetai, Mbe Ashu, Tai Ntintui, Nkemalem, Tangap, Tangendong, Nchetangwo, Mafua-fuetnkeng, Anyiamindeh, Anyiawung etc and Ajongakoh who became his successor. Most indigenous Bellah people can be traced to the same ancestry of Fuabellah Nkengbeja. Below is the sketch of the dynasty line traced from Azi to Bellah Ngeh.

AZI DYNASTY

Njiteh

Mbe-Nwet – Azi

. (Njikeng)

BELLAH-NGEH DYNASTY

Makemnkeng

(Fontem)

Atemkeng Abahatoo

(Aseha Fontem Abahatoo). (Fuabeh)

Nkengbeza. . . Ngwabekuh

(Fuabellah). . . (Nyiauwung)

Ajongakoh. . . Achemaboh

Nyochembeng. . . Asonganyi

Nkengafac. . . Defang

Yochembeng II. . . Njitua (HM)

BELLAH NGEH

Mbe Tanyisoh was a reputed hunter during the reign of Fuabellah Ajongakoh. On one of his hunting sprees in the forest of Ataluri, he discovered a lonely indigenous settler- Mbetateh. The hunter man became a close friend (visitor) to Mbetateh supplying him bush meat. Tanyisoh continued further exploration to Ngeh at the tip Lebialem waterfall. He found a lot of Ngeh fruit in this part of the forest. He later continued his expeditions to Ntchembeuh (river Mbeuh) the portion of Bellah –Ngeh between its present boundary Ntchenchua (river nchua) and Ntchembeuh was later invaded by Lewoh people. Fobellah instituted a case against these people to the colonial authorities in the early twenties but lost the case because Fontem Asonganyi did not fully cooperate with the colonial administrators. (Read the 1922 Cadman Assessment Report on the boundary disputes between Lebang and Lewoh).

Mbetanyisoh was particularly impressed by the good landscape of Ngeh and Atugong and suggested to Fobellah Ajongakoh to

move his palace from Njenbetiu to this newfound virgin land. The Chief then dispatched Mbeseha and two others to accompany Tanyisoh on a reconnaissance trip to Ngeh. Immediately they selected a site for the palace, Mbeseha chose the portion between Atiamoh and Ataluri for himself and Tanyisoh chose lower Ngeh-the palace sandwiched between them. Ajongakoh then moved his people from Njenbetiu (efem Bellah) to the present site Ngeh. Mbetateh overwhelmed by this mass movement of people accepted to pay allegiance to Fobellah Ajongakoh. Nyochembeng the successor to Ajongakoh was born in efem Bellah and brought to Ngeh as a child. Another important settler of Ngeh was Fuambep an immigrant from Mbindia. He also accepted allegiance to Ajongakoh and his lineage eventually became named Mbi- Ngeh – a notable in Ngeh and settled with Mbe Tanyisoh in lower Ngeh.

It should be noted that the name Ngeh is used to precise the actual seat of the palace that was established by Fobellah Ajongakoh. As a matter of fact, Ngeh is only one of the quarters like many others that make up Bellah Ngeh territory: Other quarters include Njematet, Ataluri, Atugong, Nteseh, Atuteng, Njenbetiu Atoangeh in Mbin Bellah. Apparently Fobellah Ajongakoh moved with all his people to Ngeh. Later, population movement from without and within Bellah territory brought in the present occupants of efem Bellah especially after Fobellah gave part of Efem Bellah to the Catholic Mission authorities for the establishment of a church and a school. These people even though they acknowledged the fact that they were residing on Bellah land, but few of them (if any) featured on Bellah Ngeh tax roll. They did not participate in community development in Bellah Ngeh. They therefore constituted a special group of notional Bellah Ngeh people. They included: -

Nwoafua Achankeng (Forcha): He was originally a retainer to the Lewoh throne after Fualewoh Achenkeng died. When Fualewoh Agendia became of age and took over the throne, serious disagreements arose between him and Nwoafua Achankeng. Nwoafua Achankeng then migrated first to Betesong before finally settling at Belleuh in Efem Bellah, **Anulegeu Mathias (Nkemalebuh):** He came to Belleuh where he settled

as a catechist of the Roman Catholic Mission following the transfer of the school and church to the site around 1948, **Atemkeng Martin alias Fuamission**. He was a hunter from Ngem who settled in Belleu following the implantation of Catholicism and was the “head Christian” or chairman of the mission station, **Tanyike Donatus** who came from Aleuleu and was of Nkematabong’s family. He settled at Belleu in the seventies, **Leke Michael (Aseha Leke Fomaze)** who came from Nweh-Nchen in the late sixties. He has matrilineal lineage with Bellah Dynasty.

The early years were characterized by conflicts for supremacy. Nyochembeng had engaged in a conflict with the Mbos from (Manjo) and together with the war against the Germans by Fontem Asonganyi, the Bayangs who had occupied land up to Ndasoga fled down to Nwenchen crossing over to the other side of Nsoko River. When the wars were over, the Bayangs who could no longer move back to Ndasoga proposed to sell this part of their former territory to Nweh people. This part and some virgin forest “Mbin” was thus acquired from the Banyangs by the Nweh chiefs thus Mbinmac, Mbin Bellah, Mbin Belua etc Fontem Asonganyi then settled his kin Fossung Atabongawung in Nwenchen. Some Bellah people Mbetai, Mbe Tangap, Tangendong etc then moved to create Atoangeh in Mbin Bellah. These Bellah people unfortunately did not thrive successfully because of the harsh environmental factors in the virgin forest. Most people perish and a few like Mbetai totally back to Ngeh. Fobellah Nyochembeng begot Nkengafac who later begot Yochembeng II our present head of Bellah Ngeh family.

**Assessment Report by H Cadman: December 19th 1922 on
Bangwa Tribal Area. Division: Mamfe, Province:
CAMEROONS**

Statistics for the Village Area of Fontem Tribal Area of Bangwa

Village or Hamlet of Fomila

Total male = 72, Male on plantation = 08, Males taxed = 64, Females = 102, Boys = 64, Girls = 60, Total population present excluding (Number 3) = 290, Number of huts = 138, speaking fair English = 5, Catholic = x, Protestant = x, Capitation tax per adult = 5%. Total tax for Hamlets = ? 16. Goats = 138, Sheep, 131, swine = 53, farmers = 19, Palm oil industry = 23, Traders 19, Chiefs Chinda = 2,

List of Bellah Ngeh tax payers in 1922

- 1). Fobellah Nyochembeng
- 2). Nkemnjiamin Abenlebong
- 3). Asaha Efuetskeng
- 4). Mbencho Tazisong
- 5). Tanguayim
- 6). Ndemndoh nwoa-Asaha
- 7). Afendia Abanda
- 8). Tangap Nkengbeza
- 9). Tanguendong Aminateh
- 10). Nwafua Efuetsju
- 11). Ashu Nkafu
- 12). Defang Atemnkeng nwoa-Ashu
- 13). Banjo Atemajong nwoa-Ashu
- 14). Fualefac Thomas nwoa-Ashu
- 15). Nkengbeza nwoa-Ashu
- 16). Bebongachem nwoa-Ashu
- 17). Ajongako nwoa-Mefuet
- 18). Khungang Mocktoi
- 19). Nwoafua Aminkeng
- 20). Tambankwah
- 21). Agumndong Esoafua
- 22). Nkenganyi Aben
- 23). Ajongako Nkehmbeng
- 24). Njoya Esoa-Nkong
- 25). Taku Atabongawung
- 26). Nkafu Ashu nwoa-Fobellah
- 27). Anutatu Bechem
- 28). Nkohnkwoh Wetbeh Khumbah
- 29). Nojang Nzefeu
- 30). Nchenku

- 31). Ajongako nwoa-Ngunyi
- 32). Nkengafe Dominic
- 33). Nkengbeza nwoa-Ajong-Mefuet
- 34). Nkemnji Fonjia
- 35). Tanyiatem
- 36). Khungang Awungjia à Ngeh
- 37). Tanyisoh
- 38). Tohnya
- 39). Nyiawung Fonjia
- 40). Tabi Nchienze
- 41). Abofu Jonny
- 42). Ndifua Tazanu
- 43). Tache Ajenganyi
- 44). Nquifua Ndanne
- 45). Jam nwoa-Fondungallah
- 46). Nicolas Efuetnkeng
- 47). Njuh Betanga
- 48). Foku Asongache
- 49). Tabanku
- 50). Abohsoa
- 51). Tateh Nkembi
- 52). Tayong Asonganyi
- 53). Mbeteh Atabongafe Mمبر
- 54). Atabongankeng
- 55). Njuh Aya
- 56). Ajongako Nda-Soa
- 57). Folefac
- 58). Njikem
- 59). Esehsesey
- 60). Azangu
- 61). Nkengbeza
- 62). Alemnji
- 63). Nkunfunga
- 64). Mimbar Atemkeng

Source: - Government archives in Buea-cameroon.1

PART II - History of Bellah Ngeh

MIGRATION AND IMMIGRATION ISSUES IN BELLAH NGEH

Julius Afendia Fobellah

Introduction:

Immigration is the process by which people move to settle in areas that they do not belong to by origin. Migration on the other hand is the process by which people move out of their own areas of origin to some other places. The present population of Bellah Ngeh includes people who for various reasons immigrated to Bellah and over the years by dint of integration became a full flesh member of Bellah Ngeh community. Such individuals will enjoy all the privileges of a citizen. In Bellah Ngeh like in many other Nweh communities; the simplest method of achieving this integration has often been through marriage. The new immigrant would be given a wife or wives who are daughters of Bellah Ngeh. This method ensured that at the very least on the man's demise his next of kin would almost certainly be a son born of a Bellah Ngeh woman.

On the other hand, there are some instances where some Bellah Ngeh people migrated to other areas. As far as this class is concerned, the majority returned to their land of origin before their deaths. Where they did not return however nearly all, their descendants have maintained a close relationship with Bellah Ngeh. They have maintained this either by coming to marry daughters of Bellah Ngeh or by giving out their own daughters to come back and marry Bellah Ngeh men.

Many years ago when slavery and slave trade were still being practiced, some Bellah Ngeh men took slaves as wives. Some male slaves in Bellah Ngeh were also free and in fact did marry Bellah Ngeh women. When slave trade and slavery ended the slaves or their descendants had the option of returning to their families of origin or simply staying where they were. Most of those people simply remained but Forku Asongache, the first

leader of Nkwa dance group was one of those persons who returned under this category.

For the purpose of this article, all persons living in Diaspora but who can trace the physical presence of one or both of their parents in Bellah Ngeh and who continue to participate in Bellah Ngeh activities shall be considered as living in Bellah Ngeh.

The following Bellah Ngeh people migrated: -

Ajongako Tandungang. He was born by Mafua Anyiamin in the palace during the reign of Fobellah Ajongako. Because his mother was not married at the time, he was considered a palace child. However, when his mother later got married to someone from Lekong he was forced to follow her to Lekong. When he grew up he never returned to Bellah Ngeh. He preferred to stay at Lekong apparently because of the fertility of Lekong soil. His descendants in Lekong today include Njungo, Agombin, Ndeuzem, Aleateli, Nkengafac, and Waka Gregory. They are all considered as Lekong people.

Aben Nkenaganji. He was the son of Fobellah Ajongako. He left Bellah for Lekong where he settled and had a big family. However George Folefa (Nkemchap) one of his descendants is the only one who elected to return to Bellah Ngeh. He was buried in Bellah Ngeh when he passed away very recently.

Taziaong Mbencho.

He was the son of Mbeseha Aminkeng .He left Bellah Ngeh and followed one of his matrilineal relations to Lewoh. He remained in Lewoh until his death but continued to keep touch with his base. One of his daughters Ngolefac was married to Thompson Nyochembeng (RIP) and his successor Boniface Aminkeng was married to the daughter of late Mathias Mbonwoh another Bellah Ngeh mean.

Mbe Alemnji. He migrated and came to Bellah Ngeh from Njeh after briefly settling at Njentse. He came with his brother Ndifor Tazanu who later migrated and settled in Nveh Forchap. He got married and had Johnny Abofu. Johnny Abofu had the privilege of having three wives, (Nkokwo, Antonganwoa and Nkengbeja).

All the three wives were from Bellah Ngeh. All his descendants have remained in Bellah Ngeh and today enjoy all the amenities and rights of citizens of Bellah Ngeh

Mbe Nkemnjikem. Around 1860 Fobellah Ajongako gave one of his relations by named Nkengbeja to Mbe Njikem of Ndungated as a wife. Mbe Njikem and Nkengbeja had a daughter called Anjimbreh. Anjimbreh came back to Bellah Ngeh and got married to Mbe Nwafua Aminkeng. When Mbe Njikem died later he named Fonjia as heir to his throne. Fonjia then decided to return to his matrilineal family of Bellah Ngeh. When he came, Fobellah Nyochembeng settled him at Efem Bellah. As a sign of warm reception back to the family, Fobellah Nyochembeng gave him one of the Royal Princess Mafua Antongawoa as a wife. In addition to Mafua Antongawoa, Mbe Nkemnjikem had many other wives. When Mbe Nkemnji Fonjia passed away he left Ben Achenjang as heir to the throne. Coincidentally, Ben Achenjang by the time he succeeded Nkemnji Fonjia, he was already married to one of the grand children of Emah Bellah. Today all the descendants of Mbe Nkemnjikem Fonjia are full flesh Bellah Ngeh people.

*[*Editor's note: This account is very different from that contained in Nkemnji Achenjang, Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow. p 8. For example, the appellation, Nkemnjinkem is strange; even more so is Nkemnjinkem Fonjia]*

Akocha Hans was the last member of Mbe Nkemnji's family to immigrate from Ndungated to Bellah Ngeh in the late sixties. He was a nephew to Mbe Nkemnjikem and left Ndungated with his son Patrick Njikem because he had some problems with HRH Foto of Ndungated. He settled in Bellah Ngeh briefly and when he passed away his son Patrick Njikem moved to Mbalangi. Patrick remains an active member of the Bellah Ngeh community in Mbalangi today.

Mbe Sam Tambeuha and Maurice Tajocho.

Fobellah Nyochembeng got married to Asonganyi Tazi who was a senior sister to Sam and Maurice. It is as a result of this

marriage that Sam and Maurice followed their sister and settled in Bellah Ngeh. Both were originally people of Leyang Acha. Maurice Tajocho later got married to Martina Amindeh and Emenji Dorothy. The two wives were daughters of Bellah Ngeh with direct links to the palace. Maurice Tajocho predeceased his senior brother Sam Tambueha. Sam inherited one of his junior brothers widows (Amindeh). Sam later moved to Three Corners Ekombe where he lived until his death. All the descendants of both Maurice and Sam are full-fledged Bellah Ngeh people and participate fully in all Bellah Ngeh activities.

Mbe Nyiawung. Nkafu Nyiawung was one of the wives of Fobellah Ajongako. The said union was blessed with four children namely Ajongankwette, Zinkeng, Ajuamendem and that Mbe Nyiawung Fonjia and his brother Nchienze later migrated from Leyang Nkemasong to Bellah Ngeh. Many descendants of Mbe Nyiawung later married several royal princesses and other daughters of Bellah Ngeh. These include Mbe Simon Aka and David Atabong both of blessed memory.

Mbe Nkwetta-Ajap. He came from Njenacha apparently following marriage of junior Francisca Mbowoh to Mbeseha Ndemndouh. His father was the son of Fondong Atemkeng. His other junior sister Veronica Efuetnkeng later on divorce from Njenacha and got married to Thompson Nyochembeng. He himself was married to two Bellah Ngeh women namely Efuetnju the sister to Mbe Nwoafoa Nkafu and Nkengbeja daughter to Mbe Nonjang.

Mbe Nkemnkeng Michael. He was originally of Nveh Forchap. His father appears to have died when he was very young. He moved to some area with the present Douala vicinity where he remained for some years in search of economic opportunities. Apparently that early adventure did not pay well for him and so he returned back home. However, on his return from Douala he preferred to settle in Bellah Ngeh in the late sixties following one of his aunts Christiana Fonjia was married to Andreas Esagebui Tanguayim. He later got married to Dorothy Emenji, the daughter of Mbeseha. He passed away in 2007.

THE GENEALOGY OF BELLAH NGEH ROYAL FAMILY

Julius Afendia Fobellah

The Bellah Ngeh dynasty derived from the Lebang royal family whose founding fathers were Njiteuh, the father of Njinkeng, the father of Mankemkeng.

Around 1740, there was power struggle among the first leaders of Lebang: Fuareke a Bellua, Fuangung à Ntesah and Mankemkeng (Fontem) who were all living around the present Ntesah Bellah, Nche, Letia, Bellua, Mankem and Azi. Mankemkeng succeeded to dominate his contestants in the power struggle. To prove and consolidate his supremacy, he decided to make one of his sons by name Atemnkeng a chief whom he called Fobella. Apparently the name Fuabellah was a reflection of the role Atemnkeng played in the settlement of disputes that came to the palace. The said Atemnkeng was the grand son of Fuareke à Bellua- one of the original chiefs who was involved in the power struggle referred to above. It is believed that Atemnkeng would have been the heir to the throne of Mankemkeng but for his family connections with Foreke of Belua who had challenged Mankemkeng earlier. Mankemkeng died around 1760 and was succeeded by Abeatu Fuabeh (Fontem Abeatu), who is believed to have been the first King to assert total control over the whole of Lebang. He is therefore said to be the first paramount ruler of Lebang. Fua-belleh Atemnkeng who settled at Njenbeti (Present Efem Bellah) was not satisfied as he kept contesting to be of the same statue as his half brother. He requested for "Mbe-Ngwi" (tiger's knife) from Abeatu Fuabe (Fontem Abeatu) to no avail.

During one of his hunting expedition southward he came to a more fertile and less hilly forest with plenty of cashew nuts (Ngeh) that he baptized his hunting ground. While pursuing his hunting activity one day, he discovered marvelous and frightful waterfall that causes heart beat. He returned and informed people of a wonderful hilly waterfall that provokes fear "Lebe-alem", this name has undergone several articulations to be

become Lebialem today. He married and had two children, namely Nkenganzi and Nkengbeza. The struggle for more power ended his life prematurely around 1780. When he died his children went to Azi palace where Abeatu and later Nkwatebuku raised them.

When Nkengbeza, the heir to Fuabellah was matured enough, he carried his properties on one Amina Market day and was moving to an unknown destination to prove his discontent on Nkwatebuku Nyiawung (Fontem Nkwatebuku) delayance to settle him in his palace at Efem Bellah. This agitation highly motivated the later to summon the Lebang people for the construction of a new palace at Efem Bellah. This done, he was given four wives to start his life at the new palace.

His brother Nkenganji had one daughter who got married to an Essoh-Attah man. Together they had a son called Atemnkeng (Tanyi-Atem) who later returned to Bellah to succeed his grandfather.

Descendants of Fobellah Atemnkeng

- 1) Nkenganji. The descendants are today known as Tanyi Atem.
- 2) Nkengbeza the heir.

Descendants of Fobellah Nkengbeza

- 1) Aminkeng (Nkwetta) father of Alemji (Nkemnji Amin) father of Nkemnji Abeulebong father of Nkemnji Nguanyi, Alemji (Nkemalem) Nkengbeza William.
- 2) Anyiamin (Mafua) her mother Atabongnju (nwoa Njunge) was daughter of Fondongawung of Mengia. She delivered Tandungang Ajongako and Anahanze in the palace before marrying at Lekong and had Nkengbeza who first wife of Fontem Asonganyi. She accompanied the husband to Garoua on exile; Atemnkeng (Atem Anyiamin) Nkengafac (Nkeng Anyiamin) three children from the same mother were coupled to Fontem Asonganyi, but unfortunately childless. Agendia (Ageha-Anyiamin) the successor of Mafua got married to Ndifua Tazanu Fontem and had Asonganyi Johnson, Atabongankeng (Mafua-Ageha), Azinwoa, Atemafac Njinju and Ndobegang.

Tandungang Ajongako was father of Njungoh, Agombin, Ndeuzem, Aleateli, Nkengafac, and Gregory Waka.

Anahanze got married to Ngangallah and delivered Atabongankeng, Fuanyi, Nchumbongoh and Atemafac.

Atabongankeng mother of Ateafac (Nkematong à Njeih) Atemanju Anyiamin, Fualefac, Besso.

3) Anyiawung junior sister of Anyiamin got married to Forekefua and delivered Bezenchia mother of Mafua Nkengafac Fominka mother of Ebokem (Esuafua) HRH Fonjinju, Atabongafac Denis,

4) Aminkeng (Aseha) father of Mbehncho Tazisong, Tanguayim, Aseha Efuetskeng, delivered Asaha Ndemndou, Abeulebong, Aminkeng Thompson. Mbehncho Tazisong delivered Aminkeng Boniface, Atemlefac Henry, Ngolefac, Maurice Akamin, Zilefac (wife to Fossungu), Atabongawung, Anyiaka (Mother to late Christopher Njang). Tanguayim delivered Esagebui Andreas, Simon Nkafu and Nkengbeza (Mother to Bernard Nkeze) Nkiangu daughter of Aminkeng got married to Tatsea and delivered Mbe Nkemyiawung of Ndasoha and Anyi Nguago Catherine, mother of Agendia Bernard Abanda and Nkengafac Lucia. Mbeseha Ndemndou had Emilia Atabong, Mariana Ajap, Regina Emenkia, Anastasia Emenkeng, Dorothy Emenji, Dorothy Akateh, Agnes Nkafu, Alexander Ebesoh, Francis Ngomueh, Cletus Abofu and Timothy Mbeseha

5) Tanguendong father of Tanguendong Aminateh father of Ajocha mother of Dan Anulegeu and Aminateh Jacob father of Atemnkeng Monica, Agendia. Tanguendong grandson called Aminateh delivered Tanguendong Beso, Asonganyi, Ngulefac and Aminateh.

6) Ajongako (Ajonakeng meaning son of Mekeng) was the heir titled Fobellah Ajongako.

7) Efuetsnju (Nwafua Efuetsnju) maternal brother of Fobellah Ajongako and father of Alebebeah mother of Sam Efuetsnju (Nkemnju)

8) Njinkeng (Mbe) his descendants are at Nwehnchen

9) Akawung (Fuaka) of Nchen-Ndungated

10) Nkafu (Ashu) father of Bebongachen, Atemnkeng Defang, Nkengajong Banju, Fualefac Thomas, Zinkeng. Fualefac Thomas father of Ashu Nkafu Manfred father of Anyiatabong, Iya Elizabeth, Nkafu Bobo, Folefac, Ndemafia. Ashu Bebunguchem delivered Ashu Mbunya John, Nkengbeza, Ajongako, Aminde, Asonganyi, Ngenyi, and Aleabong.

11) Mother of Fonge Tatu Fongang, father Fonge Tajochmo father of Fonge Efuetngang. Fonge Tatu Fongang is grandfather of Chief Fuabe and Chief Forbin of Nwehbetaw.

When Nkengbeza died, Ajongako who moved from Efem Bellah to the present site called Bellah Ngeh succeeded him. The precise date of this movement is not known but he died around 1895.

Descendants of Fobellah Ajongako

1) Ajongako father Nkengbeza, Emilia Ajocha, Nyochembeng Thompson and Ajenanyi, James Fualefac, Tazanu Oneglass

Emilia Ajocha delivered Agnes Efuatlath, Ester Anyiacha, Ajongako Stephen, and Ndobegang Michael. Efuatlath mother of Fonjia John, Mbapndah Fidelis, Anyizi Theresia, Asongakap Camillus, Gladys Belanka and Njembong Denis. (Mbe Nkemnji Njembong)

Anyiacha, mother of Martin Awungafac, Elizabeth Mbuagetli, Emilia Ajocha, George Besongmbeng.

2) Nchetangwo mother of Ngulefac mother of Atemnkeng Peter and Nzengung David.

3) Yochembeng (Heir), Fobellah Nyochembeng.

4) Khungang delivered Ajongako mother of Emekia, Benahze, Emenkeng, Belifeu Philip and Motua. Kungang was also father of

Tanyinke Liambu father of Folefac, Nkolaka Mocktoi. He was the direct junior brother of Nyochembeng.

5) Aminkeng (Morfaw) father of Ajongako Philip, Nkafu Wilson (Mbe-Nwoafua) Efuetnju mother of Lebongwoa William (Nkwetta-Ajap) Aminkeng.

6) Ngebwung (Ankwetta) mother of Ajongako Ankwetta and Ndeloake. Ajongako Ankwetta delivered Asongafac, Emeawung Nyagwi Sylvester (Nkemasong) Lekeaka Joseph Asonganyi (Nkemleke)

Ndelohake delivered Anyifuet, Atemnkeng, Tonyah Cornelius (Nkemtoh) Efuetji, Anutalehe Thomas, and Njingwa.

7) Tambankwah junior brother of Ngebwung, father of Allaembong Johnson and Ngallia

8) Aguimndong (Essoa-Fobellah Nyochembeng, father of Asabawung who delivered Akongbebeh mother of Nkemnkeng.

9) Njinya (Anjinya) the daughter of Menkeng. She got married to Fotabongache and delivered Aminchap Clement, Emenkeng, Atabongawung and Margaret Ajongako.

10) Anyiatem mother of Ajongafac, mother of Atemnkeng Micheal, Nkengoa, Atabongawung, Emenkeng. Ajongafac delivered Leguachengake and Nkengafac mother of Nkengue Tazinkeng George.

11) Achendung Ajongako married Nkenmzi mother of Azoambeu father of Mbakem Agoambin Alex, Lekelefac, Asonganyi, Ngenyi and Nkengafac David Forjong

12) Alechongwa was sister of Anyiatem, Njinya and Achendung. She got married to Tamonkafu and delivered Tongwa, Alongamoh, (Tamonka, Asehngedoa and Nchangwoa Henry

13) Nkenganyi Aben father of kealebong, Nguatem, Mbohnwoa Alex, Fualefac George, Lechejie, Ekokobe. Zishu got married to Mbetacha and delivered Margaret Taku and Nkengacha

14) Nkongbue junior sister of Nkenganyi Aben married Fontem Asonganyi and delivered Abila Nwafua Fontem.

15) Ajongako Nkeh father of Akemati Gallus

16) Atemnkeng Nkeh mother of Nkenganyi, Aminmetse delivered Sabina Amin and Wilfred Nkafu and Ajongako Stephen delivered Dr. Tabi Johannes.

17) Nkeze Nkehmbeng junior sister of Ajong and Atem Nkeh who delivered John Nkeng, Njemteju Tache and Tazocha

18) Njoya Esoa-Nkong,

19) Taku Atabongawung brother of Esoa Nkong father of Ajongako, Bebonchu and Nkengeh William.

20) Nkafu Ashu father of Tagietnu John

21) Njuh Betangabeh brother of Nkafu Ashu

22) Atonganwoa (Mafua Atonga) mother of Anyiacha mother of Afangtenahe, Tateh Francis Mbuyah (Nkematemfua), Akawung Theresia, Aminkeng, Ajonako Linus and Mafua Atemnkeng mother of Ngoasong Clementine, Chapzi and Fualefac Michael. Akawung delivered Anyizi Bertha; Afantenah delivered Tajocho, Nkemi Vincent (Nkwetta) Anyiacha Florence (Mafua Fatabongche), Tangoalem Julius and Emeatem.

23) Ajongako (Ajong Atemfua) mother of Abila, Nkeyangawoa and Asongafac Joseph (Nkemajong).

24) Atehjeu mother of Nkengbeza mother of Anna Nguanyi, Asongacha John, Atabongawung Anastasia, Aminmetse Lucia, Cornelius Tajocho.

25) Anutatu senior brother of Atehnjeu father of Bechem John and Ngulefac mother Njang Fualem, Atemafac.

26) Azongankwetta mother of Mbetem, Nzengung and Ajongafac. Nzengung delivered Joseph and Abeza Christina, mother of Tendongwoa Iya Mary.

27) Nzinkeng sister of Azongankwete and mother of Nwethnjeh Nyiawung, Ajongako, Anumbondem, Awetndia. Nwet Njeh Nyiawung, father of Ntukem, Ngoasong mother of Chief Forchap Fuandong., Nkengbeza Justine, Achaleke Ben, NKAFU Cerol, Nwetndah Christopher, Cecilia Bequike. Ajongako delivered Achaleke, Nkafu, Abondjo, Ngulefac, and Folefac.

28) Nkohnkwoh Wetbeh Khumbah father of Ajongako, Amingwa David (Nkemamin), Atemnkeng, Nkongzumbu, Ajuamendem, Efuatlacha Augustine (Nkemfuatlacha), Chapbeza. Nkemamin delivered Betangabe, Ngunkeng Josephine, Awungfuet Margaret (Mrs. Mbeseha) Nkongazembu, Nkokwoh, Ajongako Emmanuel and Njulefac Martin (Nkemamin).

29) Nojang Nziefe father of Nkengbeza Helen Michael Ndemnduo, Ajongako John, Amindeh (wife of late Nelson of Letia and Agendia who was also married to Emmanuel Ndeloh of Letia too.

30) Nchenku father of Efuatlach Alexander and Alemnge.

Fobellah Ajongako died in 1895 and was succeeded by Fobellah Nyochembeng I

Fobellah Nyochembeng I - Descendants

- 1) Mafua Emefuetnkeng
- 2) Efuetsju mother of Njemfehe Michael, Achatia Michael Ekokobe (Nkemache) and...
- 3) Ajuamendem wife of Fontem Asonganyi
- 4) Ajongako father of Nkolaka (Asaba)
- 5) Nkengafac Dominic (Heir)
- 6) Atongangwoa mother of Anumbondem, Njembong Sylvester, Nkenganyi (Anyinkeng-Antonga), Alemka Paul (Nkem Alemka)
- 7) Aminkeng mother of Nkematabong Nkemtoh and Nchabenu

- 8) Nkohnkwoh mother of Atehawung, Alemnji David, Zilefac and Nkengbeza
- 9) Aletanu mother of Asaha Fongonya
- 10) Asongafac father of Nkengafac Dominic, Ajongako, Anyinke, Achangnwoa, Emeafuet Gladys, Kealebong....
- 11) Achankeng Donatus father of Anumbondem Sylvester, Anyiawung, Nyochembeng, Nkeze
- 12) Asong Wilson father of Nkengafac, Nyochembeng, Aminateh...
- 13) Nkengbeza Alongu mother of Mbonwoh Judith, Nyochembeng Sylvester (Nkem Nkengbeza), Tayimaka Fowang Julius, Emeji Lucia, Awungjia
- 14) Asonganyi Alongu mother of Achankeng Ndongko and Nkenganyi Mbekem
- 15) Akawung (Nkemaka) father of Nyochembeng Theodore, Alongu, Efuetskeng
- 16) Aminkeng Richard Morfaw father of Alemafac, Nyochembeng, Atabongawung, Alongu
- 17) Nzobella Charles father of Ajongako, Ajoacha, Alongu, Anyinji, Atemafac.
- 18) Atabongawung mother of George, Nyochembeng, Ntumbong, Asonganyi.
- 19) Atemafac Josephine (Emelong) mother of Nyochembeng, Alemajoh, Antoh, Aminkeng.
- 20) Nkengbeza Wiliam (Nkwetta) father of Mefuet, Atabongankeng, Asongtazi
- 21) Tajeangeh Johnson father of Nyochembeng Brian, Penny...
- 22) Ajuamendem mother of Nyochembeng
- 23) Akate Martin.
- 24) Njua-Atem mother of Nkengbeza, Nyochembeng
- 25) Nkafu Sophina mother of Emeafuet Agartha
- 26) Asongafac.
- 27) Akeanwoa
- 28) Ankwehetebeu mother of Nyochembeng Nkemnji who lives in Kwakwa.
- 29) Nkenganyi Julie mother of Mary Menyi, Vincent Fotabe, Peter and Paul Fotabe, Ajongako Alex Fotabe, Louisa Fotabe
- 30) Asong Patrick father of Nyochembeng and Julius Efuetskeng
- 31) Ajongako Margaret mother of Patrick Nguatem
- 32) Bezieme Joseph father of Nyochembeng
- 33) Ndemazie Robert.

- 34) Nkengache senior sister of Asong Wilson and mother of Khumbah John Ekokobe and Eme-êh
- 35) Anyifuet mother of Keahlebong Nkefua, Nkafu, Nyochembeng and Ngulefac
- 36) Anyingu mother of Nchienze, Mefuet, Atabongankeng
- 37) Ngubejo Francis father of Nyochembeng, Anumetse.
- 38) Nkengazem Robert father of Nyochembeng
- 39) Alongamoh
- 40) Atabongankeng mother of Bejanji, Nyochembeng, Nkembi
- 41) Dobegang...
- 42) Anyiawung Theresa mother of Nyochembeng and Anyimbeza
- 43) Emefuet wife of Chichi mother of Meven, Akawung Chichi
- 44) Awungnkeng Hans father of Nyochembeng, Bekongncho, Emeka, Nkengafac, Fuatoh
- 45) Abelatejeu
- 46) Lekeaka Gilbert

He died in 1947 and was succeeded by Fobellah Nkengafac

Descendants of Fobellah Nkengafac

Below are the children of Fobellah Nkengafac. Some of those listed below are already dead but we leave their names for the purpose of merely connecting them to the family line.

- 1) Ndemaze Gabriel
- 2) Nyochembeng Daniel (Heir)
- 3) Atemfua Thecla (Mafua)
- 4) Aminawung Grace
- 5) Njikem John
- 6) Afendia Julius
- 7) Nkengafac David
- 8) Njulefac Boniface
- 9) Nyochembeng Edward
- 10) Nyiawung Alexander (Nkemnyiwung)
- 11) Ntebenu Dorothy
- 12) Abenampeh
- 13) Angebem Pamela
- 14) Akamin Bernard
- 15) Nchabejong Clement
- 16) Nkengafac Esther
- 17) Antongawoa
- 18) Atabongafac Nicolas

- 19) Ajongafac
- 20) Atemafac Michael (Nkemnkeng)
- 21) Fualefac Francis
- 22) Nkafu Thomas
- 23) Nkemcha Peter
- 24) Meafuet Gertrude
- 25) Atabongafac George
- 26) Folefac Henry
- 27) Abohnwoh Carnisia
- 28) Nkafu Justine
- 29) Tabreajeng Anastasia
- 30) Nkengbeza Evelyn (Ankwetta)
- 31) Ndemateli Ernest
- 32) Ntawmbu Thecla
- 33) Belleallehe John
- 34) Agendia Gallus
- 35) Anyiacha
- 36) Ngulefac Oliver
- 37) Ndeuzem Pius (Asaha)
- 38) Aminkeng Nwoafua Richard
- 39) Efuetngwa Diana
- 40) Mankemnkeng
- 41) Tazocha
- 42) Asonganyi
- 43) Mbuajeu Ambrose (Nkemajeu)
- 44) Emenkeng Martina
- 45) Anyileke Esther
- 46) Chichi Sandra
- 47) Nkafu Nicodemus
- 48) Asonganyi
- 49) Nchetangwoa
- 50) Bezanji Sophina
- 51) Nwoazoake Nazzarus
- 52) Nkengbeza Emmanuel
- 53) Ajongako Christopher (Nkwetta)
- 54) Nwiecha Helena
- 55) Defang Walters
- 56) Asongtia (Wetmbeh)
- 57) Chateh Ndem
- 58) Betekong
- 59) Njualem Michael (Nwoafua)

- 60) Atemnkeng Charles (Nkematem)
- 61) Bezetanga Thaddeus
- 62) Awungafac Dominic
- 63) Nkengbeza Zach aria
- 64) Achangwi Evelyn
- 65) Anumdem
- 66) Asongfuet
- 67) Alahambong
- 68) Nwilefem
- 69) Bezeanya Paul
- 70) Njilefac
- 71) Nzengung
- 72) Tendongafac Stella
- 73) Alletanu Danilius
- 74) Anyingu Babiana
- 75) Anyiafua
- 76) Nkengafack Joseph
- 77) Bebonchu Mariana
- 78) Atemnkeng Stephen
- 79) Ngoasong Nazarus

THE GLORIOUS YEARS OF FOBELLAH NYOCHEMBENG I

Julius Afendia Fobellah

The history of Bellah Ngeh stretches through the reigns of Atemnkeng, Ajongako, Nyochembeng 1st, Nkengafac and now Nyochenbeng II Each of these patriarchs played an important role in shaping events during his reign. However, we have elected to dwell on the reign of Nyochembeng 1st because of his very special role in shaping certain major events that took place during his reign. His personal style of leadership helped shape some of these events to a degree that many decades after his demise, Bellah Ngeh community as a whole continues feel the impact. Nyochembeng was born around 1860 to Fobellah Ajongako and Efuethnkeng just after Ajongako and his people had migrated from Njenbetii to Ngeh. Nyochembeng was the third of five children born to Ajongako and Efuethnkeng. History has it that his first two elderly siblings passed away on delivery and that is a possible explanation for his name that can be interpreted in Nweh to mean “Shinning sun in the dry season”. It will be recalled that in those days the rate of infant mortality wash high and in many instances unfortunate mothers stood the risk of losing all their kids at birth or soon after. In the case of the young Nyochembeng, since his two elderly siblings had passed away, the general fear was that he too might die. After him, his mother had two other children namely Aminkeng who later became Mbe-Nwafua Aminkeng and Kungang Mohtua. It is estimated that he took over the throne 1895 when his father Ajongako passed away.

His reign that lasted from 1895-1947 though short was very eventful in the development of Bellah Ngeh. During this period, he: -

- Sought to defend and protect Bellah Ngeh lands
- Extending a welcoming hand to the new Western culture and religion.
- Was fascinated by foreign culture through the acquisition and initiation into Ekwah Society (a dance that he acquired from the Efiks; a tribe in Nigeria).

Nyochembeng's desire to protect and maintain the unity of Bellah Ngeh lands led him in 1922, to lodge a complaint to the colonial for Mamfe Division that some Lewoh people including Mbe Taku and Akemnda of Njeh, Fombin of Mbin and Fonkem of Tanoh had trespassed onto his land and were exploiting same without paying any royalties. He asserted that the boundary between Bellah Ngeh in Lebang and Lewoh Chieftdom was the river Nche Mbeuh. He lost the case essentially because of the lack of cooperation from Fontem Asonganyi and also because the administrator held that there was not sufficient evidence to substantiate the claim that the land was a lease. . It is this ruling by Cadman that established the present boundary between Lewoh and Lebang (See Cadman's 1922 assessment report).

Still in this area of land protection, he consolidated his grip on that portion of forest that was acquired after the escape of the Bayangs across river Betenten. That area referred to today as "Mbin Bellah" is where the entire Bellah Ngeh farming community today depends.

At the time that the Nweh people in general and the chiefs in particular were hostile to implantation of foreign western culture and religion, Nyochembeng openly embraced them. When the first primary school was opened at Azi in 1922 he enrolled his son and would be heir Nkengafac Dominic in the school. This was very unusual given the fact that at that time, it was inconceivable for a chief to send his child and worse still the heir to school. This unusual step taken by him eventually led to Fobellah Nkengafac being the first Chief in Nweh not only to receive formal education but also to hold a public service job prior to ascending the throne in 1947. His readiness to accept and integrate western educational and religious beliefs is further demonstrated not only by his willingness to cede parts of Efem Bellah to the Catholic Mission where they built St. George Catholic School and church. He also gave another piece of the land to the Baptist Mission where they built a church just next to the palace.

Nyochembeng encouraged trade between his subjects, other Nweh areas, the Bamilekes to the East and Nigeria to the West.

It was through these commercial contacts that his people came into contact with the Efiks who introduced them to their cultural dance of Ekwah which Fobellah Nyochembeng later acquired. This acquisition eventually earned him the title "Ayangame". Up till date, no other chief in Nwehland uses that title. It is said that it was in imitation of this act that Fontem Asonganyi later acquired the Ngwei or Ekweh dance from a certain Abelleyang who was the leader of the Ebeagwa of the Bayang ethnic group. Contrarily to the Ekwah group however, several other people have acquired the Ekweh or Ngwe dance too.

Fobellah Nyochembeng will always be remembered for the acquisition of Nkwaah dance group, Mbin Bellah Farm land, his readiness to accept Western culture and religion and his failure to establish Nche-Mbeuh as his official boundary with Lewoh autonomous chiefdom.

Bellah Ngeh in retrospect- A critical look at the Cadman Assessment Report of 19th November 1922

Timothy Mbeseha

Almost all what we know of Bellah Ngeh about a century ago is embedded in oral history. Because the stories are essentially handed down through oral tradition, it is clear that not all the facts can be relied on. After all, unwritten history often has flaws. This is because human memory is short and facts get jumbled up with the passage of time thus making it less reliable.

The German colonial administration of Cameroon lasted just from 1884-1916. Infact, when German rule ended the Germans had just begun to have a strong foothold on the interior of the Bangwa land. German colonial records on Bellah Ngeh are to say the least sketchy. When the British took over the territory under mandate of the League of Nations in 1919, several colonial administrators visited the area. However, the most senior of these colonial visitors was the Provincial Assessment Officer in the person of Mr. Cadman. During these visits, official records of any official business done were kept. Most of those documents can be found today in government official archives kept in Buea. In the case of Bellah Ngeh, two of those official documents prepared by the British colonial administrators and found in the Buea archives today shed some light on Bellah Ngeh at the time. In all those documents, Bellah Ngeh is generally referred to a hamlet of Fomila. The first of those documents dated 27th of September 1922 was the demarcation of the contested land boundaries between Fomila (Fobellah in Lebang) on the one hand and Fonge Njeh and Fonkem of Tanu both of Lewoh in Fotabong chiefdom on the other hand.

The second document dated November 19th 1922 is dedicated entirely to what is describes as “The assessment report.” This report is the first written detail report of Bellah Ngeh that we have been able to lay hands on up to date and contains important information on the area. This is part of the reason why we thought it necessary to make some analysis of the said document. A careful study of that report reveals that Bellah was

a very vibrant community with a population of about 290 people. It is our belief that the population might have been much more than that given the perception that the people had of any census at the time. There was always a tendency to declare as few people as possible because the general perception was that a higher figure would mean a heavier tax burden to the chief who had to account to the colonial master. On the record however, Bellah Ngeh tax assessment totaled sixteen pounds five shillings. Bellah Ngeh together with Fossung came second only to Fonge which was assessed a tax of seventeen pounds five shillings. In any case of the 290 people declared 64 were taxpayers, 19 farmers and 19 traders. A good number of people were involved in animal breeding, keeping goats, sheep and pigs.

Another interesting thing revealed by this report is the fact that the administrator identified at least 5 people who spoke the English language fairly well. Even though the report does not name the 5 persons who could speak English fairly well, the unanswered question is where these persons learnt the English language. The only credible possibility of where these persons learnt English is that they were certainly amongst the 19 traders, some of whom traveled far West to Nigeria to buy and sell goods including slaves. This is because our nearest English-speaking neighbor was and still remains Nigeria. The story has been told elsewhere how the Bellah Ngeh people acquired Nkwa that was originally an Efik dance. The Efiks are an ethnic group in Nigeria. This point of view is further buttressed when we look at the claims that some Bellah Ngeh people acquired foreign names like Defang, Jonny, Taku, Bechem, Tabi, Jam and Ashu when they had contacts with the Efiks and other Ejagham and Ibibio tribes of Nigeria. Almost everybody will agree that those names are not Nweh generic names. In any case, if this story of name acquisition has any reliability to count on, the Cadman report of 1922 will go further to confirm that the Nkwa dance was acquired by Bellah long before colonial rule.

A closer look at the report gives us an idea on how population movement has occurred in Bellah Ngeh since 1922. The report shows for example that Tache Ajenanyi was a taxpayer under Bellah Ngeh. Tache Ajenanyi was an immigrant from Attah of

Forcha. Apparently, when he first arrived he was settled by Fobellah and recognized as a Bellah Ngeh man. Today, the descendants of Tache Ajenganyi and more specifically his heir Tache Njemteju pays allegiance to Nche Beruri. There is no convincing evidence as to when and why the descendants of Tache Ajenganyi switched allegiance from Bellah to Nche Beruri. The report lends further credence to other immigration/migration issues in Bellah Ngeh. Ndifua Tazanu for example who is listed as number 42 in the report has since migrated to Nveh-Forchap. The same story can be told of Mbencho Tazisong who is listed as number 4. He too migrated to Lewoh and today lives there. In the same vein, people like Nquifua Ndanne (the father of Charles Ndanne) migrated at a later date to East Cameroon. An important thing to note here is the fact that despite the migration of some these people to different areas, in the majority of cases their descendants have continued to maintain close ties to Bellah Ngeh. Another important significance of the report is that it helps some of us to trace their roots and or attachments to Bellah Ngeh.

BELLAH NGEH OUR LAND*Amin John Atabong*

We, Bellah Ngeh Youths stand in defense of our land.
 We shall defend it to the last, for good and for worst.
 We stand in defense of the land our forefathers left behind.
 The Glorious and generous gift of God.
 We shall defend the land from Generations to Generations.
 We shall raise the land from nothing to something.

Bellah Ngeh, the Peoples' land.
 The Land of Unity, Love, Prosperity and Positive Progress.
 The Land of Generosity and Hopes of brighter days.
 BNDA Leading the race, we shall succeed.
 From the Fuandem/Nteseh Hills,
 Through the Plateau of Atungong to the Lowlands of Ngeh,
 The Land smiles; A smile, which awaits its DEVELOPMENT.

How long would it or should it wait or hope?
 Who else will do it than us? No one!
 Together we stand, Together we are on the move!
 A move without an end. .
 Forward EVER, Backward NEVER.
 Let us together, the Young & the Old; the Rich & the Poor;
 The Able & the Disabled, make it a place,
 A place worth LIVING,
 A place of attraction, a place to be.

Our DEVELOPMENT is imperative; let no one put it asunder.
 Make it a pride to say I was or I am part of it.
 Just as Chickens have comfort from mother (hen), in times of
 danger,
 One's home does better and more.
 A hut at home is better than mansions elsewhere,
 And a day spent at home is far better than a hundred days in
 Foreign Land.

Make our children know home and be part of it.
 A falling tree not replace reduces the life span of a forest.
 Lets make a Union Circle of Bellah Ngeh,

An All Bellah Ngeh Peoples' Union [BAPU) before it's late.
We should not be like one who lives by a riverside
But washes the hands with Spittle.
Let's not be beggars in our own Land.
May God be our Guide?

PART III - Integrated Development

Development and Investment Incentives

FOBELLAH YOCHEMBENG II DANIEL

I feel privileged to be given the opportunity to address you on development issues in Lebang in particular and Menji municipality in general.

This is my first trip to the USA as Mayor of Menji Council. Thank you all for the phone calls, e-mail messages, and letters of support following the unfortunate misunderstanding that resulted from the SDO's action last May. I would like to take this very unique opportunity to assure you that at this point in time, there is relative stability to make the SDO, Mayor and Councilors to continue working collaboratively.

To me, this meeting and discussions are important because Menji Council considers LECUDO as an important partner in the development of the council area. LECUDO and other Fondom organizations within Menji Council area of jurisdiction are important development agents in the villages that make up the municipality. Because of this, I would like to suggest that issues and recommendations made here be considered as covering the whole municipality. This is because even though Lebang constitutes more than 60% of Menji council, issues of development that confront Lebang are similar to those of Esoh Attah and Njoagwi. Besides, the development of Menji is important to the entire Division since Menji is the administrative Head Quarters of Lebialem. In this regard, I wish to extend very special recognition to LECUDO-USA for the role they are playing in the development of Lebang. I further acknowledge LECUDO's contributions, most particularly in the construction of public toilets at Azi, the attempt to rehabilitate Fiangep Bridge and the assistance given to some schools.

Ladies and Gentlemen

For any development to take place some basic pre-conditions must exist. These include the availability of electricity, pipe borne water, roads, health facilities and schools. Let me announce here that some of these basic amenities exist in Menji council area. Investors coming to our area for development should not nurse the fears that their children or dependants will not have schools to attend or Health Centers to take care of them when they fall ill.

Electricity

I am proud to inform you that Menji council area has electricity in some of its villages. Today, we can boast of electricity in Menji and its environs, Azi and its environs, Bellah Nganga and its environs. The electrification of Esoh Attah is currently underway and hopefully in the next few years we should be able to have electricity in that area too. Presently, there are streetlights in some parts of Menji, with the intention to expand it to Seat of Wisdom College, Government Bilingual High School (GBHS), and the Fontem Cooperative area. Despite these signs of positive development, a lot still remains to be done. Overall, less than 15% of Lebang homes have electricity. Before leaving this point, let me seize this opportunity to congratulate and encourage the Bellah Ngangah people for the wonderful work they are doing in promoting community based and funded electrification project for their village. I encourage other communities to emulate this wonderful example.

Pipe Borne Water

Menji Council area has pipe borne water in Menji town and other areas of the municipality including Nwanchen, Letia, Atulia, Bellah Ngeh, Nchenfem, Azi, and Bellua. However, the system that supplies Menji and Azi is obsolete. It was first conceived more than forty years ago. Presently, thanks to the benevolent assistance of the Canadians, and the relentless efforts of Professor Tambo Ivo (Fuafeah) the system is being upgraded, including the construction of a water tank around the SDO's

residence. It is our prayers and hope that more assistance is needed to make the entire system sustainable for the whole city. Because the projects are community based, consumers do not have to pay any monthly bills. I also want to recognize those of you who have contributed to the realization of these projects. A lot more still has to be done in order to bring clean and portable water to all our villages.

Telecommunication and Roads

Gone are the days when people had to leave Menji and travel to Dschang only to make a phone call. Thanks to the presence of a few Telecom Companies, the situation has greatly improved for Lebang and Lebialem. But more needs to be done. Our schools still need basic equipment such as computers, so that our kids can begin to better prepare themselves for meaningful competition.

Our entire area has problems of active rivers and difficult terrain. This makes it difficult to construct reliable motorable roads. Despite these challenges, different villages through communal efforts have over the years spared no efforts in the construction of some seasonal roads. These are not the best but remain useful especially during the dry season. I want to congratulate LECUDO-USA for the efforts they have put in this area.

One of the most effective ways for LECUDO to participate in the development of Lebang is to channel its contributions through the different village development organizations where such projects are located. This method ensures sustainability.

Schools and Health Facilities

I would like to thank the Focolare Movement and the Catholic Mission for their wonderful contributions in the areas of education and health in the Menji Council area. Our Lady Seat of Wisdom College Fontem remains one of the best performing Colleges in the country. Mary Health of Africa Hospital Fontem also remains the most viable health institution in the Division.

However, we need to do more in the area of Public Health in order to effectively tackle the problems of killer diseases like HIV/AIDS and Malaria. Menji council has the stigma of HIV/AIDS not only in Lebialem but also in the whole of Cameroon. Part of the explanation for this is the fact that most HIV/AIDS patients from outside Lebialem retire home shortly before their deaths. Despite this, we are not oblivious of our responsibilities towards our own HIV/AIDS patients. We are called to help not only the patients but in many cases the children orphaned by this killer disease. While we need more Health Centers, we need to keep the existing ones running. Consequently we need both human and material resources.

In principle, Lebang has enough schools to cater for the interest of their school-aged children. But these schools are plagued by problems of bad classrooms and understaffing. As we speak, the people of Njeih and Atulia are respectively constructing the newly created Government Technical College (GTC) and Government Bilingual Secondary School (GBSS). I want to appeal to LECUDO- USA to continue to assist these two young institutions because our brothers and sisters back home are already stretched to near breaking point.

Mr. CEO,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Permit me to venture further in this discussion and suggest some areas of development that are a priority for us:

- As stated above, our road network is less than desirable. The poorly constructed roads need regular maintenance. The people look up to the Council to assist them in this area. However, the Council has very limited financial resources. This is why I am here making an urgent appeal to LECUDO-USA and other well-wishers to help us acquire a bulldozer and a tipper with which we can regularly maintain these roads.

- You all know that even though we have electricity and water in our area, to tap those facilities into individual homes/ compounds remains expensive. Our settlement patterns that favor living in individual compounds separated from one another by long distances make it difficult to tap both water and electricity into such houses or compounds. It is my strong recommendation that we encourage our people to regroup under community resettlement schemes so that electricity and water can be easily and cheaply accessible.

I am glad to announce here that any community within the Menji Council area that wishes to organize a village resettlement project will have the support of the council.

- Presently, our people have to travel either to Dschang, Bafoussam or Douala to buy both building materials and chemicals for their cocoa farms. It will be a good business venture either individually or collectively to open commercial stores and distribution centers for some of these essential goods in Menji so that the population can be able to buy with less difficulties. This is certainly a very lucrative venture, the market is assured and the Council will do everything to encourage and support such projects.
- Another area where you might be looking at is animal breeding. Today, if one has an occasion at home and needs say a goat, sheep, pig or cow, one would have to travel several miles to Dschang and even beyond. We do not need to suffer like this knowing that it is possible to rear goats, sheep and pigs in our own area. A bit of support materially, morally and financially from you will certainly encourage the parents, brothers and sisters back home to undertake such ventures. Here ANUCAM Establishment at Catholic Mission Bellueh Fontem has set a glaring example worth emulating. The sale of a goat, sheep or pig in September will help pay school fees for children returning to school.
- In the past most of our area was famous for producing palm oil. Palm oil is not only consumed widely at home but is also a source of immediate cash. Today, we are no longer producing palm oil because most of those

palm trees are old and less productive. It is possible for us to individually or collectively replace the old palms with modern and more productive ones. This requires money and technical know-how that our parents back home don't either have or are not properly informed about. I believe strongly that you are capable of transforming our barren hilly landscape into more productive small and better yielding oil palm plantations. The Council stands ready to help in these and other areas that can make life more sustainable.

- I wish to recommend that some of you venture into fishery. Fish is a rare commodity at home. Many years ago a few brave citizens constructed fishponds. They succeeded to a point but because of the poor technical know how at the time, their efforts were short lived. It is time we establish fish farms again and I assure you that the Council will do everything in its powers to encourage such efforts.
- Menji town in particular and the municipality in general need modern houses. We count on you to come back home and build both in Menji and in your different areas of origin. In the past some of the complaints have been that building plots are not easily available in Menji. I am glad to announce that Menji Council is currently developing a plan to create more Council layouts. As soon as this is done, I believe the issue of the lack of building plots will be resolved. While waiting for that I strongly encourage those of you who already have building plots in Menji to put up modern houses on those plots.
- Information dissemination on investment opportunities both at home and abroad is vital for our hard working population. Lebialem Community Radio is helping us a great deal in these endeavors but needs financial and technical support to upgrade its capabilities. I call on you to spare no effort in assisting this young institution.
- Menji Telecommunication Center currently provides the sole Internet link with the outside world. But we do not have enough computers and other technical equipment to make it more functional and reliable. I call on

LECUDO-USA to give any assistance they can to assist this young institution because this is an important incentive for foreign investors in our area.

Thank you for listening and for following through with the suggested investment initiatives that will help promote development in Menji Municipality and Lebialem Division.

Thank you and May God Bless you All.

BELLAH NGEH INTERGRATED DEVELOPMENT

Timothy Mbeseha

Within the past 25 years, several development projects have been initiated and carried out in Bellah Ngeh. Some of these projects have been relatively successful while others have had some problems. Some have gone unnoticed while others have had a tremendous effect on the lives of the inhabitants of the area. Regardless of any difficulties, the Bellah Ngeh people have to continue in these development efforts for several reasons. One of the reasons why these efforts must continue to be encouraged is the fact that the development of Bellah Ngeh is today inextricably linked to the growth of Menji- the Divisional Head Quarters of Lebialem Division. Bellah Ngeh is less than seven Kilometers from the central town of Menji. Today, Bellah Ngeh remains one of the very few areas for the possible expansion of Menji Township. It is almost certain that not very long from now the problem of where to locate some government services in Menji would arise. Bellah Ngeh remains one of the most viable alternative areas for the location of some government services. In fact Bellah Ngeh is included in master plan of greater Menji drawn up in 1975. Few people realize that the expansion has already started. How many people for

example know that the houses of Harry Ncha, late Francis Tate, and late Martin Fonju, located on the main road just after Seat of Wisdom College are in fact in Bellah. We need to maintain this momentum and continue so that tomorrow when Bellah Ngeh effectively becomes simply a quarter of Menji just like Molyko is a quarter of Buea, we can all proudly say that we foresaw it coming and took the necessary action to preserve whatever we were able to.

The Bellah Ngeh Development Association (BNDA) champions development in Bellah Ngeh. BNDA took its present form in 1983. In addition to BNDA, other affiliate groups take part in the planning and execution of different development projects in Bellah Ngeh. These groups include Bellah Ngeh Youth Association (BENYA) and the Bellah Ngeh Women Common Initiative Group. While BENYA is essentially the Youth Wing of BNDA, the Women Common Initiative Group is more of an NGO dealing with women affairs. As we go further into this discussion we would see how sometimes these separate groups carry out independent development projects and how sometimes they act under the umbrella and direction of BNDA. The most important thing among these groups is that all their activities are geared towards the development of Bellah Ngeh. As mentioned above, it is only a question of time before Menji Urban expansion and development encroaches into Bellah Ngeh. When that reality occurs, BNDA might be completely overshadowed. The Menji Rural Council will inevitably come in and start doing things their own way with or without our consent. That is just the truth about how rural communities are often absorbed by urban development. That is a fact of rural development that makes Menji today no longer just the traditional territory of chief Fomenji. When the time comes and the council expands to Bellah the DO and Mayor would do whatever is in the interest of the Menji Rural Council. Bellah Ngeh may be treated at that time as no man's land. The same system applies to all other urban centers in Cameroon and so we are not going to be different. In the paragraphs that follow, we shall be discussing the development projects that Bellah Ngeh has initiated so far. In that discussion we shall show how far each project was executed and try to identify what could be done to complete or improve the

project at a higher level. In this light, we believe that this document should be very helpful to us and our partners in the development of Bellah Ngeh in particular and Lebialem in general. These partners include, the Administration, Non Profit Organizations (NGO) the Menji Rural Council and other private entities of funding organizations and donor groups.

BELLAH NGEH ROAD NETWORK

From Menji, one can get to Bellah Ngeh either by going through Nchembin i.e. using the Menji- Besali Road or by using the road that takes off around Mr. Paul Alemnkia's or Nkemalem's residence. Either way, the road will take you round the whole of Bellah Ngeh. The road is about seven to ten kilometers long. In addition to this main access way into and out of Bellah Ngeh, there is another short but very important road connection that starts from the Palace Gates (Nchomah) and runs through Nchotanju, Pa Andrew Nyochembeng and resurfaces opposite Colonel Edward Fobellah's residence. This portion of the road which is about two Km long is generally referred to as the U Road. The first phase of Bellah Ngeh road project started sometimes in 1978. That phase runs from Nkemlekeaka (Dr. Asonganyi) to the Bellah Ngeh palace or Emah Bellah. This phase was entirely done with financial contributions from Bellah Ngeh people at home. In addition to the community financial contributions, the people also contributed a lot of voluntary human labor to the realization of the project.

Around 1983 the Bellah Ngeh people living out the village started contributing towards the financial costs of the road project. Despite all these efforts, the second phase of the road did not begin until 1989 thanks to 5000 000 CFA financial aid from the Cameroon Government. The Bellah Ngeh community remains very grateful to one of their dedicated sons Richard Fobellah (RIP) who initiated the application for the government aid and followed it up to fruition. Other than the said aid from the Government, records show that Dr. Ndobegang, a son of Bellah Ngeh and an MP for Lebialem (1997 -2002) contributed 100,000 CFA Francs (One hundred thousand Francs CFA) to assist in the construction of some road culverts. Thanks to the financial aid referred to above and the out of pocket contributions from those

in Diaspora; by 1991 the road had been completely traced through Atalule. At this point the road remained impassable mainly because of the fact that no bridges were built and also because a heavy rock blocked the road at a portion just before Ncheshi. By 1993, all the bridges and coverts had been built. The rock that completely blocked a portion of the road as referred to above, was partially chopped down thus making it possible for small vehicles to maneuver their way through that part of the road to Bellah Ngeh Palace.

The approximately two kilometers U-shape road portion mentioned earlier was entirely planned and carried out in 1997/98 by the Bellah Ngeh Youth Association (BENYA). Thank God that our youth took this timely action which has gone a long way to deflect criticism from some circles that despite their contributions, they were not benefiting enough from the road project. We thank them greatly for their action. As a sign of appreciation for this timely gesture, the National Executive of BNDA approved and gave BENYA the sum of 100.000 CFA Francs for this good job.

The entire road described above was essentially a self-reliant project. A DVD produced by BNDA documents the role of the children, youth, women, elders and Bekem Bellah Ngeh at one of their regularly scheduled work session. Because of the ageing population of the Bellah Ngeh people, it is not feasible for the people to do community development with the same zeal as they use to do twenty years ago. The road still needs a lot of work to make it passable all year round. For now the road can be adequately described as a track on which only 4-wheel drive vehicles can manipulate their way through during the dry season. The condition of the track during the rainy season is deplorable and therefore much remains to be done.

This road remains a problem because:

1. It has never been graded since construction more than twenty years ago.
2. The cutting of gutters to direct run off rainwater has never been professional done.

3. The rock that originally blocked the road was only partially chopped down.
4. There is still need to completely blow off that particular rock and many others in order to be able to enlarge the road.
5. Some portions of the road need to be re-constructed. This second construction will cut down some very steep and rough gradients that render the road near impassable especially during the rainy season.
6. It is estimated that we might still need about 10.000 000 CFA francs to make the road reasonably passable.
7. Regular maintenance of the road is crucial especially because some vehicles going to Besali or lower Mundani prefer to use the portion that passes through Mr. Paul Alemnkia rather than use the Nchembin section.

The National Executive of BNDA and the Bellah Ngeh traditional Ruler are encouraged to take up these problems with the district Administration, Municipal authorities, our local political Representatives and any other groups or persons of good will that can be helpful in providing funds to be used in resolving the road and similar development related problems.

AFRICA 2000 ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECT NETWORK

Africa 2000 Network was an environmental protection project. It was partly financed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) based in Yaounde. Mr. Timothy Besingi who was the regional Director of the program in Cameroon first introduced it to Bellah Ngeh in 1991. Mr. Besingi is an in law to the Bellah Ngeh people. His wife comes from Bellah. In his capacity as an in law, he attended the General Meeting of BNDA, which took place in Bellah Ngeh on the 19th of March 1991. During that meeting, he informed BNDA of the program after listening to the many environmental challenges the people faced. On the basis of that information, BNDA drew up a project proposal and sent to the Yaounde office of UNDP for funding consideration. After a careful and competitive review, the project was approval for partial funding. Initially, the project envisaged the planting of trees, which in addition to protecting the natural environment would have served as better quality wood for cooking. The project was slow to take off because the people were not

sufficiently sensitized and therefore not properly educated on the project goals and implementation. Secondly, BNDA erroneously thought that they could create a sample tree plantation of their own. The main problem here, as it turned out, was that the project ignored the land tenure system, which exists in Nweh, and even though this might be outdated, the people still cling to it because no effective alternative has been found. Because there was no vacant land on which such a communal tree plantation could be started some people suggested that we go and create the plantation at Mbin- Bellah. This was senseless because we could not be planting trees in an existing forest. At the very least the forested areas of Bellah did not face any environmental challenges then. In any case the tree-planting project was started at Efem Bellah and Ntselebeh. We pay tribute to Nkemchap Joseph Mbiao (RIP) for being the only person who appeared to have had a real understanding of the project and voluntarily offered his back yard at Nchelebe for this project. Despite these efforts, the project did not work essentially because the women in their practice of shifting cultivation inadvertently burnt down the trees. Today, there is little evidence left of the hundreds of trees that were planted under this project.

The second phase of Africa 2000 network project started in 1993. This phase comprised the raising of a palm nursery with the intent of eventually replacing some or all of the wild oil palm trees that dominate the landscape of Bellah Ngeh. The idea was that with the ageing population, it would serve better as individuals could easily harvest the palm nuts around their compounds and thus have easier access to palm oil which is widely consumed in the area. A nursery of 3,150 young palms was raised. While it was agreed that individuals would be able to plant a few modern palms around their compounds, we also believed strongly that it would be good to have a small demonstrative palm farm to serve the entire community. This also ran into difficulties as we soon discovered again that there was no community land on which to create such a communal farm. In Bellah Ngeh every piece of land belongs to somebody even if that person lives hundreds of kilometers away and probably has not been on the land for decades. The second problem was the fact that in Bellah Ngeh most compound

owners do not necessarily own the palm groves that surround their compounds. Thus whereas the compound owner could plant food crops, he did not have the right to plant oil palm trees. The planting of palm trees was therefore going to be in conflict with the interest of the owner of the wild palm groves around the compound. Therefore whereas compound was allowed to plant economic crops like coffee, cocoa and other food crops they were not permitted to grow palms trees. In the end, BNDA actually planted about 300 palms at Atalulo but this was only possible when the Organization had the written consent of the chief. The consent itself was not possible until the chief received financial compensation for court cases he claimed he had single handedly fought over the years to secure the piece of land. It is very interesting to see how many Bellah Ngeh people still ignorantly cling to theories of wild palm groves as the base of their economy whereas very few people today climb those palms. It is also interesting to note that a good number of them fail to see that cultivating alternative economic crops like cocoa and coffee cannot favor the survival of the wild palm trees which in each instance are simply destroyed in the process of cocoa or coffee cultivation.

Many lessons can be learnt from the Africa 2000 network project. The first lesson is that Bellah Ngeh people like others in Nweh are still very attached to the old and outdated notion of land ownership. We cannot develop as a community if each person remains attached to the notion of "ancestral compound ". We must learn to accept the fact that for proper development to take place we have to sacrifice and be ready to forgo outdated notions of land ownership that we have held for centuries. This becomes very important in cases where there are no houses or compounds indicating the habitation of the place. The doctrine of our ancestral fences is sometimes too old and ought to be reviewed if we really want development in our home territory (Bellah Ngeh). We need to be reminded that the customary land tenure system is no longer good law especially after the Cameroon 1974 Land Law. As we woo the administration to bring services to Bellah, we must be ready to relinquish old habits and customs. Looking at Menji, Seat of Wisdom College, Mary Health of Africa Hospital and other facilities in Lebialem today, we acknowledge that those structures or services are

standing on lands that were once private compounds and that there was little rancor about compensation when those lands were taken for common use.

In conclusion, despite the setback with the Africa 2000 environmental project, today in Bellah Ngeh nearly everyone understands the need to grow improved palm species instead of relying on the wild palms that our forefathers left many years ago. It has been a good learning process and we are better prepared to embrace more development projects for the growth of Bellah Ngeh. The protection of the environment, which the project was originally intended to achieve, remains successful to a limited extent. Most Bellah Ngeh today has groves of planted trees around their individual compounds. Most of these planted trees today serve either as building materials or fuel wood.

NGEH PLANNING AREA

As far back as 1989, BNDA agreed to reserve Ngeh as a planned residential area essentially for the citizens of the area. This meant that the acquisition and construction of houses in Ngeh was to be regulated. Conditions were put in place for the acquisition of plots and similar regulations were laid out for compensating people who had interest in any economic crops that would be destroyed in the process. A Committee was also put in place to oversee the implementation of that resolution s of the General Assembly of BNDA. It is interesting to note that long before the creation of Lebialem in 1992, Bellah Ngeh Development Association (BNDA) was able to foresee this problem and that they had taken such decisions. BNDA was already foreseeing the expansion of Menji to eventually include parts of Bellah Ngeh. Today with Lebialem Division in place and Menji changing from Sub divisional to Divisional Head Quarters, the planning of the entire Bellah Ngeh becomes more necessary and urgent .The problem of people grapping plots or illegally putting up houses in Bellah Ngeh can only arise if the present national executive of BNDA neglects to properly enforce the Association 1989 resolutions. Those resolutions received the backing of the chief. The issue of building a church for example that appears to be posing a problem between Pa Hans Awung

and the chief should not have arisen. The allocation of a plot for a church or any other project should have been done rightly by the follow up committee and whether the place chosen was around Pa Hans Awung's compound or elsewhere should not have been a big problem at all. If the children of Pa Hans Awung intend to build their own house or houses in Ngeh that should not be a problem because the original plot allocation document of 1989 clearly spells out what to do in such circumstances.

It is therefore strongly recommends that:

1. The planning that was originally limited to Ngeh should now be expanded to include the upper areas of Bellah. Such planning should now take into account places of public interest like churches, schools and dispensaries. We have to be constantly reminded that if we fail to do some of these things by ourselves, some one else might eventually impose them on us.

2. We should begin to exploit the level land where Lebialem fall starts for touristic purposes. We should be careful not to fall into the trap of some of our brothers or sisters who lay unsubstantiated claims to parts of Ngeh. It is probable that some of these claims are purely for selfish gain and not for the common good of Bellah development.

3. We should begin to see into the possibility of getting a caterpillar to cut out some streets in the planning area. This will not only encourage development e.g. the laying of water pipelines and the putting of electric poles but will also help prevent the possibility of people encroaching on official roads.

4. If this proposal sounds difficult for us to implement, we can ask assistance from the town planning authorities and the Council in Menji. BNDA-USA has step up to assist in the survey and demarcation of the Bellah territory.

WATER PROJECT.

Bellah Ngeh water project was started well back in 1996. This is essentially a project, intended to bring clean and safe pipe borne water to Bellah Ngeh. Despite all efforts to get some financial

assistance from government or other development agencies almost nothing came in except for 250,000 CFA that was given as aid from the Menji Rural Council. Apart from this little sum, the project is essentially self-reliant. The bulk of the money has been contributed by Bellah Ngeh people. In all the project cost more than 7000,000 CFA Francs in cash and voluntary man-hour services of community development. The water project is complete in the sense that standpipes can be found throughout Bellah Ngeh. Though standpipes are found all around, the flow of water is not as regular as one would expect. Much more work still has to be done around the water catchment and storage system to have an all season water supply system in Bellah Ngeh. The effect of global warming has not spared Bellah Ngeh. The effect of climate change and global warming has resulted in a negative impact on the Bellah Ngeh streams and even the Lebialem Falls. The need to improve and make this water system working at all times is compounded by the fact that most inhabitants of Bellah Ngeh are ageing out fast and thus more and more of them are finding it difficult to go fetch water from streams and springs as was the case a few decades ago.

Problems and Suggestions:

1. The water catchment needs to be redone to ensure constant flow of water into the main tank especially during the dry season. The new catchment tank should take into account an eventual population growth in and around Bellah Ngeh in the next ten to 20 years. The possibility that some government services might be located in or around Bellah Ngeh in the future should also be taken into consideration. The location of such services will undoubtedly cause a rise in the population of the village. This will probably cost more than about 2000,000 CFA francs in cash and numerous man-hours of community labor.

2. The main Pipe should at least be a 60mm in order to eventually serve the growing population, some of whom might want to tap water into their private homes. This replacement of pipes could cost more than 5000,000 CFA francs.

3. A better maintenance system needs to be put in place. Just saying that those living around a water point should replace a broken pipe is a recipe for failure because that puts responsibility on no one. It is suggested that the water committee should work out a more effective way of funding and carrying out repairs otherwise the whole system might break down within a few years. It is our believe that after this community self help project and a more aggressive maintenance approach, we would probably be able to get some funding from competent Government Ministries and NGOs.

ELECTRIFICATION PROJECT

The need to continue the expansion of electrification to cover the entire Bellah Ngeh is urgent since, electricity now only ends at the Bellah Ngeh Palace. We have to take a more aggressive approach by contacting the relevant authorities and pleading for assistance. Electricity is a catalyst for development everywhere in the world and there is no reason why we should not benefit from it like other Cameroonians are benefiting already. Our plan is that electricity should be able to go through Nchomah, Atiamoh, Nchotanju, through Ataluri, from Mbe Tate to Nkemalem (Mr. Paul Alemnkia). The current system where people have to place their electric meters more than 500m away from their compounds or houses and use crude, non permanent cables to connect electricity to their compounds is not acceptable. This is not only unnecessarily expensive, but terribly unsafe, dangerous and risky. Customers are paying for the cost of electric consumption and should receive better service from the government and the local energy supply company who have the monopoly of this service.

BELLAH NGEH WOMEN COMMON INITIATIVE GROUP

Bellah Ngeh women are currently registered and established under a common initiative group since 1995. They collectively own farms of cassava and other food crops in Efem Bellah and beyond. They also try to market their produce in a cooperative style and reinvest for the benefit of their members. These cooperative endeavors ought to be encouraged. One way to encourage the women here is to supply them modern farm tools.

They will equally need things like wheel trucks to help them in transporting their produce and most importantly they need a cassava grinding machine to help them transform cassava into garri. In order to effectively manage their own affairs, the leaders of this group need to attend seminars organized for this purpose anywhere in Cameroon and even beyond.

In an effort to improve their marketing strategies, the group recently constructed a warehouse at Ngeh .The building when completed will serve both as a warehouse and a retail store. The retail store will sell fresh farm produce to the public and other goods to members at reduced prices. For this to be successful, the store would also need a fridge in which to keep fresh farm produce. If encouraged and well managed, this could end up being an ideal venture for other Lebialem women to emulate. It is also envisaged that the building would eventually comprise a Social Center where young female school dropouts could learn some trades like sewing, knitting, typing and financial management. Finally, the building would comprise an entertainment center for social occasions like marriages. For now, the building still needs the following work: -

1. Plastering
2. Ceiling.
3. Painting
4. Equipment and maintenance

It is estimated that about 3000.000 Francs would be needed to complete and equip the building.

DISPENSARY

Although Bellah Ngeh is not very far from either Menji or Mary Health of Africa Hospital, we believe that it would be necessary to have at least a dispensary in the village. This will be able to administer First Aid before patients are transported to the hospital. This is particularly important when we consider that the population is fast ageing with an average age of a majority of people above 60 years now living in the village. The young, strong, ones are out of the village, maybe in the coastal plantations, struggling to survive. For now most serious patients have to be transported on local stretchers by less serious

patients to either Menji or Nveh health facilities. A dispensary or a first aid post will help take care of the less serious patients and provide preventive care.

DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

1. BNDA constitution as amended 1983.
2. Minutes of Bellah Ngeh enlarged executive meetings.
3. A valedictory address by MNF Ashu 1999.
4. BNDA Water Project Financial Report .2005
5. Message from President General BNDA to the BNDA-USA convention in Boston (2006).

Education in Bellah Ngeh

John Nkemnji

The growth and impact of formal education on the individual, families and the Bellah Ngeh community is very similar to the impact on other Lebialem families and communities, with the main exception being that people in Bellah had a good role model, their traditional ruler, (Fobellah Nkenglefac) who believed in the benefits of formal education. First, I wish to define in a broader sense the meaning of education. The term education is often used to refer to both formal and informal transmission of a people's culture or way of life from one generation to the other. Education therefore covers a broad range of experiences, from formal learning either in an institution like school or in the workplace (apprenticeship) to the building of understanding and knowledge through day to day experiences at home, in the churches and in other community social institutions. Education and schooling are therefore not synonymous. There are usually several overlaps between informal and formal education. A people's culture is usually passed on to the younger generations through informal settings.

Education is a lifelong endeavor. Formally before western education, Bellah had a number of 'griots' as teachers, counselors and spiritual leaders, who conserved and passed on the ways of the people by memory. They were tutors for young princes and princesses and also of the whole village. They were the ones who acted as archives, recorders of the customs, traditions and village policies. They are the ones who could easily tell how much money (goats and pigs) were paid as bride price for each of the newly wed, which herb is used for which illness and which skull belonged to which ancestor. The "griot" also referred to in current educational literature as the "ancient sage" and sometimes called "retainer" answered questions or formulated opinion regarding the nature of our ancestry and creation, the concept of good and evil, witchcraft, evil and magic. Old and gifted village sages taught twins and prospective brides in formal settings.

In Bellah Ngeh, young children grew up learning acceptable civic and social skills and sex roles from their parents and elders. The female children grew up working closely with their mothers in the kitchen, on the farms, and in a variety of female clubs and dance groups. They learned from a very early age how to cook and manage issues related to domestic science and to female personal hygiene, how to farm and fetch food for the family. They were taught how to behave in a manner that is acceptable by the culture and in general, Bellah Ngeh women were noted to make very good spouses and housewives.

The male children went through a similar form of education leading to initiation into manhood after circumcision. The boys spend more time with their fathers. The male children received instruction on how to trap, hunt, tap wine from the raffia or oil palms, and how to take care of the goats, sheep, pigs and other domestic animals. It was their duty to grow up learning about social class and rank, and about the trade of their fathers. If your father knew how to carve or grow coffee, the male child was sure to grow up with similar skills. Some parents earned a living by working the palm grove and climbing tall palms and harvesting the nuts and producing oil for sale. The male children grew up as apprentices assisting their parents and learning the same trade. Some parents who were traditional doctors taught their male children the tricks of the trade. It is usually said, "like father, like son." I grew up learning to sew because my father was an expert tailor. I also learnt how to play the guitar because I spent a lot of time with my uncle who was a great guitar player -- playing from one dance to the other in the area. You will recall how great the children from Ema Bellah are on the traditional dance floor. They caught that from the father.

Apart from learning the trade of the parents, children spent the evening hours together with their parents learning how to tell stories, how to sign and how to compose and solve riddles. The stories and riddles usually related to popular cultural beliefs on creation, work and life. The stories also help the children learned about rituals, lineage, family values, sex roles and the invisible world or the world of the ancestors and the gods.

Bellah Ngeh people explored the outside world for a variety of reasons before the establishment of western formal education in Lebialem. They went to work as cooks and plantation laborers in the coastal areas of the southwest province. Some of them went beyond the country to Nigeria to trade. These adventures and trade practices were lucrative but dangerous. They took tobacco products for sale in Nigeria and bought gunpowder and other foreign goods for sale on their return to Cameroon. They learned to speak Calabar, Bayang, Pidgin, and the Germany languages. They adopted names like "Oneglass, Sixpence, Jampassdie, and Mantrouble,"

It is a delight to point out the leading role that both Fobellah Nyochembeng and Nkenglefac played in the advancement of formal education in Bellah Ngeh.

A combination of factors appear to have given Bellah Ngeh people an early lead in Western style formal schooling -- not only in Lebang, but almost in Nweh in general. Bellah Ngeh people had the luck of being geographically near many educational institutions. R.C.M. School Fontem, opened in 1947, is on their land -- Efem Bellah. All the educational institutions located in or around Menji are within minutes of walking distance from Bellah Ngeh. Their children can attend these schools without the extra financial burden of going to pay bus fares, house rents or food and feeding budget like those of other children who have to commute long distances to school. By 1922, when the first school was open at Azi, Fobellah Nyochembeng I was a lover of schooling despite the misgivings of most traditional leaders like Fontem Asonganyi at the time. The fact that Fobellah allow young Dominic Nkeng who would later become his successor to enroll in the first school is proved of the fact that he was a visionary. After the school in Azi was shut down Fobellah permitted his young son, Dominic Nkeng to travel far away out of the village to Mamfe for further schooling. It was in Mamfe that young Dominic completed primary education.

Mr. Dominic Nkengafac who later became chief, in keeping with the tradition of his father, always encouraged Bellah people to send their children to school long before he succeeded his

father. He used his education for very practical purposes like starting and maintaining written records of every child born in Bellah. He equally read the bible and encouraged his children and family who attended school to do the same. He saw a great need for education. In fact, nearly every male child born in Bellah Ngeh since 1940, went to primary school following the encouragement of the traditional head. Details of Fobellah Nkenglefac's contributions to education will be dealt with in a separate chapter, but it will be good that we reproduce here what his philosophy of education was.

In 1990, he held a central committee meeting of the Bellah Ngeh Development Association (B.N.D.A.), and made a proposal that B.N.D.A. could open a college for Bellah children. To emphasize this point, he said; "I believe that education is the foundation for personal development in Cameroon. It is through it that the child of a common man can become a doctor, the son of a laborer a headman, the child of a farmer a D.O., the child of a commoner can even become the President of a great nation!" He illustrated his views by citing how people like the late Martin Foju, P.M. Kemcha, and Martin Amin (Secretary) had climbed to the pinnacle of Nweh society even though they were not children of the rich or of the powerful class.

In 1995, Bellah Ngeh children formed the largest single village (from Lebang) represented in seat of Wisdom College. Because of all these factors, Bellah Ngeh people today are found in key positions in a variety of prestigious professions like; school teachers, college tutors, University professors, medical doctors, military and security officers, Magistrates, lawyers, football players, sports-hero, church ministers, and mountaineers.

BNDA-USA is planning on starting a study center, library or examination preparation facility in Bellah Ngeh. The center will be equipped with textbooks and used by the community and visitors alike. The center will be equipped with a variety of teaching materials, books, computers and computer programs that would help students study for various certificate examination. It is the desire of a few volunteers to equip the center with literature on the Nweh culture and instructional programs that will help users prepare for external examinations

75 🖱 Bellah Ngeh

like: ACT, SAT, TOEFL, GMAT, GRE, A/L and O/L examination. This effort fits well with the vision of late Fobellah Nkeng when he encouraged BNDA in 1990 to open a school or college in Bellah Ngeh.

Health care in Bellah-Ngeh: Then, Now and Tomorrow

Hilary A. Aroke, MD

Introduction

Health is a fundamental human right whose attainment is an important worldwide social goal and inequality in access to health care within any society is therefore politically, socially and economically unacceptable. Yet, the concept of health is misunderstood by a vast majority of people in our society.

In this light, the World Health Organization has defined health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Similarly, traditional medicine (TM) has been defined as "the medicine that refers to health practices, approaches, knowledge and beliefs incorporating plant, animal and mineral based medicines, spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises, applied singularly or in combination to treat, diagnose and prevent illnesses or maintain well-being".

Traditional medicine is not taught as part of the regular medical school curriculum in most countries. Instead, it is studied as a field of medical anthropology called Ethnomedicine. These studies include both written and orally transmitted knowledge and practices. The emphasis here is on perception and context of the use of TM. As a result, TM has not been subject to any rigorous scientific evaluation.

The role of Traditional Medicine in Cameroon

Traditional medicine plays an important role in the lives of most Cameroonians. However, knowledge about the healers' techniques and practices is limited. Observational studies suggest that most TM practices in Cameroon are characterized by illiteracy, secrecy and the healer's personal involvement. Illness is seen from a holistic point and divination is evoked as diagnostic tool. There is widespread reluctance to submit these

healing practices to standardization as this may demystify the work. In addition, we observe wide variation in personal abilities and quality of services rendered to the sick and poor. Despite these limitations, TM still provides the health needs of a substantial proportion of the population. In some communities, for example, up to 60% of the population uses traditional medicine. In fact, some traditional healers have well-recognized competence to cure certain illnesses. For example, TM is often used to deal with symptoms of mental illness and traditional midwives provide essential maternal and child healthcare in many poor communities. In Bellah Ngeh until recently, the use of traditional medicine to treat even multiple and complicated fractures by Massa Nka was thought to be unrivaled.

A brief history of Traditional Medicine in Bellah-Ngeh

Long before some of our parents and grandparents were born, the Bellah-Ngeh area was one of the few Lebang settlements south of Azi. Like many other areas of Lebang and Nweh-Mundani, parasitic and diarrheal diseases were rampant. Later on, it was an ironic coincidence that Bellah-Ngeh and surrounding areas like Nveh, Nche- Beruri, Nche- Mbin and Menji were referred to as the “mbe-mbe” or mosquito country. In addition, pipe borne water, sanitation, good nutrition, and maternal and childcare were visibly absent. There were no health centers or hospitals. Mortality rate was very high in all areas and knowledge about traditional healers and their abilities was limited because information about them was disseminated almost exclusively by word of mouth. Similarly, the primary means of transportation was trekking through footpaths in the jungle and/or farmlands. It was commonplace for the entire community to forgo farming for several weeks to attend to burials and funeral ceremonies. This trend lasted for decades and in the early sixties, chief DN Fobellah urged school age children not to forgo classes for these burials.

With all these health challenges, some natives and settlers of Bellah-Ngeh acquired the ability to treat or heal various diseases and conditions using traditional methods that have since been

handed down from generation to generation. Prominent amongst the latest generation of traditional healers were following:

Mbe Tanyiache (Late) - Was the older brother of Mami Ngu-Anyifuet. He built his hut in Ngeh where late Pa Mathias Mbonwoh resides (alias Mbe Benyeng-anchu). He was endowed with the ability to heal young children. He gathered his medicinal herbs from around his compound and the undergrowths of Ngeh. He could heal children with diarrhea, anorexia, convulsion, malaria and excessive nocturnal crying. He equally practiced soothsaying: he could look into a calabash of clear water and his palm and be able to reveal to the parents of an ill child, whether the child would survive the illness or die. He also dealt with infertility problems. His practice was handed over to his heir.

Late Mbe Tanyiatem (Nkongmih)- He was a son of Fobellah-Atemnkeng. He lived at the foothills of Effem-Bellah, across from the present compounds of Mbe Rona and Mr. Michael Leke. He was the lead-priest to all the existing shrines in Bellah. He prepared “ndwat”, “belang” and “afuh-kang” for various traditional rituals. Whenever a household was blessed with twins, he performed the traditional rites, which were meant to initiate the twins and their parents to “ndia belem”. His successor, Hans Folefac (RIP) healed children with febrile illnesses. Mbe Tanyiatem was also known to treat wheezing (agang-abenchi).

Late Mbe Tate-Njinya - He was one of the first settlers of Ngeh. He quickly earned his reputation in the Nwehland for his curse-breaking and cleansing rites; performed on the occasion of suicide and other accidental deaths like fire, drowning, thunder, and motor vehicle accidents. He handed this practice to two of his children - Pa Tateh-Agendia and Mr. Harry Nchanwah. Today, these two perform these rites in Nweh and beyond.

Late Mbe Teeh lived in Mbin-Bellah area that borders Nwenchen and upper Bayang. He was gifted in the healing of various kinds of sprains and fractures. He could perform an operation to mould and rebuild fractures in a matter of weeks or months depending on the severity of the fracture. Some of his practices are seen today in the form of shoulder sling for collarbone fractures, a cast for fractures of long bones and techniques used in chiropractics.

Cola-nut was routinely used for massage. Similar techniques are used today in physiotherapy. For severe fractures a fowl is inflicted with a similar fracture and both a cure concurrently. Most fractures and sprains resulted from slip and fall, broken tree branches, and later on, car accidents. He passed his art to his off springs. His late heir resided and practiced “leben” healing in Fiango-Kumba. In Lebang, Mami Nkafu Fobellah (alias Massa Nka), one of the daughters of Mbe Teeh, was one of the most popular “leben” healer in the 1970s and 1980s. Why her practice suddenly died remains a mystery to many who knew her and revered her success as a traditional healer.

Late Joseph Banju Mbiaoh - His father was never a traditional medicine man. He professed to have acquired his mystical traditional medicine practices from India. He had such charisma and force that no ordinary person possessed. He carved wooden objects and is said to have had the power that he could order them to dance or jump up and down. He used herbs as protective shield against witchcraft. He could bind destructive forces coming to an individual or an entire community. Samuel Lemondem (RIP) claimed similar healing powers and the ability to command carved wood objects.

“Mankwih” (traditional midwives): There were two prominent traditional midwives who were gifted in attending to childbirth - Egeh Lereazoha (wife of Nkemnji-Fonjia) and Ewah Alongu Fobellah. It is breath taking to listen to elders talk about rudimentary practices offered to women during labor, delivery and immediate postpartum, not to talk of breastfeeding practices and overall childcare. For example dried bamboo blades were used to cut the placenta and circumcised the baby boy and sharpened bamboos used to pierce the ears baby girls. Nkemnji-Fonjia (RIP) practiced circumcision and handed it down to Pa Johnson Aroke who continued the practice until the advent of modern medicine. Shaving knives and razor blades were used when they became available.

Other accounts suggest that Pa Sam Nzungung treated Bellah-Ngeh for epilepsy. Mbe Chap-Ajong treated ear infections; Pa Morfaw-Aminkeng treated convulsions/fever and Fotabong-ache

treated victims of snakebite. Martin Akawung (RIP) had some expertise in eye problems.

Can traditional and modern medicine work in tandem?

There are four broad legislative approaches to traditional medicine.

1. Exclusive system: modern medicine is granted a legal monopoly (US).
2. Tolerant system: recognizes modern medicine and condones the practice of TM (UK).
3. Inclusive (parallel) system: Allows both systems of medicine but requires formalization as a precondition to recognition (India).
4. Integrated system: integrated training and practice occurs (China).

In our Cameroonian society, western medicine is generally well accepted for certain indications. However, there is a sense of laissez-fair attitude towards TM. Sometimes, patients use TM simultaneously or sequentially with western medicine overtly or secretly. The choice of their initial care provider is influenced by perceived quality of care, household income and size, cost of health care, distance to the provider as well as social and cultural factors.

The Coming of the Focolare Movement to Fontem

In the late 1950s and early 1960s lots of Lebang people were dying from malaria, sleeping sickness and childbirth. Infant mortality was in the 90th percentile. In 1964, HRH Fontem-Defang sent a strong delegation bearing gifts to Julius Peeters, the then Bishop of Buea Diocese, earnestly asking him to pray to God to save his people from extinction by disease.

The Catholic Mission decided to create a parish in Menji and build a hospital and a secondary school in Fontem. To achieve these noble goals, Bishop Peeters turned to the Focolare Movement. Chiara Lubich accepted the invitation and dispatched a group of doctors (including Dr. Nicasio) and nurses to Fontem. Upon arrival, they opened the first dispensary in the private house of late Martin Forju. However, apprehension of the motives of the Focolare Movement, land disputes and serious

disagreement as to where to locate these institutions would initially delay the opening of the main hospital.

The local Member of Parliament at the time, Hon. PM Kemcha, favored the location of the hospital at Njah - near Azi. But apparently the land in Njah was not going to be enough to accommodate all the envisaged institutions. The second option was Nveh where both the hospital and secondary school are presently located. Bishop Peeters (then Bishop of Buea) accompanied by some experts visited the two proposed sites. They preferred the second site but there was no motor-able road to facilitate the transportation of building materials. At that point, Chiefs DN Fobellah, Forchap and Fotabonganche volunteered to mobilize their people to construct a road from the then NA School Fontem to Nveh. Chief Forchap provided most of the land for the hospital. In return, chief DN Fobellah offered some farmland to his wives.

In the end, the three chiefs prevailed over the powerful politician, PM Kemcha. It will be recalled that Mr. Kemcha was not just a local member of parliament - he was also the Minister of Finance and thus the Vice Prime Minister of West Cameroon. Hon. Kemcha and his supporters were infuriated by this decision and cried foul against the fact that the hospital was going to be built in the "Mbe-Mbe"(mosquito) area. The rumor was that the apparently warmer and swampier Nveh area provided a better breeding ground for mosquitoes than the cooler upper lying Azi-Njah area. However, there is no doubt that the Bellah-Nveh-Nchembin-Ncheberuri and Menji had the same health problems like other areas of Lebang in particular and Nweh-Mundani in general. As a matter of fact this reference had more to do with politics than the fact that the area might have been infested with more mosquitoes.

Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom College, Fontem was finally opened and Chiara Lubich laid the foundation stone of the hospital in 1966 in Nveh. Since then, Mary Health of Africa has played a key role in the successful eradication of sleeping sickness in Fontem and neighboring Bayang, Mbo and Mundani areas. It is now considered a renowned hospital with special interest in tropical diseases. The infant mortality rate that was in the 90th

percentile in the 1960s is now estimated to be 2% and the new fight against HIV/AIDS has begun with the creation of an HIV treatment center. The prevalence of HIV was estimated to be 9.8% in a recent survey sponsored by LECA-USA, Inc.

Primary Health Care and the Need for a Health Post in Bellah-Ngeh

Primary health care is essential health care based on practical, scientifically sound and socially acceptable methods and technology made universally accessible to individuals and families in a community through their full participation and at a cost that the community can afford to maintain at every stage of their development in the spirit of self-reliance and self-determination. It is considered the first level of contact of individuals and their families with the health system in developed countries.

The promotion and protection of the health of a people is essential to a sustained economic, social and cultural development. In this regard, before the arrival of Mary Health of Africa, chief D. N. Fobellah (a retired Police officer) had taken his initiative to educate his subjects on the hygiene of safe drinking water. He also opened the maiden Bellah-Ngeh First Aid box that contained bandages, cotton, iodine tincture and basic medicines such as Nivaquine, M&B, etc... We now know that people have the right and duty to participate individually and collectively in the planning and implementation of their health care. The people of Bellah-Ngeh at all levels must therefore collaborate in introducing, developing, and maintaining a primary health care system that satisfies its needs.

In general, one can say that Bellah-Ngeh people have benefited immensely from its relative proximity to Mary Health of Africa. However, Mary Health of Africa cannot satisfy our future primary health care needs. We are now facing new challenges with a growing and ageing population, urbanization and a rapidly rising incidence of HIV/AIDS. Therefore, it is time to set up a Bellah-Ngeh Health Post so as to bring health care closer our people.

Based on the 1978 Alma-Ata Declaration, such a health post must meet some basic requirements, namely:

1. Reflect the economic, social and cultural believes of Bellah-Ngeh people;
2. Address the main health problems by providing preventive, curative, and rehabilitative services;
3. Include at least: education concerning prevailing health problems and the methods of preventing and controlling them; promotion of food supply and proper nutrition; an adequate supply of safe water and basic sanitation; maternal and child health care, including family planning; immunization against the major infectious diseases; prevention and control of locally endemic diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS; appropriate treatment of common diseases and injuries; and provision of essential drugs;
4. Promote maximum community self-reliance and participation in the planning, organization, operation, and control of primary health care, making fullest use of local resources available;
5. Rely on local health workers, including nurses, midwives, auxiliaries, and community workers as well as *traditional practitioners as needed*, suitably trained socially and technically to work as a health team and to respond to the expressed health needs of Bellah-Ngeh community.

Although Greater Bellah-Ngeh chieftdom consists of Mbin-Bellah (settlement to the southeast of Lebang Fondom), Effem-Bellah, Atuteng and the Ngeh mainland, the best location for a health post would be in Ngeh to serve Ngeh, Njeih-Lewoh, Nche-Beruri and Nche-Mbin. The health post should be set up to do home visits for the frail and elderly, school visits, vaccination campaign and treatment of minor illnesses in the center with timely referral to Mary Health of Africa, General Hospital - Fontem.

References:

1. WHO/UNICEF - Primary Health Care: Report of the International Conference on Primary Health Care, Alma-Ata; USSR, 6-12 September, 1978
2. Mafua Anangong & Pa Johnson Aroke: Interview on Traditional Healers in Bellah-Ngeh, 2007 (Unpublished)

3. Tembon AC. Health care provider choice: the North West Province of Cameroon. *Int J Health Plann Manage.* 1996, 1(1): 53-67.
4. Heinzerling LM. Attitudes of traditional healers towards Western medicine in rural Cameroon. *Trop Doct.* 2005, 35(3): 161-4
5. Nyika A. Ethical and regulatory issues surrounding African Traditional Medicine in the context of HIV/AIDS. *Developing World Bioeth.* 2007, 7(1): 25-34.
6. Van Bogaert DK ethical considerations in African Traditional Medicine: A response to Nyika. *Developing World Bioeth.* 2007;7(1):35-40.
7. Puckree T, Mkhize M, Mgobhozi Z, et al. African traditional healers: what health care professionals need to know. *Int J Rehabil Res.* 2002; 25(4): 247-51
8. Peu MD, Troskie R, Hattingh SP The attitude of community health nurses towards integration of traditional healers in primary health care in north-west province. *Curationis.* 2001; 24(3): 49-55.
9. Van der Geest S. Is there a role for traditional medicine in basic health services in Africa? A plea for a community perspective. *Trop Med Int Health.* 1997; 2(9): 903-11.
10. Liverpool J, Alexander R, Johnson M, et al. Western medicine and traditional healers: partners in the fight against HIV/AIDS. *J Natl Med Assoc.* 2004 ; 96(6): 822-5
11. Nelms LW & Gorski J. The role of the African traditional healer in women's health. *J Transcult Nurs.* 2006; 17(2): 184-9.
12. Chipfakacha V. The role of culture in primary health care. Two case studies. *S Afr Med J.* 1994; 84(12): 860-2.
13. Bizimungu C. The interface of traditional medicine with conventional medicine and primary health care *Imbonezamuryango.* 1985; 1(4): 52-67.
14. Ndagiza A. Maternal and child health care in traditional Rwandan environment *Imbonezamuryango.* 1984;(1): 14-22
15. Pretorius E. Traditional and modern medicine working in tandem *Curationis.* 1991; 14(4): 10-3
16. Gessler MC, Msuya DE, Nkunya MH et al. Traditional healers in Tanzania: sociocultural profile and three short portraits. *J Ethnopharmacol.* 1995; 48(3): 145-60.
17. Busia K. Medical provision in Africa -- past and present. *Phytother Res.* 2005; 19(11): 919-23

18. Wessels WH. The traditional healer and psychiatry. *Aust N Z J Psychiatry*. 1985; 19(3): 283-6.
19. Klefstad-sillonville F. The traditional village midwives. *Child Trop*. 1970; 65: 25-30.

The importance of Family Unity: “Nothing is more important than Family unity”

Mankemkeng Fobella

This write up is a reminder to us all, how important each and every one of us matters in moving our family unity a step forward. Many a time, we have heard brothers and sisters question the value or importance of all the efforts we put in organizing family meetings. Some people complain that they do not have enough time or worse still that they do not have enough money to spend in keeping extended family alliances afloat. I think they are mistaken. They have not fully understood why all these efforts are made. We didn't choose which family to belong to, from birth. Only the Almighty alone who is the sole creator knows why. It is our duty to stand up for what we are and look for the best, work for the best, and expect the best. Below is a simple guideline to help some of us understand the importance of family relationships.

The guidelines are good for Bellah Ngeh people just as they can apply to other communities. For the Bellah Ngeh people they are very important given the fact that by and large the Bellah Ngeh community is essentially a family. Even those who came to Bellah Ngeh as immigrants, have in the end been integrated through marriage into the Bellah Ngeh family blood stream. Those who immigrated but did not marry Bellah Ngeh children have also all been accepted as forming an inseparable part of Bellah Ngeh community. The unity of our family plays an integral part in our lives. Family unity encourages families to create daily routines, as well as special traditions and celebrations. These routines and celebrations affirm members, connect them to family roots, and add creativity and fun to ordinary events. Families can build a secure nest in many ways. The nest must shelter without smothering and allow room for all members to “test their wings” under a unique protection and encouragement.

Strong families recognize that there are benefits and pleasures to be gained from time and activities together. They also realize that they have contributions and obligations towards the family

as a group and its members as individuals. They value the family bond and make efforts to preserve time together for family activities and interaction. Families that value unity will, from time-to-time, evaluate the time and energy allocated to family issues and when necessary, makes needed adjustments. By spending pleasant, positive time together, families build up a reserve of good feelings. When trouble comes, it has to be shared with the family as a joint burden. What families do together matters so much because they do something together that is mutually planned and collectively undertaken. It is fair to say that it is probably a good idea to strive for a balanced activity program, including active and inactive, physical and mental, old and new, at home and away, work and play. Spontaneity, humor, wit, and fun are goals to strive for in order to feel the warm touch of each other. Family unity includes time that family members spend together, both qualitatively and quantitatively. It means maintaining family identity and togetherness, balancing family priorities with support for member needs, producing strong family bonds, and encouraging freedom for individual self-expression.

Communication

Once a human being arrived on this earth, communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relationships he/she makes with others and what happens in the world around us. Communication with our family members should be an engagement in clear, open, affirmative speaking and consistent, empathetic listening. This in the end will lead to constructive conflict management and problem-solving. Strong families communicate easily and well, frequently, openly, clearly, and directly. They do a good deal of sharing among themselves of their feelings, hopes, dreams, fears, joys, sorrows, experiences, growth, and other needs. People are busy and have many demands to meet. However, it is critical that families find ways to gather together and increase the amount of talking they do together and continue to look for ways to improve their communication skills. In strong families, the members may listen to each other. On the other side of the coin, they must express their own wants and needs clearly. Strong families are not conflict-free. Truly there is no perfect family. There is a saying in

our dialect that, “there are good days, and never a good house” as I can translate it into English, or in mathematics, we do say that there is no problem without solution. In a case of a complex problem, we use complex numbers to solve it. However, the focus is on resolving the issue or solving the problem, with little emphasis on blaming and faultfinding. Focusing on the problems rather than on the person will go a long way to accepting the fact that family members are just humans subject to mistakes and even vicious behaviors at times.

History

As human beings, part of our connectedness has to do with our connection to the past. In strong families, there is a strong sense of family history. Strong families have a need for connection to the past; they have a history and are affected by that history. Family history provides roots, which gives the family a sense of belonging and an identity.

Strong families have a sense of history that provides a sense of responsibility for many generations. We have all heard the saying “if you know where you are coming from, you will know where you are going and definitely you will know where to end”. It is our responsibility to live and to build a strong family unity with a journey for our own sake and the generations that will come after us. We can promote our family history through documentation, story telling, teaching important events/activities to family members, keeping up with family members when they move away, going to family gathering and making sure that the kids know family members. We do well know that the past influences the present in many ways. Things that may seem insignificant when they occur can turn out to have a profound influence on our family's lives. We have all seen things with our eyes and therefore it is common sense for us to learn from events of the past so that as far as possible, negativity does not repeat itself. Strong families will often look at significant events that changed their lives and how they might have influenced who they are today. For the sake of tomorrow, how can we protect this family history from distortion deliberate inaccuracies? I presume that written history is more reliable in a growing family

like ours because it can hold facts for the next generation to come.

Humor

In science, we learn that humor changes brain chemistry, releasing endorphins that increase our sense of well-being, improve our reasoning powers and make us less sensitive to pain. Laughter is a proven stress reducer. A good belly laugh improves breathing and reduces muscle tension. Families who have joy in their lives are more likely to feel good about themselves. It also seems fairly obvious that having a sense of humor helps families cope with life stresses and crises. Humor can ultimately be used as a coping tool for families. It can also be very beneficial in strengthening families. It gives families some perspective and a sense of power. Humor also dispels anger and aggression and relieves tension among family members. Families that learn to find humor, even in some of the grim realities and emotion, packed challenges of daily life have an edge on peace of mind, but this mindset takes practice. Humor makes life fun; it is a safety valve for the expression of anger and other strong feelings. It is mentally and physically good for families offering perspective and balance, while providing temporary relief from the world's restrictive regulations. Humor is a means of communication and creative expression. It affirms life and brings families together; through this we can express the truth, even when such truth is feared.

Optimism

Optimism or positive thinking can help families feel hopeful in difficult situations. They tell themselves I can, rather than I can't. They see the glass as half full rather than half empty. When one door closes, another opens, but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us. Strong families change their focus from what they have not done to what they can do or have done. From what they do not have, to what they do have. From where they have not been, to where they can go, from their weaknesses, to their strengths. Strong families are optimistic

about the present and future, always looking at the brighter side of things. The best advice is that we should always be strong and letting nothing to disturb our peace of mind, look at the sunny or brighter side of everything, and make your optimism come true, be just as enthusiastic about the success of others, as they are about your own. For get the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future. Give so much to the improvement of self that there is no time to criticize others. And be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear and be enduring in the presence of trouble.

Resilience

Family resilience is the family's ability to cultivate strengths to positively meet the challenges of life. Strong families help children learn resilient behavior when they teach problem-solving skills and provide positive, non-critical support and sense of togetherness. The values and skills learned at home give individuals the power to shape their lives. Families that learn how to cope with challenges and meet individual needs are more resilient to stress and crisis. Strong families solve problems with cooperation, creative by brainstorming, and openness to one another. A saying goes thus “a wise man solves his own problem”. If you are up and your family is down, it is undisputable that you are at the same spot with them.

High self-esteem - feeling good about oneself makes it easier to meet the challenges of life. Families that believe in their ability to succeed are most often able to carry it out. Good self-esteem provides the basis for a strong family unit. People who have a good opinion of themselves and know that their lives are worthwhile face life in a positive frame of mind. They feel capable of making good decisions for themselves and others around them. Families that encourage and foster high self-esteem are able to accept some failure as normal, and not let it keep them from trying again. If we stand by this, then we will be able to cope with the day-to-day challenges or problems that come our way and also be able to look toward our future with excitement and confidence, while working toward fulfilling our goals and not likely to let others make decisions for us or to influence us to do things we do not want to do. Positive self-

esteem goes deeper than a pat on the back. To really feel good about ourselves and to keep on feeling that way, we need to know that we are capable of doing things which are important to us, and to be able to do those things when they are required to be done.

We can help each other make positive and meaningful connections with the world around us. Making a contribution by doing meaningful things for others makes the world a better place to live and makes us feel better about being a part of it.

Values

Values are a reflection of who we are, of our culture and our own unique heritage. Being clear about our values enables and empowers us to establish priorities and make decisions that we can live with. What we learn from our families in childhood serves us throughout our life. Families guide personal growth and education, while offering love and protection. When families are strong, our neighborhood is strong, our nation is strong, and we can be more hopeful about the future. Values have an influence at every stage of making a choice. Values shape what we perceive. They influence our goals, the alternatives we select, and the ranking of these alternatives. Values are a consistent response to situations with common factors. True values are the principals and ideals by which we should live. Many of our family ideals, beliefs, behaviors or “values” are what make us what we are and this should never in any case be negative. Identifying and communicating the values of our family can be helpful in making personal decisions, become a guide for self-empowerment. This may help us manage our time, energy and resources to help us know ourselves better, help us eliminate some of the confusion in our lives and help us to better understand and respect others who have different values.

Traditional Methods of Dispute Resolution in Bellah Ngeh

Margaret Mbeseha.

Long before the coming of the colonial administration, Bellah Ngeh had its own system of resolving disputes amongst its members. Although the rules were unwritten nearly every member of the community understood them. These unwritten rules regulated nearly every aspect of life. Sanctions for breaching these rules varied depending on the nature and gravity of the bad conduct.

To a large extent, the of traditional system of dispute resolution is still in place in Bellah Ngeh despite the presence of other legal and administrative services located in Menji, just at the back yard of Bellah Ngeh. In most Nweh traditional societies, there are at least two ways of settling a dispute. The first and commonest method is that where a third party come in with or without any invitation from the parties and attempts to make peace between the feuding parties. This in Nweh parlance is what we refer to as Achem. Achem may either be limited to a few family members and friends or it may involve several people. In the first scenario a family feud or a dispute between family members or close friends might be resolved. Such a meeting can take place either in the house or compound of one of the feuding parties or at a different venue mutually agreed to by the parties. A second scenario involves the entire community. This takes place either in the palace or at the community head's compound. This is what has become known as 'Achem a lemoh'. All members of the community are free to attend. In this type of gathering disputes that have not been successfully dealt with in the limited achem and other important or complicated matters are treated. These types of cases include witchcraft issues, land disputes between

individuals or groups of persons who belong to different villages or quarters, matrimonial cases involving persons from different villages or quarters or other issues of collective interest to the entire community. This forum sometimes serves as an appellate jurisdiction even though it has original jurisdiction in some other cases. In addition to some parties bringing their personal issues for resolution, any interested member of the community can bring an issue before this assembly. Decisions taken in Achem settings are binding and in the case of Achem a lemoah an appeals to a higher jurisdiction is not possible. This lack of appeal is understandable given the fact that this court is an assembly of all the people and is regarded as the highest judicial instance known and recognized in traditional disputes. In some cases an Achem group may decline to entertain a case for lack of jurisdiction. One of the possible reasons for declining jurisdiction is the fact that the issue complained of may not have a remedy. Just like in the common law, a cause of action without legal remedy amounts to no cause of action. In some witchcraft related matters for example there may be the lack of a “proper juju” for the parties to swear to.

The procedures followed in the two types of Achem are similar. A case is initiated either by an oral complaint or by a plaintiff who brings two bottles of beer to a designated person who acts as ‘complaint recipient’. Thereafter, a day is fixed for adjudication and the parties are informed to appear with their witnesses. At the hearings, the complainant together with his/her witnesses adduces evidence first followed by the defendant and his/her own witnesses. Thereafter questions may be put to the parties and their witnesses. At the close of this stage, members of the Achem may pass their judgment if the matter is simple and straightforward. If the case is a complicated one, a committee of about three persons is appointed to deliberate and come out with a decision.

The decision or judgment can be either a fine of some bottles of beer, a rebuke, or some other form of punishment. Even though through out the entire process, little or no direct cash is involved, sometimes, the punishment could have serious financial implications. An example of an occasion where a fine though not in cash possibly has enormous financial consequences was the way adultery was punished. A man found guilty of adultery with a fellow Bellah Ngeh man's wife had to give his own pig. If we remember that in those days the only economic activity a man was most likely to be involved in was the raising of his pig, then we can imagine the financial consequence of such a punishment. Sometimes it took between 9-12 months for a man and his wife or wives to raise a pig. When that pig is taken away as a punishment for sleeping with another man's wife, you can imagine what that meant. As for the woman, her punishment was equally drastic and included the eating of her whole barn of planting seeds for the next planting season. In addition she had to weed a portion of a named footpath. That weeding alone could take days or weeks to finish. No other woman was allowed to come to her aid. Any accomplices to the crime were equally severely punished.

Milder sanctions like rebuke are reserved for minor offences. Where the community or Achem is unsure of who among the contesting parties is telling the truth, they would resort to offering an oath for one of the parties to swear. If that party swears, he/she is declared the winner of the case in the hope that god would punish that person if he/she swore falsely.

One of the methods of resolving disputes in the past was by the use of Troh or what some people describe as the 'night society'. In the area of dispute resolution, Troh plays at least three roles. Firstly, it is a traditional law enforcement institution. Secondly some people sitting in a 'troh' society can resolve disputes among their members. Thirdly in its law enforcement capacity troh is used as an injunction to maintain the status quo pending

the eventual determination of a case. This is mostly in land cases. As law enforcement institution, Troh sometimes executes decisions pronounced by the competent traditional authorities. In the pre-colonial days 'Troh Ndi' executed death sentences. Today, that role has disappeared mostly because the powers of traditional authorities to sentence people to death no longer exist. However, Troh still has the authority to enforce some decisions or judgments. Troh can for example enforce the payment of fines imposed on a chief or notable. As important as Troh might be, not all matters required its intervention. While Troh is often very actively involved in the resolution of landed property disputes, other simple offences like theft, adultery, defamation etc are often treated without its intervention.

However, we must distinguish between the Troh mask and the Troh society. While the mask can be used either to enforce a judgment or maintain the status, quo, members of the Troh society sitting in council do litigate and pass binding judgments. In any case, Troh litigates mostly in cases involving members of its group. Troh sitting in council often hears and determines cases against its own members. Important decisions affecting the entire community are sometimes decided in the Troh Society. Decisions arrived at in a " Troh House " are considered classified, cannot be discussed in public or appealed against. Thus we sometimes hear of references of the fact that such or such a decision was taken in a ' Troh house'. Fines imposed by Troh are referred to as ' goat'. The number of such goats may range from zero to nine depending on the gravity of the offence and the status of the troh in question.

Traditional society does not have prisons or jails where offenders can be incarcerated. It does not have officially trained and paid judges to hear and determine matters. Nonetheless, it has its own system of justice and sanctions that go with the commission of a crime. Its sanctions ranged from fines, being exiled to even

the death penalties. In the case of Lebang for example all cases deserving the death penalty were referred to the supreme council in Azi because no other council in Lebang had the powers to impose such a severe penalty.

The traditional system of dispute resolution is fast disappearing in Bellah Ngeh. Today, many people prefer to take their disagreements to Menji where they would benefit from more modern westernized system of justice set up by the administration. Even though this system is more expensive than what obtains in the traditional society, many people prefer it to the traditional system. This is because in the majority of cases, the modern methods of dispute resolution include better and standardized methods of adducing evidence. The modern administrative/ legal systems also have better ways of law enforcement as compared to the traditional system. There is little doubt that the traditional system of dispute resolution is fast disappearing in Bellah Ngeh. Even the highly respected Troh is losing grounds. I have seen cases where a troh injunction was openly violated with no consequence because the violator claimed successfully that troh had no jurisdiction in the case.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND ORGANISATION OF NKWAAH

Afendia Fobella and Nkengbeza Nyochembeng M.

The Nkwaah-Fobellah is a cultural dance that originated from the Eket Local Government Area of the then Calabar Empire. It derived from Ngwee (Ekweh), which is a Leopard Society dance reserved mostly for the initiated male. On the other hand, both men and women do take part in the Nkwaah dance.

It is believed that Ngwee was discovered or invented by fisherwomen but was seized by men who developed it so well that all people of Calabar or Cross-River Empire (Nigeria - Cameroon Coastal Area) and beyond were interested in acquiring. They relegated the women to Nkwaah and other minor societies.

Nkwaah in Ifik or Ibibio means dance and the complete appellation “Ekwaah Fogoh” stands for dance group or “Ekung Lebin” in Nweh Language.

Historical Background

The Nkwaah was first introduced in Bellah Ngeh during the reign of Fobellah Nyochembeng apparently to replace the famous “Afu-Ekea” that was paralleled to the present day “Manjong”. Both Afu-Ekea and Manjong are more or less war dance s practiced mostly in the evenings or late in the night to mourn a departed member. It was danced with vigor and power and it is believed that the spirits of Afu-Ekea and Manjong could give those who performed it power to person exceptionally difficult tasks could be used to execute extremely difficult tasks like carrying very heavy objects like big drums. The analogy here can be better understood only if we appreciate the importance of owning a big drum at the time and how difficult it was to bring those heavy drums from the forest to individual compounds, which in general were built on tops of steep hills. To be able to perform those difficult tasks, the people believed that one

needed to be initiated or one needed to be endured with special powers.

During the pre-colonial and colonial days, many Bellah Ngeh people were traders. As traders, many of them traveled to distant places like Onitcha and Calabar in Nigeria to sell slaves and buy other goods such as salt, kerosene, cloth, jewelry, etc.

As the commerce between Nweh and Calabar was flourishing, Fobellah Nyochembeng made friendship with Enow-Kwenchung of Besong-Abang. It is alleged that there was a regular exchange of visits between Fobellah Nyochembeng and his Besong Abang friend. Thus his subjects were used to this area.

As time went on one Bellah man by name Foku Asongache had left many years ago to live with his matrilineal parents at Ngundeng in Menoua Division. While in Ngundeng, the said Foku Asongache was caught and sold as a slave to Ndepaya, a trader who hailed from the Eyumejock area of present Manyu Division.

One day Tabi Nchienze and Prince Tabankuh who were traders from Bellah Ngeh were going to Calabar Market, they perceived a man that resembled their relation. They approached and questioned this man who confirmed to have lived in Bellah Ngeh, his village of origin before being sold as a slave. He manifested his intention to return home. Following this desire to return to his native Bellah Ngeh, a plan for his escape was made and secretly executed.

When Foku Asongache arrived Bellah Ngeh, he had nostalgia. He became lonely and found his old home boring as he had acquired a different culture and habits. He settled at the present compound of Pa Andrew Nyochembeng. Feeling deserted he started singing Nkwaah songs that attracted the attention of the Bellah Ngeh people as his melody and rhythm were humorous and pleasant. He danced majestically with pride and joy. These characteristics of the new cultural dance made the Bellah Ngeh people to learn it. After learning the songs and intrigue of Nkwaah, they then offered to acquire their own Nkwaah. They

then approached a certain man called Awei Mba. for the acquisition. Their offer was accepted.

They acquired the dance with “Ofro-quabi” which is a fetish or mascot stone signifying God's own medicine. It is purported to be the stone of love and unity of the dance group capable of chasing witchcraft, demons and bad spirits out of the vicinity of Bellah Ngeh. Anything above human understanding is conferred to Ofro-quabi, guarantor of the security and tranquility of the village. Hence he is the actor who oversees his people. This fetish was planted at a place known today as “Arudi Tabi”.

The first Bellah Ngeh elites of Nkwaah were the children of Fobellah Ajongako and some Bellah Ngeh traders who were used to Ejagham, Bayang and Ibibio Languages. It is worth noting that some of these people also acquired Calabar names. Some of them include people like Mbe Ashu Nkafu, Mbe Lefang Atemnkeng, Mbe Tayong Asonganyi, Mbe Mimbar Atemnkeng, Mbe Banju Nkengajong, Mbe Taku Atabongawung, Mbe Abanda Afendia, and Mbe Tabi Nchianze. The second generation of Nkwaah elites includes Wilson Ajong Aminateh, Mbe Thompson Nyochembeng, Johnson Taziengheh, Mama Asong-Along, Francis Ngubejo, David Nzenwung, etc.

Nkwaah Dance

The Nkwaah is danced like Ngwee or Ekweh but with slight dissimilarities. The instruments used are: four drums, a gong, jingles, rattles, split pieces of bamboos, four singers and a full audience that sings the chorus. The dance is performed in circular form with musicians seated either at the corner or inside the circle. Nkwaah is a dance of pride and royalty and the movement is done with the gesticulation of legs and hands from the left to the right direction. The head has to be nodding and turning like that of a king of the forest inspecting the kingdom with the melody of some secret music.

Roughly Nkwaah Bellah utilizes six songs today, which interestingly are all in the Efiks language; a language not

understood by either the people of Ejagham, the Bayangs or even the Nweh people.

Nkwaah Songs

1. A wei mba njanaleke

- a) (1 soprano + 1 alto): A Wei mba é-Njan-a-leké
All: Awei mba
- b) (1 tenor + 1 base): A Wei mba é-Njan-a-leké
All: Awei mba

2) Essoso mamba

- a) (1 soprano + 1 alto): Eso-so mam mba é--
All: Oh-- yam koko
- b) (1 base + 1 Tenor): Eso-so mam mba é--

3) Ekwangsi

- a) (1 soprano + 1 alto): E---wangsi / E--- wangsi / E---
wangsi
All: O--- Ewangsi
- b) (1 base + 1 Tenor): E---wangsi / E--- wangsi / E---
wangsi (O--- mandreya)
All: O--- Ewangsi

4) Oroni Nkwa ya

- a) (1 soprano + 1 alto): Oroni Nkwa ya é---
All: Oroni Nkwa ya
- b) (1 base + 1 Tenor): Oh yo WO oh yo oh---
All: Oroni Nkwa ya

5) Mayam Nkwaleyem

- a) (1 soprano + 1 alto): Oh WO Mayam Nkwaleyem
All: Maleyem Nkwaleyem
- b) (1 base + 1 Tenor): Oh WO Mayam Nkwaleyem
All: Maleyem Nkwaleyem

6) Sanja Mamfe Sanja Calabar

- a) (1 soprano + 1 alto): Sanja Mamfe Sanja Calabar
All: Aya Aya
- b) (1 base + 1 Tenor): Sanja Mamfe Sanja Calabar
All: Aya Aya

Certain Actors

- 1). **Nsibiri**: Means silence, don't talk or don't propagate the secrecy of the society. He is the discipline master and the prospector of the group.

- 2). **Manyamnkweh:** He is the controller and the animator.
- 3). **Matama:** It is the voice of the Leopard that makes loud noise (mmmm) in the bush when the Nkwaah is in full animation.
- 4). **Ayagameor Eyambe:** It is the title of the Lord of Nkwaah.
- 5). **Amaa:** It is the majestically appearance of the leopard, leopardess and three kids during Nkwaah dance.

Membership of Nkwaah

Membership is opened to children, women and men with no particular initiation.

PRESERVATION OF “ALOACHABA” DANCE

ALETANU DANILIO

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Like Nkwa, Ngwih, Massem, Angwu, and many other Lebialem dances, Aloachaba originated from the Baying land. This royal dance also known as Lefua was first acquired by the Fon of Fontem and then later by some of the founding chiefs of Lebang like Fobellah Ngeh, Formin of Atohangeh, Fonge ofNjieh-Lebang, Forchap, Foretia and Folekeaka of Belua. The Belleh-Ngeh people of Lebang Fondom have since its acquisition been doing every thing possible to uphold the dignity of this royal dance. The Bellah Ngeh people have a special appreciation for the dance and hence are believed to perform it with a difference. It is not uncommon to hear comments like: - “ You are dancing Aloachaba like a Bellah Ngeh person.” The Bellah Ngeh people did not only acquire it; they have since adopted it as theirs. Bellah Ngeh people in general and the Princes and Princess in particular believe they have no rivals in the playing and dancing of Aloachaba in Nweh.

INSTRUMENTS

The rhythm of this royal dance is a combination of equipments or instruments. Note: - For the purpose of this article, I shall as far as possible call each instrument by its Nweh name. This is because it is not possible to have a correct translation of most of those names into the English language. The main instruments include:- Nteh, three

Ekkhhaas, Nkwindim, Ndeeh, Khang-Khang, and Abogeh. A combination of the above-mentioned equipments, their players together with four singers give the rhythm of the royal dance.

WHO AND ON WHICH OCCASION IS ALOACHABA DANCED?

Aloachaba is danced during a funeral celebration of a chief, a nobleman and women of royal origin and during other very important ceremonies. It is generally referred to as a royal dance. To uphold the dignity of our traditional society, the chiefs, bekems and all other men and women of royal origin dance the royal dance Aloachaba.

DRESSING (PLACE AND METHOD)

A typical Aloachaba dancer equips himself or herself with Ndroh-Nchen tied to the right hand side, Achieh, Benhang, Ndroh Benhang, Kem Atrouser, Ndroh-Nti, towel, Asangalih on the left hand, Nyih on the right hand Mbeh-Nyih tied to the left hand side. The chief can sometimes substitute the nyih on the right hand with Asangalih. In that case the chief holds two white Esangalih on both left and right hand. Participants in the dance get themselves dressed up in mbin lefem. This idea of dressing in "mbin lefem" or sacred forest also adds more weight to the importance of the dance because not every person in the society has access to the sacred forest or mbin lefem. This also explains why not everybody not even all chiefs can own Aloachaba. Similarly, not all chiefs in Nweh have Mbin Lefem or sacred forest.

THE DANCE PROPER

Entrance into the dancing ground is made in pairs of either two or three. Sufficient space must be provided in between the pairs as they make their entrance into the dance grounds. Unlike other traditional dances, Aloachaba is danced in an especially elegant manner portraying a lot of precautions, pride and attraction. This explains why the dance is also referred to as Lefua. In the case of Bellah Ngeh, the Chief is usually at the tail of the group when it makes its entrance into the dancing ground. This is also the time for the drummers to display their full talents. The chief will then make his way towards the drummers who are in the center. He would then gracefully dance and stop the drummers momentarily. Thereafter, the chief and his entourage will then proceed to sit down while the dance continues. The drummers and so stops the dance momentarily. From there the

chief goes and sits down while the dance continues. The Bekems or Mafua can also do this momentary stopping of the dance.

Another important episode is the appearance of the three masques of the dance. The three masques symbolize royalty. The significance of two women and one man is an indication of one man with more than one wife and this adds more weight to the royal nature of the dance. Polygamy is an indispensable part of royalty in Nweh culture. A typical Aloachaba masque is decorated with goat's skin and then put in the barn of a fire wood kitchen. Over the year, the smoke would give it its natural black color. As the dancers make their way into the dancing ground, one participant escorts each of the three masquerades who not dance but pass speedily and elegantly. They also do not accept gifts. This is as if to say they are not poor and this also goes a long way to explain the pride or the royalty they represent. Exceptionally they can receive at source or inside Lefem as they get themselves dressed. The first two female make their way into the dancing ground followed by the male. Also as a mark of their importance they do not go round the file but disappear through Nti-maah in the case of a palace or the inner section of the compound where they take off their dancing attires before joining other participants inside Lefem. This idea of not dancing round and not returning through the same way is a calculated attempt not to over expose themselves to the audience and this creates anxiety to the audience and so adds more meaning or importance to the dance.

THE CHIEF'S SECOND COMING

The chief makes his second appearance into the dancing ground soon after the three masquerades have signed out of the dancing ground completely. This time, the chief is gotten up by the participating bekems, and other important participants. At this moment, the rest of the participants are making their way out of the dancing ground and so the chief together with bekems and few others make their way towards the players and do the final stopping. The gathering of all equipments follows this final stopping and so all participants move to mbin lefem to undo their legs. Before this time all arrangements for refreshment must

have been concluded and refreshment is usually being done inside the mbin lefem.

PROBLEMS AND SUGGESTIONS

Despite all the progress, Alobechaba has over the time and over the years encountered some problems. Basically, there has been the problem of the maintenance of its equipments. Most of our equipments are out of order. We have in some cases been compelled to depend on other people's equipments and this has in one way or the other narrowed the dignity of Aloachaba Fobellah. There is also the problem of continuity. Majorities of our people especially the youth who participate in Alobechaba say eighty to ninety percent are involved only in the dancing part. Very little is known about playing, singing and other organizational part of the dance. Even in dancing, though it is universally acknowledge in Nweh that we are good so long as Aloachaba is concerned, some participants still find it hard to differentiate between Alobechaba, Nteh and Nkang. In all, the above-mentioned problems have been due to the fact that there has not been enough practice of playing, singing and dancing. But then if these problems are properly looked into and the unity of Bellah-Ngeh people maintained, then it is as true as darkness follow day light that our Aloachaba would be held in high esteem even across the borders

SOURCES OF INFORMATION.

Mbe Morfaw Aminkeng
NI Ngobejoh Francis,
Pa Jonson, Tajiangeh
Pa Wilson Asong,
Defang Walters.

BELLAH-NGEH-FUANDEM: ANCESTRAL WORSHIP REVISITED

Timothy Mbeseha

INTRODUCTION

After many years of denigrating and trying to destroy traditional worship in many non European cultures, Pope Paul VI, head of the Roman catholic church, in 1967 publicly acknowledged that “many customs and rites, once considered to be strange are now in the light of ethnological science, as integral parts of various social systems, worthy of study and commanding respect. In this regard, we think it profitable to dwell on general ideas which typify ancient African religious cultures because we think their moral and religious values deserve attentive consideration.”.

Since this publicly pronouncement by the head of one of the largest Christian religions in the world, traditional forms of believes, worship and practices which were almost disappearing in many non western Cultures, including Bellah Ngeh in particular and in Nweh in general, now receives more careful review.

In its place different brands of Christianity are taking roots all over the area. But long before the advent of Christianity, less than a century ago, Bellah Ngeh people like other Nweh people offered sacrifices to God. The fear of God and the believe in his protection was so great that no one would even start the construction of a house or compound without first reserving a place for future sacrifices to the gods. In this article, I intend to address how the Nweh people in general and the Bellah people in particular worshiped in those early days. I will then attempt to compare and contrast any similarities between the Nweh traditional worship and the modern Christian practices.

The Nweh traditional society, to which Bellah Ngeh belongs, recognizes three forms of sacrifices to God. In the first place the Nweh culture recognize God the Creator (Ndem Nboh), Ancestral Worship (Atu-Npkeh) and Community God or (Belem a

laeh) Bellah people like the rest of the other Nweh people live in compounds. The first step to starting a compound is the acquisition or assignment of a piece of land on which the eventual house or compound would be built. Once such a piece of land is acquired, one of the first things the owner does is to plant a fig tree (Ndah, Efedem or both) on it. This tree signifies that the place belongs to someone already. Eventually when the house or compound is built, this tree will stand at the entrance to the compound.

Immediately before the owner begins to inhabit or soon after he occupies his new compound, something very important happens to the Ndah or Efedem tree. The compound owner would invite a traditional priest to come prepare the base of the tree as the shrine of his God the Creator or Ndemnbo. Once the priest does this, the shrine is called Alemteh and as said above is the shrine for offering sacrifices to the "Creator God." The sacred shrine is then protected with a clay pot or some special stone. Any visitor to an ideal Nweh traditional compound can easily identify this shrine at the entrance to the compound.

Once in the compound, the owner would have at least one or several other places where sacrifices can be offered. These places could be anywhere in the compound but all or each is well protected against rain and destruction. These shrines are reserved for sacrifices to ancestors. Depending on the number of wives that make up the compound, there could be several shrines because some of the wives could have their own shrines for one or several of her own family ancestors. The shrine is generally home to the skull or some representation of the deceased family member.

The Nweh people believe in life after death. They also believe in heaven and hell. Thus they believe that their deceased loved ones are all in heaven and that they are in direct communication with god at all times. They do not believe that their dead ancestors are gods. If this were the belief there would have been no need for Alemteh, which is dedicated only to God the creator. They however believe in the ability of the ancestors to supplicate for them before God. One can easily come to this conclusion if

one tried to analyze the prayers that are said during offerings to the ancestors. In almost all instances, the individual would be calling on the departed ancestor to plead with God to do this or that to AB or C.

The practice is that sometimes after burial, his/her siblings would go fetch the skull of the deceased. The skull is then preserved in a special place where sacrifices are offered from time to time. The time frame from burial to the recovery of the skull is not fixed but could range from months to decades. It all depends on a number of circumstances. There are instances where the burial took place a very long earlier and cases where the family might even have migrated and settled in a distant place. In such cases, it could be difficult if not impossible to properly identify the exact grave where the deceased was buried. There are also cases where the deceased died in circumstances like drowning or simply that made the recovery and the identification of the corpse or gravesite impossible. In those types of cases, a Priest specializing in those events would be invited to perform some traditional rituals and thereafter, any object like a stone collected from within the vicinity where the deceased was last seen is deemed to be a sufficient spiritual representation of the deceased. There are also instances where only a tooth of the deceased can be found. In any case be it the entire skull, the tooth or any bone fragment of the deceased would suffice to represent him/her spiritually. Such a tooth, bone fragment or even a stone collected from the vicinity of the deceased death or disappearance is kept in the shrine to serve the same purpose. The ceremonial bringing of the skull back to the house or compound was not as simple as it sounds here. It required the expertise of a traditional Priest. In addition to the local herbs used, a goat or a hen was also used depending on the rank of the person whose skull was being "brought back home". It is the offering of sacrifices in these shrines that is collectively referred to as ancestral worship. Both individual and collective worship could either be simple or elaborate. In the simple type of worship, the person offering the sacrifice to the ancestors brings approximately a cup full of egusi (dried and decorticated melon seeds) to the family head. The egusi is ground into powder and the family head or the custodian of he skulls sprinkles the powder over the spot hosting the skull for which the sacrifice is

intended. While pouring the powder, he/she makes the request by urging the deceased to intercede in finding a solution for whatever problem might have brought the person afflicted to seek divine intervention. Even if the person seeking divine intervention came with a hen, the hen is not killed. The bird is simply introduced to the spirits of the ancestor and left to live its normal life. Exclusively only hens are used. No cocks are used for divine offerings. A more elaborate offering would naturally involve the slaughtering of some animals or hens. We would try to discuss more about ancestral worship later in this essay.

So far, we have been discussing individual and family worship practices in Nweh as a whole. The same practices existed in Bellah Ngeh. We would now turn to community worship. On few occasions the people of Bellah Ngeh as a community came out to worship by offering sacrifices to their own gods. This happened in times of collective catastrophes like draught, high infertility rate in the village or high infant mortality rate. The community religious shrine of present Bellah Ngeh is found at Fuandem above the former compound of Pa Morfor WN. That is where the village collectively offered sacrifices to their gods. If any unusual event like the ones mentioned above occurred in the village, the Chief in consultation with the elders would declare a national catastrophe requiring the entire community to offer sacrifices to the gods of the village. A day for the sacrifice would be agreed upon. The day would usually be on Alung, the traditional Sunday for the people of Bellah Ngeh. The traditional Sunday as stated above is a day observed with a difference in every Nweh community. Each community has its own day. In the case of Bellah Ngeh it is forbidden to play drums or organize any public manifestations throughout the community on Alung. Women may go to their farms but high profile activities like hoeing or burning of farmlands is strictly forbidden. In preparation for the ceremonial day, the women would organize themselves to clean or weed the path leading to the shrine. The men would contribute in food and drinks. A sacrificial lamb (usually a goat or sheep) would be acquired for the sacrifice. On the appointed day, the Priest would come and while all the village was assembled in the palace grounds, the Priest, the Chief and a select few would go up to the shrine and offer the

sacrifice. After the sacrifice, they would return to the palace where the ceremony continued with the dancing of “ EseiH “. The Nweh people regard EseiH as a dance for blessings. While everybody can take part in the dancing of EseiH, the principal actors are the Manyis and the Tanyis. The Manyi are mothers of twins while the Tanyis are the fathers of twins. In Nweh to have twins or triplets is considered a special blessing from God and so mothers and fathers of twins are usually highly respected. If one of the reasons for the collective sacrifice was that the village was praying for more children to be born to them, all women who were nursing would be invited to pour their breast milk on the heads of all the younger women present who had no babies. This part of the libation was intended to urge god to bless the young women with children of their own. Finally the occasion would end with heavy feasting and drinking.

One interesting thing to note here is the fact that despite the fact that even though pork is widely eaten in Nweh, pigs are never used in offering sacrifices to the gods. Also game obtained through hunting is never used for religious sacrifices. Be it individualized or collective worship, chickens, goats or sheep were the only animals used for religious offerings. The second point of interest is the fact that be it a chicken, a goat or a sheep that is used, very little of the flesh is left to the gods. The people themselves consume much of the flesh. It was considered enough to pour the blood of the animal or bird being sacrificed on the shrine. Whether it is blood that was poured at the shrine or some pieces of flesh, there was always a way of verifying to ascertain whether the gods had accepted the sacrifice or not. In our next consideration we would try to see if there are any similarities between these traditional practices and any Jewish religious practices found in the Old Testament or any Christian practices that we find today in the main Christian religious worship.

A closer look at some of the Nweh traditional religious practices leads one to conclude that there is some similarity between Nweh practices and some Judie Christian religious practices found in the Old Testament. Jewish religious offerings generally comprised the burning of some sacrificial animal (usually) a lamb. Sometimes they also offered birds; mostly pigeons just like

the Nweh use either goats or chickens. A significant difference however remains the fact that whereas the Jews burnt the entire sacrificial lamb and observed the smoke rise to heaven where the God of Israel was believe to live the Nweh people were contented with the pouring of blood and or leaving a few slices of the flesh of the animal or bird being sacrificed. A second similarity is the fact that Jewish shrines were on some sacred mountains. In the strict sense of the word, these were not really mountains. They were simply some small hills. A clear example of this is the story of Abraham and the attempt to sacrifice his only son Isaac to God as narrated in the Old Testament.

We now turn to the famous ancestral worship that has been condemned mostly by some believers in Christianity. As stated earlier, the Nweh man believes in life after death. He also believes in Heaven and Hell thus the believe that those who live honorable lives shall be rewarded with heaven on their death and those who led unholy lives punished in hell. Interestingly again is the belief that parents will continue to protect their kids even when they are dead. Thus what an Nweh man does during ancestral worship is to invoke the spirits of the departed parents or grand parents to intercede on their behalf with God with whom they are presumed to be living when they died .To the best of my understanding, Nweh people do not regard those skulls, bones or any such representations as God. If one were to study their invocations when sacrifices are being offered on those shrines the only conclusion is that they are calling on their ancestors to plead with God for some help in favor of their siblings.

We have to admit that the name Christ was unknown in Nweh religious worships before the coming of the European colonial masters. It is the colonial masters who introduced Christianity in Nweh. This as stated above does not mean that the Nweh man did not acknowledge the existence of God. The notion of God and religion has always been part and parcel of Nweh society.

When we look at the Nweh religious believes and practices however there appears to be some similarities between Catholic practices and some of what was done in Nweh. Catholicism believes in Saints. Saints are those who are dead but are

supposed to be living with God in heaven. The Nweh generally believe that their family ancestors are in heaven or at least are together with God in the spiritual world. This is certainly one of the reasons why they call for their intercession before the almighty God especially in times of problems. The only difference is that while the Catholic Church has its own time-tested procedures for declaring someone a Saint, the Nweh people have none. In any case whether we adopt the Christian or Nweh approach, the bottom line is that these are all assumptions. None of the methods is for sure a guarantee of the fact that a deceased person is in Heaven or not. If the Catholic church accepts the bone fragments of Saints which are often present in the altar stone then why not the entire skull, tooth or any other representation of a dead person whom the worshiper honestly believes to be in heaven? It is our argument that the idea of condemning ancestral worship by the Catholic Church has been overblown simply because the first Missionaries and religious teachers might not have understood the practice.

Whatever the case, there is no doubt that traditional religious worships are slowly being replaced by Christian practices. For more than a quarter century, Bellah Ngeh people have not gone to Fuandem to offer collective sacrifices to their gods. Very few (if any) modern houses constructed in Bellah today have the religiously significant Ndah or Efendem planted at the entrance to the compound. The absence of such a tree is indicative of how the notions of Ndemnbo and its once upon a time protection have declined. Instead what we find in some cases is the fact that the house owner might invite a Priest, Pastor any even a catechist to come bless the house. One of the reasons that have led to this fast decline in traditional religious practices is the near absence of traditional priests. Most of the people who once performed those sacred roles are dead and their heirs have little or no knowledge of the business. As far as ancestral worship is concerned, a sizeable proportion of Nweh people still keep the shrines in favor of their departed parents and grand parents. We have to admit though that with more education and the availability of more scientifically proven methods of curing diseases, some of the mysteries of yesterday no longer have pride of place in our beliefs and practices. Even though some Bellah people still consult oracles and offer sacrifices to their

ancestors, they do this as a last resort after all scientific approaches have failed. With all these shortcomings, one can conclude that the days of traditional religious worship are numbered.

Works Consulted:

Robert Brian

Pope Paul

Ancestor Worship by Leslie Spier

Ancestral Worship in Lesotho by Lethablie Masito.

Spirituality in Bellah Ngeh

Julius Afendia Fobellah

Bellah Ngeh people like many other Nweh people have always believed in the existence of a supreme being. Thus one can find names or expressions like Ndem Mboh, Ndemseh, Fuandem and others. All these appellations or expressions point to the existence of a supreme creator.

Religious beliefs in the traditional society were openly manifested either by adorations/offerings in sacred sites or ancestral worship practices. Traditional worship did not have organized churches like we have today in Christian churches. There was a generalized belief that the dead were with god and thus were constantly guiding the activities of their living siblings. The dead were capable of punishing the living for wrong deeds or compensating them for good deeds. This is why the Nweh man kept the skull of a departed loved one for the purpose of appealing to it from time to time for intercession.

Traditional society has natural laws that forbid the commission of sins and even though these laws are unwritten, society believes that the almighty god and the ancestors oversee their respect. Individual Bellah Ngeh people have their shrines from which they worship their gods in their different compounds. Individual sacrifices may include the offering of salt, chicken, egussi etc

The Bellah community has a collective shrine called Fuandem situated above the former compound of Mbe Nwoafua Nkafu Wilson. Fuandem means the dwelling place of the almighty God. The second shrine is found at Efem Bellah above Mbe Nkemnji's compound. The worship is performed when there is an emergency that warrants the consultation or appeasement of the almighty God. A national crisis may be said to occur when a

calamity such as prolonged drought, famine, generalized infertility of women or when some very unusual events occur in the village. For the gods to be appeased, men and women do thorough cleaning of the shrine and on the day that is supposed to be Alung, the chief priest and his aids moves to the sacred grounds with a goat, salt and palm oil. There, the goat is slaughtered and the salt and palm oil are offered at the shrine. The dancing of Esseih follows this. Part of the meat is burned to ashes for the smoke to be observed. If the smoke mounts vertically to the sky, then the interpretation is that the gods have accepted but if the smoke goes horizontal, that indicates a problem. The village has to be cleansed before any other sacrifices are made.

It is interesting to see how Bellah Ngeh people considered every event be it good or bad as a direct act of god. A family blessed with twins for example was considered as being special. The twins themselves were believed to have extra spiritual powers. Parents of twins had immediate modifications to their original names. The twin mother became “Anyi” while the father became “Tanyi”. In most public ceremonies, the parents are given special honors. As for the twins themselves, they are entitled to special treatment from other children. For example, they had the privileges of being offered chickens and other specialties because it was believed that if they were not given special treatment, they could die at any time of their choice. The prefixes Anyi and Tanyi remained part of the parents’ names even if the twins all passed away. They were even believed to possess spiritual powers that enabled them foretell future events. Twins and their immediate followers are often nourished with chickens. At a certain time, they are submitted to the “Bellem “ rites for at least four weeks. During this period they undergo special sacred initiation. They are confined to a special hut where visits to them are restricted and may be conditioned to the offering of gifts by any visitors intending to see them. During this period the twins or

persons undergoing the procedure do not do any work even preparing their own food. In short it is a fattening process. Usually, the evenings are occupied by the dancing of “Essieh” during which praises and glories are sung or offered to the almighty God. Those undergoing the initiation are called “Ebua Bellem” meaning children of God. The end of the fattening process is marked by a ceremonial closing. This closing is presided over by the chief priest or Mbe Tanyi. The twins or children who undergo the fattening process come out publicly. There is public dancing and feasting by the public. Anybody can attend and participate. The whole process ends when the twins or Ebua Bellem attend the Azi market and are presented to the entire community present in the market place. Individuals in the market show their own appreciation by offering money and other gifts to the children.

Spirituality is also manifested on sad or sorrowful occasions. If some dies in unexplained circumstances, for example, immediate relatives are called upon to swear on his grave. The relatives and some times even friends may swear that they are in no way responsible for the deceased’s death. They call on dead to take them along within seven days if they had anything to do with the death of that individual. Even though such swearing is over the corpse of a dead person, the understanding is that the call for punishment is being addressed to God.

Modern Christian worship first came to Bellah Ngeh in the 1930s when Fontem Asonganyi chased away the first primary school and Christian church from Azi, Fobellah Nyochembeng welcomed the Presbyterian Missionary at Bellah Ngeh where a church was built at Ncho Mah between the residence of Justice Nkemnyiawung Alexander Fobellah and Emma Bellah at precisely a place called Ake Church. The last known Presbyterian Christian in Bellah Ngeh was called Mbe Tonya who could speak the Douala language fluently since it was used in evangelization.

Indeed, mankind relation with his faith is very important as it affects his existence. If one believes in Christianity, Christ will save him but if one believes in traditional religious worshipping the ancestors will react on his life. This applies to all religious faith as each believer always accounts satisfaction with this God whom he refers to us as a living God in case of problems.

I recall that Mr. Bernard Nkeze and Professor John Nkemnji, sons of Bellah Ngeh, served as catechists in the sisties for the then Bellah Ngeh Catholic Mission. Many youth, men and women from Bellah learned the Catholic doctrine and were baptized during this period.

Even though the people of Bellah Ngeh still preserve their shrine and ancestral skulls, most of them no longer offer sacrifices there. Christianity has become almost an inseparable part of their lives to the extent that most of them would rather attend Holy Mass offered in Christian churches instead of ancestral worships. The majority of them still believe that their ancestors can serve as intermediaries or intercessors through whom the living could easily present their pleas and prayers to the almighty God in the same way that Saints are viewed in the Catholic Church.

BELIEVES IN WITCHCRAFT

Julius Afendia Fobellah

The belief in the existence of an almighty God is universal. In the same vein, the belief in witchcraft by the Bellah Ngeh people like most other Africans is equally very strong. Witchcraft described as acquired powers, abilities and skills by men; women and children to transform themselves from human to animals, birds and vice versa. The Belleh Ngeh man or a Nweh man like many other Africans believes that through supernatural powers an individual can transform him/herself into animals like elephants, tigers snakes or birds like the kite, owls, hawks and so on. In fact, believers in the science of witchcraft hold strongly that with that supernatural power some humans have the power to cause lightening, rain and even the deaths of other people. While modern science will attribute all these happenings to nature, believers in witchcraft reason differently. It is difficult to explain how people acquire these supernatural powers but the general belief is that these powers can be inherited from parents, relatives. Secondly, the belief is that people can be initiated into witchcraft.

The common form of witchcraft known to the Bellah person is that which is explained through the human body organs. Before the advent of the Focolari Movement and the implantation of

Mary Health of Africa Hospital in 1966, most deaths in the area were attributed to witches and traditional autopsies were performed on almost all corpse by local experts like Mbe Tafuabely, Mbe Nkengbeza and Mbe Musuh. The autopsy comprised the tearing open of the belly of the deceased for the sole purpose of reading or interpreting the nature of the deceased organs in order to know the type of witch (if any) that might have killed the deceased. The liver for example is said to be the elephant while the stomach is supposed to be the elephant's bag. If the stomach was swollen it is said that it is full of persons the deceased might have eaten in the witch society. If the liver was visibly infected it would be concluded that the deceased's elephant was shot. The bile represents thunder and if such a bile fluid had over flown, it would be interpreted to mean that the deceased had used his/her thunder or lightening for some wicked activity. Sometimes there was no unanimity of interpretations. Such disagreements as to the cause of death could and often tore members of the deceased family apart for decades or even for life. It is also believed that some chiefs and bekems have supernatural powers with which they protect their subjects. It is as well believed that some traditional healers use witchcraft to cure their patients.

In Bellah Ngeh there are two events in recent memory that have gone to strengthen the belief in witchcraft by the people. In the seventies, it is said that there was a Bellah Ngeh man who was able to transform himself into a kite or hawk. The kite or hawk

would then go catch young chickens from neighbouring compounds and transport to the alleged wizards own compound physically and in plain daylight. Some of these stolen chickens were later identified. At a public hearing in the palace, the accused admitted to the facts and the stolen chickens were returned to the rightful owners. The second incident occurred during the celebration of the life of an imminent personality in Bella Ngeh a decade ago. On that occasion something strange happened to the Troh–Ndi. The tradition holds that such a strange happening was a sign of an impending danger. It will be interesting to note that it is believed that those who get masked in the Troh Ndi must themselves possess extra powers and that any attempt to confront Troh Ndi with witchcraft may be met by the death of the individual making such unwarranted attempts. A few days after the celebrations, the individual who was identified as being responsible for the unexpected event died in mysterious circumstances. He died in the bush entangled in a jungle. His corpse was discovered later in an advanced stage of decomposition. There was no evidence of foul play and no acceptable explanation as to how he found himself on the spot where his corpse was discovered. Even though modern science could explain the cause of death to be a possible heart attack or some known scientific cause, there was never any explanation as to how the deceased found himself in that impenetrable jungle.

It is very difficult to clearly and convincingly explain how these believes came about in the first place but one thing is sure, the

belief in witchcraft is deep rooted in our people. Despite the challenges mounted by modern science, there are still many unexplained happenings in Nweh generally and Bellah in particular and in the absence of an acceptable explanation, people will remain stock in witchcraft theories.

Today the Bellah Ngeh man is aware that illness and not necessarily witch can kill and that a disease that causes death can also damage or deform the internal organs. Today, if anybody falls sick in Bellah Ngeh, the initial approach is to take such a person to the hospital or at the very least attempt to treat such a patient with modern medicines. People start thinking and consulting fortunetellers or witchdoctors only after attempts at the hospitals fail them.

This notwithstanding, the practice where family members are called upon to swear over a corpse if one of theirs especially a young person dies in unexplained circumstances remains strong. Even in clearly explicable incidences like motor vehicle accidents or HIV/AIDS, in some instances, and in some families, members may still be called to swear that they are not responsible for the death of that individual. This idea of swearing remains strong because of the fact that despite the clearly explicable circumstances of death, sometimes some other person be it a family member or friend would confess for being responsible for such death. Sometimes an accused person voluntarily confesses of being responsible for this or that mishap to another person. It

is also possible for a confession to be made by some one who is very ill.

To me, witchcraft is more of an imaginary belief than a reality. Anything above one's understanding is attributed to witchcraft. This is not unique with the Nweh man because the notion of witchcraft and witches is found in nearly all-underdeveloped communities around the world. For example parents who have lost several children will attribute it to sorcery without verifying their serology or Cycle cell status. In some instances such a child would also be referred to as a witch or 'Nwalebuh' or bad child. If magic and mystery exist then witchcraft exists too but the rate of suspicious is more than the proven facts of reality. Certain persons have declared themselves wizards but verification and psychiatry test conducted have proven them insane.

The changing attitude toward witchcraft in Bellah Ngeh is evidenced through the evolving approach to the problem as held by late Fobellah Nkengafac. It is recalled that upon ascending the throne in 1947, he declared that those accused of witchcraft or those who confessed to it should never be given any treatment because they were evil people. But a few years before his passing away in 1997, his position had so evolved that he declared, "Witchcraft accusations were merely suspicions without any tangible proof". Because of the love, unity, justice and truth that reign in Bellah Ngeh today, witchcraft is almost becoming a thing of the past. Even though occasionally,

situations call for the people to return to these believes and practices, it is hoped that with time, the whole notion will completely face out in Bellah Ngeh. This view is further supported by the fact that Bellah Ngeh is very close to Menji and very often in cases of disagreements the parties prefer to take their disputes to the constituted administrative and legal authorities in Menji.

THE LAND OF MY ANCESTORS

Timothy Mbeseha

Bellah Ngeh, you are great from creation.
 You settled by the banks of Ntse-Gum
 You had the right to slaughter your own tigers!
 Some how you lost this right without a Fight.
 Yes, You are truly the Peacemaker.

You cherished freedom and expansion.
 And thus went for a bigger vision.
 In the process, you discovered lebialem
 You took possession of all without a fight.
 Yes, History starts from a single event.

Bellah Ngeh! You are unique.
 Your landmasses are separate but united indeed.
 Efem, Mbin and Ngeh all belong to you.
 The strong bonds of a people are all we need.
 To fight, win and remain unique.

Your neighbors look up to you to lead.
 Oh! Stand tall and show the way.
 To Lebang, Lebialem and even Beyond.
 Do us the pride and take the lead
 So others may follow your lead.

Thy ancestors are with us forever.
 Atem, Ajong, Nyo and Nkeng
 Intercede with God for us again.
 When our fathers, mothers and children die
 From illnesses without a cure
 Ancestors can never be Wrong.

125 🖱 Bellah Ngeh

They eat, play and pray with Gods
Intercede when they please and get results
For causes Humans cannot explain.
Ancestors, we continue to look up to you.

PART V. HISTORICAL FIGURES OF BELLAH-NGEH

HRH FOBELLAH NKENGAFAC

J.L. Asonganyi, & Mbeseha Timothy

Fobellah Nkeng Dominic was born about 1897 at Bellah Ngeh to Fobellah Nyochenmbeng I and Mama Atemfua. At the age of about 25 he got enrolled at the first Native Authority Primary School at Azi Lebang in 1922 just when the school was opened. He later transferred to Ossing 1923-25, St Mary's School Sasse in Buea and finally completed Primary School in Mamfe in 1931.

He returned to Lebang in 1932, got married and served as Private Secretary to Fuatem Asonganyi until 1935 when he joined the colonial Police Force. In 1939, he was transferred to Lagos. His stay in Lagos was very brief. He was transferred back to the Cameroons in 1940. He then served in Nnong (Bakossi) and was later promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal and then assigned as assistant Prosecutor to the Victoria and Kumba High Courts from 1945-47.

In 1947, he took an early retirement in order to return home and succeed to the throne of his father Fobellah Nyochenmbeng I who passed away same year. Between 1947-1951, he ably represented Fuantem Asonganyi during important meetings with the colonial authorities. He later became a very staunch member of the KNDP and actively supported the reunification of the French and English speaking Cameroons. On the introduction of the CNU as the lone Political Party, he was elected as the first Treasurer of the Party in the Nweh Mundani Sub Section of the Party and held the post until 1975 when he voluntarily resigned

for health reasons. He was also a Judge of the Fontem Customary court for many years but in 1968 he became the first customary court Judge to resign “ because of the level of corruption “ which he saw as unacceptable.

His combined efforts with chief Fuatabonganche, chief Forchap and veteran teachers like MW Nkeze and DA Khumbah led to the construction of the portion of the road from Catholic School Njenbeti to Nveur where Mary Health of Africa Hospital is located today. Other fruits of that road include the later transfer of Seat of Wisdom College to its present site in Nveur.

He was the first person to create a civil status register in Nweh. Starting from Bellah Ngeh his own village way back in the 1940s kept detailed written records of the children born in the village. In 1968 he was given the honor of helping to officially start the Civil Status Registry of Fontem Rural Council. His privately kept records became the foundation of the Fontem Rural Council Civil Status Registry.

He was a strong believer in the reunification of Cameroon and thus a strong advocate of bilingualism. To this effect he encouraged many of his own children to go study French by attending Francophone schools after they had completed their Primary education in English speaking Cameroon. Many Bellah Ngeh people in particular and Lebang people in general followed this example. He was a great educationist. In this area, he helped many children of the poor by paying their fees or assisting in buying their school needs. He encouraged the unwilling and non believers that sending children to school was the right thing to do and that education would in the long run pay off. He was however very conservative and was at first not a strong believer in girls’ formal education. He believed that the place of the woman is in the kitchen and that women should be trained only to become good housewives and responsible parents.

Fobellah Nkeng was greatly loved and admired by his people. In many instances he was looked upon as a role model for the people. This is one of the reasons why his conservative stand on girl's education despite the fact that he himself was literate, might have influenced most Bellah Ngeh parents. Thus, until the opening of Seat of Wisdom College in 1966 no Bellah Ngeh girl except Margaret Ajong Mbe Ashu (Mrs. Mbelem) had gone higher than Primary School. His contrasting stand can be compared to that of Fuantem Defang who ascended to the throne of Lebang in 1951 (four years after Nkengafack had succeeded his own father. Defang who was an illiterate seemed to have understood the need for girls' education and thus encouraged both his male and female children by sending them to Secondary Schools if and when they qualified. His early Police career made him a true admirer of police and military discipline and values for the truth. The number of his own siblings who chose either the Police or Military as a career is evidence to this fact.

He was very development oriented and actively supported Bellah Ngeh Develop Association (BNDA) in all its development projects such as the road, Ngeh planning area, Africa 2000 Network and the water project. He tried almost single handedly to defend and protect the land boundaries of Bellah Ngeh. He was equally very generous offering Forchap with alternative farmlands after the said Forchap had voluntarily given up most of his farmlands to the Catholic Mission for the construction of Mary Health of Africa Hospital, Seat of Wisdom College and other projects.

One area where he would be remembered is his award of traditional titles. On his coming to the throne in 1947, there were apparently not more than ten Bekems in Bellah Ngeh. On his death in 1997 i.e. within a period of 50 years, this number had grown to almost 40. Despite this astronomical growth in the titles

of Bekems in Bellah Ngeh; he successfully resisted any attempt for the creation of any other chiefs within his territorial jurisdiction. He always insisted that any person in Bellah desirous of becoming a chief should first leave Bellah Ngeh territory and create a new quarter or village as the case may be. For this stand he had the support of an overwhelming majority of the Bellah.

Manfred Nkafu Folifac Ashu

Mbeseha Timothy

Manfred Nkafu Folifac Ashu was born in 1929 in Bellah Ngeh (Fontem Subdivision). He attended the Practicing Primary School in Kake (Kumba) in 1939. Thereafter he attended the Government Teacher Training College (GTTC) Kumba 1956-57. He taught in several Baptist Mission Primary Schools and in some CDC Schools. He later worked as a Cooperative Auditor before proceeding to the Cameroon College of Arts and Technology (CCAST) Bamili from where he obtained the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Levels in Economics, Geography and English Literature in 1964. Thereafter he proceeded to Great Britain where he obtained a BSC Hons from the University of Wales and a Post Graduate Diploma from the Twickenham College of Advanced Technology in England. He returned to Cameroon in 1972 and after working briefly as a System Analyst at the Presidency of the Republic in Yaounde, he reverted to Teaching. He then served in several Government Secondary Institutions as a classroom teacher and later as Administrator before retiring in 1988.

He was the champion of Lebialem cause, a cause that he fought through Administrative hurdles and even the much-dreaded Military Tribunal in Mamfe in 1975. His commitments and determined efforts to this cause were crowned with success with the creation of Lebialem Division in 1992. In fact many analysts of Lebialem political scene agree that the story of Lebialem would

be incomplete without the name of Ashu Manfred. Ashu Manfred is perhaps the greatest hero of Lebialem course in recent memory. Even his critics agree that he never abandoned a course he stood for no matter the difficulties he might encounter. Today, Menji the Divisional Head Quarters of Lebialem is at the back yard of Bellah .It is hoped that this in itself holds a lot of hope for the future development of Bellah Ngeh.

He was elected the First President of Bellah Ngeh Development Association (BNDA) in 1983 a post he held for close to twenty years. During his tenure of office as President of BNDA, he oversaw the completion of the 2nd and 3rd phases of the construction of Bellah Ngeh Road; the initiation and execution of the environmental Africa 2000 network project; the initial Bellah Ngeh Planning Project and the start of Bellah Ngeh Water Project.

He was a very dedicated servant of the people of Lebialem in general and the people of Bellah Ngeh in particular. Despite limited financial resources especially as a retiree, he went extra miles to make sure the projects initiated above had the maximum of success. In 1995, he spent several weeks at home working on the Africa 2000 Palm Project and refused to be reimbursed the moneys he had incurred as transport to and from the village.

He was so financially transparent that when he borrowed money from the Association he voluntarily repaid with interest calculated at Bank rate. Mr. Manfred Ashu is highly respected through out Bellah Ngeh. But for his voluntary withdrawal from the leadership of Bellah Ngeh Development Association (BNDA) an overwhelming majority was ready to maintain him at the helm of the organization for life.

At the time that most people were clamoring for traditional titles, he refused any titles proposed to him by the late HRH Fobellah Nkeng to honor him for his dedicated services to the people. According to him, he could not see how as a matter of principle, he was going to accept any title that was going to put him on equal footing with his grand father Mbe Ashu who is one of the original Nkem to the Bellah Royal house. Even though he was not an Nkem, he was an ex officio member of the Bekem Bellah

in Diaspora Meeting group. Mr. Manfred Nkafu Folifac Ashu died in 2003 and was buried behind his newly built house at Bellah Ngeh.

Mbe Nkemamin (David Amingwa Khumbah)

Margaret K. Mbeseha

Mbe Nkemamin David Amingwa Khumbah was born in Bellah Ngeh - Cameroon in about 1911 to the family of Mbe Khumbah Nkokwo and Mama Betangbeh

He attended the Native Authority School, which was then located at Azi and later moved to Tali and Mamfe N.A schools where he obtained the First School Leaving Certificate. In 1939 when the first Secondary School was opened in Sasse-Buea, he was one of the pioneer students to be admitted there. He later attended the Teacher Training Colleges of Bambui and Kumba where he specialized in Rural Science. His teaching career took him to several Native Authority Schools in Manyu and today Lebialem Divisions of the South West Province of Cameroon. In 1966 while teaching full time in Council School Fontem, he simultaneously offered part time lectures in Rural Science in the newly opened Seat of Wisdom College Fontem.

In July 1983 his paternal grandfather HRH D.N Fobellah of Bellah-Ngeh honored him with the traditional title of Nkem Amin. On conferring this title on him, HRH D.N Fobellah explained, "the title was like a medal of recognition for his role as a mediator and leadership in the development of Bellah Ngeh village." He was equally being recognized for the central role he had played in the upbringing of both his orphaned siblings and many other sons and daughters of Bellah - Ngeh. He was the first treasurer of Bellah Ngeh Development Meeting. He was thus the first custodian of Bellah Ngeh people's out of pocket contributions with which they were able to construct the first phase of Bellah Ngeh road. He held that post until 1983 when the development

meeting transformed itself into Bellah Ngeh Development Association (BNDA) .

Thanks to his joint efforts with other dedicated people like Mr. MW Nkeze, Chief Forchap, Chief Fuatabonganche and Fobellah Nkeng the portion of road from Njenbeti to Mveh might never have been constructed. It is that portion of road that led to the final installation of the Focolare Movement in Fontem and the eventual location and construction of Mary Health of Africa Hospital and Seat of Wisdom College where they are today.

Mbe Nkemamin retired in 1986 from the Public Service but that was not the end of his volunteer services to the local community. As a retired teacher, he went further to start the first Pre School day Care in Lebialem. This timely initiative was highly appreciated and the Day Care Center was eventually approved as a full school. Because the Day Care took care of both French and English speaking working class of Menji, it was named Bilingual Primary School Menji. This is also the first Bilingual Primary School in Lebialem. The school is today fondly referred to as " Pa Khu's School." The entire Bellah Ngeh community remembers him as one who loved development but cherished peace above all else. Mbe Nkemamin died on the 26th of March 1997.

Nkematemfua (Tateh Francis Mbunya.)

Stella Nkimbi

He was born on the 10th June 1942 to Mbe Tateh and Mafua Antonga. His mother Mafua Antonga was daughter of Fobellah Nyochenmbeng 1. He attended Primary school in the then Bangwa N.A School where he graduated in 1956. Thereafter he attended St. Paul TTC Bonjongo and Regina Pacis College in Mutengene from where he obtained the Teacher Grade Three and Two Certificates in 1963 and 1966 respectively. He later worked from home to pass Cameroon Teacher Grade 1 and the

London professional College of Prospectors in 1978 and 1990 respectfully.

As a dedicated teacher who spent his entire professional life in today's Lebialem, he was a person most Bellah youths sought to imitate in the field of hard work and determination to acquire high education.

He represented Bellah Ngeh in the Menji Rural Council from 1993 to 2002. As a representative of Bellah Ngeh in the Menji Rural Council he had the honor and privileged to be elected as 1st Deputy Mayor, a post that he held from 1996 to June 2002.

In apparent recognition of his hard work, Fobellah Nkengafac honored him with the traditional title of Nkematemfua and in 1995 the Cameroon Government decorated him with the Cameroon National Order of the Knight of Valor.

Nkengafac Dominic Asong

By Ndem Asong.

Nkengafac Dominic Asong (alias Yaya) was the son of Pa Asonglefac and Ma Atemnkeng. He went to Sasse College and on graduation worked as an Agricultural Officer before joining the West Cameroon Marketing Board.

He settled in Muyuka after retiring from the Civil Service and was elected the President of Bellah Ngeh Development Association-Muyuka branch, a post he held until his death. As President of BNDA- Muyuka Branch, he organized and revitalized the branch making it one of the most viable branches of the organization in the country.

In 1991, he was elected as National Financial Secretary to BNDA. As a member of the National Executive, he did everything within his powers to promote the Organization's goals. For close to ten years, he never missed any executive or general meeting. In addition to attending all the meetings, made personal

sacrifices to the Association by spending more than a month at home on special mission to promote Bellah Ngeh Africa 2000 Project.

Dominic Asong died on the 13th of June 2000. The entire Bellah Ngeh community both at home, in Muyuka and the world continues to mourn the loss of such a dynamic and development conscious member of their organization

Richard Morfow Fobellah

Richard Aminkeng Fobellah

Richard Morfow Fobellah was born in 1932 to Fobella Nyocehmbeng and Mami Alungu. He attended NA school Fontem. He later joined the West Cameroon Police force. He worked in the criminal investigation department until 1963 when voluntarily asked for a discharge. After leaving the force, he went to study in Ghana. At that time, most members of the UPC opposition group to President Ahidjo sought and obtained refuge in Ghana under Dr. Nkrumah. While in Ghana some of the exiled Cameroon opposition leaders spotted him out and recognizing him as a former Police Officer, thought he had been sent by the Ahidjo regime to spy on them. He was accordingly turned in to the Ghanaian security forces that detained him on suspicion that he was a foreign spy. He remained in detention until 1965 before being released. During this period of detention, he developed a number of illnesses including gastritis and eye problems. He returned to Cameroon later in 1965 and was warmly received by the entire community of Bellah Ngeh.

He later left for Yaounde where he received medical treatment at the behest of the government before re-joining the Public Service again. He later attended the Pan African Institute for Development (PAID) in Buea. Upon graduation he was appointed Divisional Chief of Service for Plan and Regional Development in Wum- Menchum Division. In or around 1980 in

an effort to bring together all the active forces of Bellah Ngeh for the purpose of development he created the first manpower bank of Bellah Ngeh. As a person interested in the development of Bellah-Ngeh, he helped secure the first government grant of 5000.000 CFA Francs for the construction of a ring road in Bellah Ngeh. He died in 1992. Bellah Ngeh people remember him as one of theirs who never missed an opportunity to help or assist in their development efforts.

PA MATHIAS NKENGBEJA

J. L. ASONGANYI

Born about 1906 Mathias Nkengbeja was the son of a courtier of Fobellah Ajongakoh. He lived and grew up in the palace and became a very intelligent palace boy during the reign of Nyochembeng 1.

Later, when Nkengafac took over the throne in 1947 he had disagreement with Mathias. Because of the disagreement Mathias left the palace on exile to Mbo land from where he moved to Malende in Muyuka and only came back towards the last days of Nkengafac.

Pa Mathias Nkengbeja was well known amongst Bellah people and even beyond because of his mastery of oral history and culture. Before his death in April 2006 he had become an honorary member of Bekem meeting of the coastal branch - and an important resource person on Bellah - Ngeh heritage. He was married with several children. His permanent resident was at Malende in Muyuka Sub Division.

Timothy Besingi

Timothy Mbeseha

Timothy Besingi, husband of Anyi Ashu, was an in law to the Bellah Ngeh. He participated in most Bellah Ngeh development activities during his time with us. He virtually embraced most Bellah Ngeh people as family.

Mr. Besingi is credited in Bellah Ngeh with the Africa 2000 Project. Back in the early nineties when Besingi was working with UNDP programs in Yaoundé, there was an environmental protection program known as Africa 2000. The program was intended to protect/preserve the environment. When he attended the late Fobellah Nkengafack 50th anniversary, he introduced the program to BNDA. BNDA later drew up a project proposal which was funded for five million francs.

BNDA was able to start an oil palm nursery of about 3000 improved oil palm trees species with the funds. A good number of those nursed palms were distributed to the community for individual farms and a few hundreds were planted as community property. Today, some of those palms can be seen near the piece of land around Mbe Johanese Lekeaka and Nche- Ashi.

Bellah Ngeh people consider Besingi as one of their pillars for development because of the material and moral support he gave in all their development endeavors.