

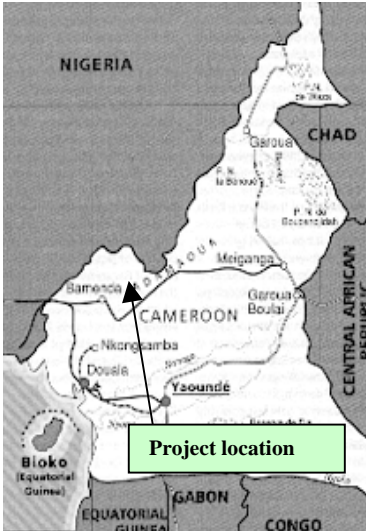
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MONITORING REPORT MAR 2009

EUCALYPTUS REPLACEMENT PROJECT PHASE II

In the Northwest Province of Cameroon, Strategic Humanitarian Services (SHUMAS) is working with grass roots rural communities to improve the livelihood of some of the poorest and most disadvantaged people in the country.

This on-site monitoring visit was undertaken for the Future in Our Hands Education and Development Fund and facilitated by SHUMAS



Strategic Humanitarian Services

PO Box 5047
Nkwen-Bamenda
NW Province
Cameroon
Central Africa

Future in Our Hands Education and Development Fund

48 Churchward Ave, Swindon, Wiltshire, UK Tel: 01793 532353
Email: enquiries@fiohnetwork.org
Web: <http://www.fiohnetwork.org/fiohfund/>

Eucalyptus Replacement Project Phase II Monitoring Visit 28th Feb - 28th Mar 2009

Introduction

Eucalyptus trees, spreading indiscriminately throughout the north west province of the Cameroon, have been lowering the water table and taking nutrients from the soil thus reducing crop yields on farming land and the land adjoining. This has had a particularly severe impact on the lives of women and children who must walk long distances to collect water during the dry season. Also, women have had to walk distances of up to 20Km to find new farming areas. Hundreds of thousands of women have been affected by this problem and generally communities have recorded water taps and springs drying up at the end of the dry season between January and April; in some cases the period has been longer than this.

The main objects of the project are to enable women to farm closer to their homes and for communities to gain access to water within 1km of their homes all year round. These objects will be facilitated by cutting down Eucalyptus trees on farming land and within water catchments and replacing them with African species, most of which are nitrogen-fixing and will thus assist the growth of crops and increase biodiversity. In the rest of this report they will be called 'natural trees' as local people often use this term as a general description.

Even when the Eucalyptus are felled this is not the end of the problem. As the picture below shows, regeneration of the trees is rapid if no attempt is made to kill off the roots. After trying different options, the most effective way of dealing with this problem has been the constant cutting of side branches and pruning the bark. After some months of doing this the stump will die and re-growth will not re-occur.

The outcomes expected from the project are that communities will increase their incomes as growing food crops is expected to bring larger incomes than can be obtained from selling eucalyptus wood. Educational opportunities will open up for children because of the increased income and because children no longer accompany their mothers on long treks to farming areas. Boundary conflicts will reduce between Eucalyptus owners and owners of adjoining farmland and family relationships will improve.

Sustainability indicators will include an increase in the numbers of land owners copying the model of the project despite not receiving direct financial help from the project.

General health of communities will improve because women will not be exposed to conditions which cause malaria and water borne diseases and pain associated with walking long distances to farm in hotter lowland regions where water is often polluted.

Monitoring Methodology:

In order to gain an assessment of outcomes for women and children, a series of questions was drawn up in association with the FIOH partner, Strategic Humanitarian Services (SHUMAS) at the start of this monitoring visit. These were given to the leaders of the village development organisations (VDOs) and the women's cooperatives. This process was considered the best means of obtaining reliable information from the beneficiaries. See Appendix B.

A very comprehensive inspection was carried out of both farming areas and water catchments at a time (the very height of the dry season before the coming of the first rain) when the success of the project would receive its greatest test. This was achieved with the help of two of SHUMAS's staff using a Hilux truck to negotiate the severely pot-holed and dusty unsurfaced roads.

Interviews were conducted with several local authority representatives, teachers and community leaders; including water managers of three major catchments. I also interviewed a bishop, priests and nuns of the Catholic church (as the Church is influential in the lives of many people living in the region). Only a few interviews were carried out with individual beneficiaries because of communication problems. Efforts in this direction were considered to be a waste of time. Allotting this task, in conjunction with detailed questionnaires, to community leaders (who were in daily contact with the beneficiaries) would help build the capacity of the VDOs and leaders of the cooperatives and also yield the most accurate assessment of outcomes. However, this would not of course substitute for the records which have been kept by SHUMAS staff to show progress towards outcomes during the whole period of the project.

I used a video camera for interviews which was also used, along with a camera, to record farming and catchment areas, school building, and environmental programmes.

I was to visit 10 catchment areas and 9 farming areas, 4 schools, a project for the mentally disabled (2 visits) and a project for children with severe physical disabilities (2 visits), 4 women's cooperatives, 2 community health centres, the SHUMAS Organic Farming Training Centre (2 visits), 4 tree planting nurseries, including one for over one million seedlings. I also conducted interviews with 4 mayors, 20 local government environment officials and 2 water catchment managers and other local government officials. I also spoke to farmers and water catchment attendants at several sites about how they managed their catchments and prevented regeneration of eucalyptus. I also gave a half hour lecture to students attending a course at the Catholic Pastoral Centre in Kumbo (with the permission of the nun in charge of the course) about the project and also about global environmental threats. I was also called upon to give speeches at SHUMAS meetings and at several community gatherings.

An account of monitoring trip (mainly, but not wholly, funded by EUREP II) is given below:

Diary

Saturday 28th Feb 2009

I took a taxi to Heathrow at 1:30 am. The plane left at 6:55am and I arrived in Douala at 17:25pm and was met by SHUMAS staff member, Bruno Sunjo, who took me to the hotel where I stayed the night.

Sunday 1st Mar 2009

Sunday was spent discussing the monitoring programme agreed with SHUMAS and devising a set of questions for women and child beneficiaries which would help gauge the project outcomes. I was able to use a small laptop I had brought with me and was also able to access the Internet by plugging the hotel computer's Ethernet cable into my own computer. The hotel's VDU layout was in French. However, generally, gaining access to the Internet was a problem during my visit.

Monday 2nd Mar 2009

The temperature in Douala is oppressive, but fortunately a heavy storm early in the morning made the temperature more bearable. At 10:30am we visited a SHUMAS project for the mentally disabled, run by a psychiatric nurse from a local hospital on a part-time basis. The rented centre is ideally located in a quiet area well away from the main road. Mentally disabled people come to the centre for treatment, but the intension is to provide beds to enable people to get off the streets for a while in a quiet atmosphere that will help them make a recovery. She told me that the government was indifferent to the suffering of the mentally disabled.

At 12:30am we went to the minibus station (these buses take about 15-20 people) and waited 2 hours before the bus left for the uncomfortable 5 hour journey to Bafoussam to meet Alfred Wingo (who founded Global Rehabilitation Services (GLORES) to see his wonderful work correcting deformities in severely handicapped children. I was deeply impressed by his hard work and dedication. He showed me the kitchen extension and beds he had provided with the grant made by the FIOH Fund. Hundreds of children have been brought to GLORES for treatment, but he said that his expansion plans were hampered by lack of funding. He had impressive qualifications in prosthetic rehabilitation and mental health, which he gained through 10 years of study in the United States.

Tuesday 3rd Mar 2009

In the morning we walked with Alfred to his clinic. About 20 adults and 10 children (all with physical disabilities or both physical and mental disability) were gathered there. I used my video camera to record the nature of each child's disability and noted the progress they had made since receiving treatment.

In the afternoon I felt faint and rested, and was sick in the evening. For the next 5 days I had a combination of sickness and diarrhoea and took some medication to try and clear the problem. This did not, however, affect my programme in any way.

Wednesday 4th Mar 2009

We returned to Alfred's clinic to record some of his work with patients, including a young man having weights applied to his leg. This was clearly a painful procedure. A baby was undergoing the first stages of treatment involving massaging her legs. This was also clearly painful for this child. A girl with mental problems was screaming and would not permit any treatment at all. Alfred told me she was alright with him when he was on his own with her. He said he had to coax her and give her a lot of treats. He stressed the importance of identifying problems at the youngest possible age, as the treatment is then much simpler and

more effective. He said that the parents often waited until deformities were at an advanced stage. He showed me photographs of children both before and after treatment. Sometimes corrective surgery was required and with this he had help from overseas surgeons who visited Bafoussam periodically. I asked him to obtain copies of the photos and write a funding application which I would pick up when I returned to see him at the end of March. At 12:00 noon we took a small bus to Bamenda where I stayed in a hotel. The Journey took 2 hours.

Thursday 5th Mar 2009

In the morning I met Menget, a girl who was being sponsored by my daughter for her nursing training. After this we went to the SHUMAS office for a meeting with Ndzerem Stephen and his wife and all his staff. The discussion revealed a possible understating of outcomes because the beneficiaries of activities copying the model of the project, but not being funded by the project, had not been counted. It was also possible that education outcomes had been understated. The idea of distributing questionnaires through community village development organisations and women's cooperatives representatives and teachers, was agreed. We visited the new SHUMAS office being built alongside one of the main roads on the outskirts of Bamenda. Stephen told me that a loan had been taken out to erect this impressive 3 storey building and that eucalyptus timber was being used in the roof currently under construction. The intension was that the building would become self-financing in terms of construction and running costs. Part of the building would be available for hire to organisations and individuals for meetings and seminars and another section on the top floor would be rented accommodation. The bottom floor had facilities and accommodation for disabled people and a lot of care had been put into the design. All the walls in the building had been plastered and painted a light green. All doorways were wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs and toilets were designed especially for disabled people. Also, the electrical socket outlets were designed with disabled people in mind. As the building would also accommodate SHUMAS staff, there would always be someone around to deal with any special needs of the disabled while they were using the building. I felt that this building would have passed even the strictest Western standards of design. This was a witness to the care and administrative expertise SHUMAS (and especially Stephen and his wife, Billian) applied in all its projects.

Friday 6th Mar 2009

The Hilux truck was now available for the monitoring programme and a team made up of myself, Bruno, Stephen's wife, Billian, and the SHUMAS secretary and the driver, Edwin, started the trip to Kumbo. En-route we stopped at one of the 10 schools benefiting from the FIOH Fund's schools environment project grants. The school, the Catholic school in Bamali, had its own plots for growing crops organically. There was also a small tree nursery and compost bin next to the school. The teachers told us that many of the children had persuaded their parents to adopt organic farming methods.

Before we reached this school we encountered an extremely serious accident. One of the small buses, similar to the ones we had travelled in, had come off the road and tumbled down a slope and turned over at the bottom about 60m below. Five people were killed and others were seriously injured. I picked up a bottle of water and slithered down the slope to the scene. One man sitting on a log had a coat wrapped around his head. There was a great deal of blood on his chest and it was clear he had died, probably soon after he had sat there. I checked the pulse of another man and it was clear that he was also dead. However, another man lying on his back, who people at the scene thought was also dead, looked to me to be alive. I bent over him and asked if he could hear me. He opened his eyes. I gave him a sip of water (instinctively I thought it would be wrong to give him too much). He thanked me. He was not brain damaged! I asked him if he could move his left leg. He did this. He was not paralysed! However when I asked him to move his right leg, he complained of back pain. He clearly should not be moved until trained medical staff arrived! A man came over and placed a coat under his head to make him more comfortable. That is all we could do until an ambulance arrived. (When I visited him at the hospital two days later, he said that he had had some internal bleeding and I realised that this was probably why I had not given him much water. The doctor said that he was doing well, but the man in the bed next to him looked to be in a critical state).

We all arrived at the impressive SHUMAS Organic Farming Training Centre (about 12 km from Kumbo) in the dark. In the ideally cool climate I slept well for the very first time since arriving in the country.

Saturday 7th Mar 2009

About 30 students were being trained at the Centre and were gathered to greet me before returning home. Billian reminded them that in their 3rd and final term, 60% of their mark would be for the practical work, and 40% for the theoretical work. Eight students with their bags piled into the truck together with our party of five and we carried them and bags of vegetables (the truck was rarely to move without carrying vegetables, eucalyptus wood, cement, etc during my whole monitoring trip). We dropped the students off near to Kumbo and continued on to the Kumbo Council land a Tayav. Here we were able to see agro-forestry established during both EUREP Phase I and EUREP Phase II. At this point Billian and the SHUMAS left us to return to their work in Bamenda.

From this point I was accompanied by Bruno and Edwin on a comprehensive inspection of the project locations. The roads were unmade and difficult to negotiate at times and dust was a constant problem. Much of the time it was only possible to travel at about 5 km per hour because of stones and potholes. My accommodation for most of the rest of my stay would be the Catholic Pastoral Centre.

Note that trees planted in EUREP Phase I and in the first year of Phase II are now well established. Also it should be noted that the Kumbo Council have been very supportive of the project and have expanded the area of eucalyptus felling from its own limited financial resources.

It started raining in the afternoon and for most of the night. The Hilux truck was taken in for repair. This was the first of 5 occasions this was necessary and it was not surprising given the state of the roads in most of the areas we visited.

Sunday 8th March

I started to recover from sickness and diarrhoea. We visited the Bansa Baptist Hospital where the victims of the road accident had been taken. This is United Nations Women's Day and we attended the celebrations in the stadium after the truck had been repaired.

Monday 9th March

The truck was taken in again for repair. After this we visited the Bonkuity Womens Group and observed that there was a good flow from two water taps. The women who attended the meeting there all said they had benefited from EUREP II and could farm close to their homes.

During the day we saw extensive evidence of private landowners copying the example of the project.
PHOTO

Tuesday 10th March

We visited the impressive health centre at Vekovi village built using funds raised by the community. Several people helped there on a voluntary basis. We then moved on to the village centre where about 2,000 people had gathered. Children from several schools and all the community leaders, including the Mayor and representatives of the Village Development Organisation (One of the ten established with the help of SHUMAS under EUREP II). With the support of the community, this hard working VDO was also in the last stages of completing a large community hall. Entertainment was laid on and the esteem with which SHUMAS was held was very clear. I was also honoured and was appointed an honorary chief and introduced to all the community leaders. The photograph below is interesting because I was told that before EUREP II women would not have taken part in such a dance nor been able to wear hats. This was a sign of their newly found confidence and the extra time they now had to take part in cultural activities.

Wednesday 11th March

We visited the catchment area at Kikiakom where a large number of natural tree seedlings had been out-planted. The traditional ruler and water catchment manager said that at least 75% of the 6,000 population had benefited from the project as water taps and had recovered and flowed throughout the year since the eucalyptus had been felled. There was a steep climb up to the top of the catchment and I could imagine the difficulties that would have been involved in transporting the seedlings during the rainy season. We also visited farming areas in the area where eucalyptus had been felled and a small private nursery.

Thursday 12th March

We visited nurseries and catchment areas at Kitiwum, Kikiakelaki and Romajah where natural trees had been out-planted and measures were in place to control the regeneration of eucalyptus.

At Kikiakelaki a line of trees with orange blossom served as the demarcation between the catchment and the farming areas. The catchment had previously been affected by fire which had destroyed many of the tree seedlings planted. The solution was to allow farming in the catchment until the seedlings become trees strong enough to withstand fire. This would enable the bracken to be controlled. This strategy was adopted

at Kitiwum and in several other areas. Farming will be prevented once the trees are established. Fire had also been a problem at the large Romajah catchment because adjoining sheep owners burned the grass each year in the dry season to stimulate growth. The solution adopted was to skim the topsoil and grass over a width of 2m around the whole perimeter to stop the fire spreading into the catchment area. This was a huge task that must have involved much heavy manual labour. The first seedlings planted in 2006 were well established, many being about 7m tall.

Friday 13th March

We visited G S Roh Meluf school built with funds from the UK charity, Schools for Africa.

After this we visited the Divisional Delegate of Agriculture and then the Mayor of Kumbo. The Mayor spoke of the Council's close association with SHUMAS and the land which had been provided by the Council for the Bio Farm development.

We also visited an elderly man who had established his own small nursery to provide an extra income because the returns from his coffee plants had been so low. He sold his seedlings to Kumbo Council.

Saturday 14th March

The Hilux truck had to be taken to Bamenda for repairs and a taxi was hired to take us to Oku, a journey which took about 2 hours. The womens cooperative had made some remarkable achievements under the leadership of Gangli Mary and her friend, David Oyes. These included a row of rooms especially for visitors. I slept in one of these that night. I observed several water taps in the compound.

Sunday 15th March

In the morning we attended a meeting with about 200 women in the building they had constructed. The Mayor also attended and gave a short speech about the problems that had been caused by eucalyptus and the need to replace them with natural trees. Mary gave a long speech about the achievements of the cooperative. Several women gave testimonies on how they had benefited from EUREP II. After the meeting we were taken to the women's bakery. Mary showed me how the women had learned to make compost much cheaper than the same quantity of chemical fertilizer and also how they made soap, vaseline and beauty products from local crops.

Mary told me that since the eucalyptus had been felled, there was no problem obtaining water all year round and that many new taps had been installed. She said that previously water shortages had even been experienced during the rainy season.

Monday 16th March

We walked to the site of the GBS Kimbo Secondary School in Kumbo. This was only the second government secondary school in Kumbo. However, the government had not provided any money for the construction. The money for the building materials had come from a charity in the UK. This school for 500 pupils was being built by teachers and parents on land provided by the Fon of Nso near his palace.

Many schools were being built throughout the region in this way with funds obtained from AidCamps International and Schools for Africa. Not only did this enable many schools to be built with small funds, but also gave communities a strong sense of ownership and responsibility for the upkeep of 'their' school and the education of their children. Bruno pointed out to me that this school building programme would not have been possible but for EUREP II as many small children would previously have had to accompany their mothers on trips to farms and families would not have been able to afford school fees. Finding money for secondary education fees was a particular problem. I joined in with the digging illustrated above for about 20 mins and the solid ground made this hard work. The task of creating a path around the school was going to involve a lot of hard physical labour. A pick had to be used at a depth of about 600 mm.

Tuesday 17th March

I noticed that a large number of eucalyptus had been felled in the areas on both sides of the Pastoral Centre, especially the land owned by the Baptist Hospital. These areas were also covered with natural trees. Bruno told me that one of his trainees on EUREP I, Kenneth (previously met by Alan and Teresa Stewart last year), had supplied the seedlings. I also noticed on the other side of the hill how some eucalyptus had been allowed to regenerate.

Bruno comes to the Pastoral Centre with a pile of answers to my questionnaires. He has also brought me the results of his interviews with private landowners around Kumbo (those who have not been helped directly by the EUREP projects) to assess how many women have benefited from the eucalyptus trees they have felled. From this small survey it would appear that as many women have benefited from this felling as have benefited from the felling under EUREP II.

The truck is not repaired and I spend another night at the Pastoral Centre. I spend most of the day relaxing and reading.

Wednesday 18th March

The Hilux is repaired and we set out for Ntumbaw. Some of the areas visited have not yet been planted with natural trees, but the intention is to do so when the rains come in April. There is a possibility that there are not enough seedlings in the SHUMAS nursery at present to fill all of these areas, but the long term policy is to fill all farming land and catchments with natural trees. In the future I can visualise that much of the catchment areas covered by EUREP I and EUREP II will become like the established forest at Oku and a haven for wildlife.

We inspect two water taps at high points in the village and the water from them flows freely. Neither of these taps operated between January and April before the eucalyptus were felled under EUREP II.

We stay the night at Ntumbaw.

Thursday 19th March

We visit several catchments and farming areas around Ntumbaw with the chairman of the Village Development Organisation. In one of the catchment areas there was dense undergrowth, but areas had been cleared in small sections to permit planting of natural trees in rows 4m apart with 2m spacings between the seedlings. Bracken and fire risk was minimal in this area. It was clear that different factors needed to be considered in each catchment according to the prevailing conditions and location. Bruno also pointed out that in this case farming was taking place right up to the edge of the catchment with the greater likelihood that any potential fire hazard would be spotted.

We visit two community kindergartens and one of the womens cooperatives.

We stay another night at Ntumbaw.

Friday 20th March

We set off for Nkambe near the border with Nigeria with the roads now free of dust because of the heavy rainfall during the night. The journey took about 2 hours. We passed one of the 20 areas around Nkambe where eucalyptus had been felled.

We were already aware of a problem with regeneration of eucalyptus in Nkambe itself. Alan Stewart had found that the problem was partly as a result of the death of one of the land owners and partly because of a political problem. The present Mayor had been voted into office at the last Election but some of his Party members wanted to replace him as Mayor. However, he would not stand down and there was some resistance to his policies (which included a systematic programme to remove eucalyptus extensively spreading throughout the whole region). The problem in this region was probably greater than in any of the others we had visited.

We visited the Council Office and I asked the Mayor what plans he had for solving the problems of (i) eucalyptus in catchment areas and (ii) the regeneration of the trees felled under EUREP II. He said that he intended to use his statutory powers to prevent farming in catchment areas and to remove eucalyptus in catchment areas. He showed me the tree nursery established next to his office and then took us to areas around the town where poles had been erected to demarcate the boundaries of catchment areas. He also pointed out some areas where the water shortage problem was solved by felling of eucalyptus, shortages were now being felt once again because of regeneration. This was probably due to the rapidity of the regeneration and re-growth i.e. the re-growth may be taking up as much water as the original mature trees.

We return to Kumbo and visit some of the farming areas owned by the Council to see if many people have started farming after the rain. We find people already starting to farm and it is noticeable that there are about equal numbers of men and women. This was not the case when I visited in 1999 when nearly all the farmers were women. I suspected that families were now finding that there was more money to be gained from growing food crops than from growing cash crops or eucalyptus. Here we found the young man, Kenneth, who had established his own nursery, helping his mother and sister on their farming plot.

The truck was taken in for repair again, this time because of a broken spring.

Saturday 21st March

We were invited to have lunch with the Assistant Mayor and several Council and Water Company officials, including the Chairlady, and some councillors.

We were then taken to a vantage point where the Deputy Mayor (who had been working closely with SHUMAS staff) could show us a large area where the Council, using its own funds, had felled eucalyptus to create more areas for farming and planted natural tree seedlings in a large water catchment area. He showed us a running stream and told us that this had dried up at this time of year (i.e. the height of the dry season) before the eucalyptus had been felled.

Sunday 22nd March

We travelled to the Organic Farming Training Centre (Bio Farm) and this was the chance to study the facilities in more detail.

The young man who had been appointed to care for the livestock showed us around the Farm and I was impressed by the extent of his knowledge about animal welfare in general and the record keeping programme devised for student training. All the students were required to keep welfare records on all the animals. We were shown the raised rabbit hutches in a large shed, the piggery, poultry shed, cattle pen and the stall for the bullocks (These were used for pulling the plough. A tractor was also used for this purpose when it was necessary to rest the bullocks).

The guest house was situated at the highest point on the site and a small windmill provided the electricity for this and the male student accommodation nearby (A generator supplied the electricity for the administration block and methane from the digester provided the fuel for cooking). The future plan was to make the Training Centre almost wholly self-sufficient.

That night I could not help being impressed by the star-filled night sky. I could hear the monkeys chattering in the distant pockets of virgin forest.

Monday 23rd March

Stephen and Billian and several of the SHUMAS staff, including those based at the Bio Farm and representatives of 21 women's cooperatives, arrived to take part in a general meeting. There were about 100 people present. Most of the meeting was taken up with the cooperative representatives providing feedback about their activities and repayment of the loans provided in the network savings and credit scheme administered by Billian. New loans were given at the end of the meeting. I was asked to give a speech and stressed the difference between a grant and a loan and the importance of honesty, sharing and cooperation in all the cooperative network activities. I also suggested that it might be an idea to organise specialist workshops on 'best practice' so that the experience of ideas that had benefited the women could be shared effectively amongst all the members.

The meeting finished at about 5.30 p.m. and we returned to Kumbo with a full load of produce plus 12 women, 4 babies and one man in addition to the driver and myself.

Tuesday 24th March

We departed for Bamenda and the Hilux truck was to be used to the full along the way. Six stops were made for garri, potatoes, 8 bundles of eucalyptus wood, to give lifts to 2 young ladies and to drop off 5 large bags of cement for a community water supply project.

In the evening we visited the home of the driver of the large truck and then went to the SHUMAS office for an evaluation meeting with Stephen and Billian and SHUMAS staff.

Wednesday 25th March

In the morning Stephen's sister, a Catholic nun, took me to the Bamenda prison where she had some responsibility for the care of prisoners. I gained the impression that the prisoners would experience great hardship but for the Catholic Church. I was shown the accommodation for both men and women prisoners and the very basic facilities for the care of prisoners who were ill. I was told that in some prisons it was possible that the police would intercept items brought in for prisoners and sell them on the open market. I had already experienced police corruption in several African countries, including the Cameroon. The Hilux truck was required in Kumbo, so Bruno and I took a taxi to Bafoussam to see Alfred Wingo. Alfred had produced the project application and photographs of the children I had requested.

Thursday 26th March

After waiting for 2 hours, we travelled in a large coach to Douala, a journey which took 5 hours.

Friday 27th March

I visited the SHUMAS Health Centre and several patients came for treatment and assessment.

Saturday 28th March

I returned to Heathrow and arrived home at about 7.00 pm on Sunday 29th March