THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF CAMEROONIAN AS-SOCIATION (ASSOGRAF) TO THE INTERGRA-TION OF CAMEROONIANS IN FINLAND

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this report is to provide a clear and more visible picture to describe the idea, the process and the outcome of a documentary project which is titled "The Contributions of Cameroonian Association to the integration of Cameroonians in Finland". In my video I concentrate on the ASSOCIATION OF GRASS LANDERS IN FINLAND (ASSOGRAF) which is one of the numerous Cameroonian associations in Finland.

The project is aimed at finding how the social and economic aspect of integration of Cameroonians are being handled by this Association (ASSOGRAF) in order to build a strong, peaceful and intensive interaction and cooperation within its members and other Cameroonians in Finland. This documentary also seeks to create awareness of the activities and contributions of ASSOGRAF both in Finland and back in Cameroon.

This is a project type of thesis and interviewing some members of the association was the method I used in the process of data collection. The film consists of interviews with three members of the Association and also some footages of the activities of the group I found interesting such as the General Assembly meeting, parties and also some nice and interesting footages showing the rich culture the organization seek to protect, promote and showcase in Finland. The findings or results from these interviews show's that the association plays a great role towards the integration process of most of its members (Cameroonians) into the Finnish society. This has come about as a result of the groups indoors and outdoors activities. The results were based on the personal opinions

This project also reveals important aspects of the Cameroonian culture, education, employment, accommodation, interaction and member's well-being as fundamental tools which the organization seeks to promote. The findings also revealed that there are few things in the opinion of the interviewed members that will need to be changed or given more attention.

Coming out with this project has been a very difficult and time consuming process, it has been long but also very productive and educational in many ways to both me and also those involved from the start to finish including the participants in the video and the editors.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The contribution of Cameroonian Association to the integration of Cameroonians in Finland and Using ASSOGRAF (Association of Grass landers In Finland) as my case study is the topic of my thesis. The main idea behind this documentary project is to create awareness of this association and also look at the role it plays in the life of its members here in Finland towards their integration with the Finnish system.

Over the years there has been a great increase in the immigrants population in Finland and according to the preliminary data statistics of the Finnish immigration service, the annual report that was publish by the Finnish Ministry of interior in 2014, states that about 221,900 immigrants are living permanently in Finland

by 31 December 2014. This demographic figure does not include asylum seek-

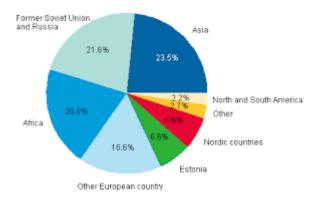
ers and refugees. (Statistics Finland 2014). Amongst these numbers there are about 809 from Cameroon.

Immigrants in Finland

Country of citizenship	2013	%	Annual	2014	%	Annual
Estonia	44 774	21.6	12.6	48 354	22.0	8.0
Russia	30 757	14,8	1.9	30 619	13,9	-0,4
Sweden	8 382	4.0	-0.4	8 288	3.8	-1.1
China	7 121	3.4	7.5	7 559	3.4	6.2
Somalia	7 465	3.6	0.0	7 381	3.4	-1.1
Thailand	6 484	3.1	7.5	6 864	3.1	5.9
Iraq	6 353	3.1	7.3	6 795	3.1	7.0
India	4 372	2.1	8.5	4 728	2.2	8.1
Turkev	4 398	2.1	2.9	4 508	2.1	2.5
United Kingdom	4 048	2.0	4.4	4 280	1.9	5.7
Germanv	3 974	1.9	1.7	4 044	1.8	1.8
Viet Nam	3 595	1.7	7.5	3 993	1.8	11.1
Poland	3 319	1.6	15.0	3 684	1.7	11.0

Afghanistan Former Serbia and	3 202 3 155	1.5		3 327	1.6	10,1
Others	66 112	_,_	0,0	71 691		
Total	207 511			219 675		

Source: Statistics Finland, Demographic statistics



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Living in a new country has never been an easy task as it requires a lot of challenges and demands for the immigrants and as a result of this move, the person or immigrant in other to survive will need to learn the new culture and tries to adapt to the system in his country of destination. This process has been termed integration. The word integration and immigrants have been wildly used and talked of in recent times and as a result the Finnish government and other stake holders has devised a series of ways and methods geared towards the integration of immigrants thus making the country gradually becoming more multicultural and diverse in nature.

According to the act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010) by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Finland, integration means the personal development of immigrants, with the aimed for them to take part in the working life and society while preserving their own language and culture. It also means the measures actions taken and the resources and services provided by authorities to promote and support such integration and the consideration for the needs of immigrants in planning and providing other public services and

measures (Integration of Immigrant and Reception of Asylum seekers Act, 2005).

It is with these provisions in the Finnish constitution that ASSOGRAF gets its backing or takes it strong roots and also from the fact that the Cameroonian population in Finland is gradually increasing and at the moment we are already having a second and third generation of immigrants living in Finland with their roots from Cameroon thus making the Cameroonians more conscious of their role in the Finnish society and as a result of this, there has been an Increasing and massive participation recorded by ASSOGRAF in its activities which are intended to help its members more in their integration while preserving and also promoting their rich culture through their indoors and outdoor activities.

2 BACKGROUND

Looking at the information provided by the Finnish statistics center on immigration published by the ministry of interior Affairs, it is very visible that the population of Cameroonians living in Finland has steadily been increasing within the last couple of years. It is with this effect that I personally got motivated and seek to look at how these people are trying to get themselves integrated and recognized in Finland. It was with this motivation that I started looking at the interaction between the Cameroonians in Finland and this made me to discover that there are lots of registered Associations existing in Finland whose roots can be traced back to Cameroon. At this point it became more interesting and I went further to look at the actives of some of these groups and how they enhance the integration of their members. This brought me in contact with ASSOGRAF.

The Association coordinates and run activities either directly or indirectly which are geared towards integration such as their monthly meetings, parties, sports, child birth celebrations and also seminars which are at times organized with cooperation of MONIHELI to which they are an affiliate group. The organization is governed by the general law governing the existing of NGO's and cultural groups in Finland and also the Association constitution and the code of conduct.

The association is made up of three main bodies; The General Assembly which is the main decision making body of the Association, The executive headed by the president ensures the functioning, supervision and coordination of the group activities, meetings and projects. The Advisory board constituting of the elders and former Presidents assist the president in decision making and also check the excesses of the president and other members and also intervene in times of crisis.

Apart from the fact that interaction and participation continues to be an important and relevant topic when it comes to integration, Cameroonians in general and members of ASSOGRAF in particular are continuously being conscious of their in participation in activities within Finnish society as a fundamental tool for their integration.

The decision to carry out this project on this topic was firstly because as a member of the group and seeing that they play a great role in enhancing and supporting the integration of fellow members here in Finland, secondly being an international student living in Finland and is also conscious of the conditions necessary for integration such as interaction and participation and is equally still in the process of getting full integration into the system, I saw the idea of coming up with a documentary like this showing the contributions and role of this

association in the integration of its members as a very good medium to encourage others. The zeal to realize this project also came from the fact that I wanted to create awareness to the public and also the international community of the group and its activities which could be of help not only to Cameroonians in Finland but also other immigrants associations and communities to emulate.

As a social works student who has participated and benefited from lots of seminars, presentations and talks on integration during my studies and also the fact that there has not been any documentary or project of this kind carried before either by the association or any of its members, I thought of it that the culture they seek to promote and the activities they carry wouldn't be good elements in creating awareness and also making the organization more popular thus this project was necessary.

I also seek to foster the spirit of togetherness and enhance the wellbeing of the members through this video. It has also been one of the motivating factors behind my execution of this video. The main idea is that as Africans we have been used to the spirit of living together and being each other's keeper and now being it a country which is very different from where we are coming, and some of the people are not so open or friendly to strangers or immigrants, thus it's very difficult for new members to handle and deal with stressful situations so this video also seeks to show how members use the activities of this association to deal with issues of stress and also as a way to distract themselves.

In relation to Community development, I seek to empower individuals and groups of people with the skills they need to effect change within their communities or environment where they live. These skills are often created through the formation of large social groups working for a common plan. It starts from the principle that within any community there is a wealth of knowledge and experience which, if used in creative ways, can be channeled into collective action to achieve the communities' desired goals which in this case is integration. Not only do I wish to foster social inclusion and equality within the Cameroonian community here in Finland through this project, my goal also is to create opportunities for the community to learn new skills and, by enabling people to act together, so that everyone can take part in the issues that affect their lives.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

From the first half of the 1990s, a series of research and researchers who has actually come up with reports, documentaries, books and journal targeting the integration of immigrations and the contributions of immigrants associations and groups towards their integration. Finland after joining the European Union in 1995, immigrant's authorities and administration have emphasized the importance of immigrants associations in integration of immigrants in Finland. This phenomenon has really helped and contributed positively in the realization of this documentary that shares a couple of views and similar theories with other researchers and publications on this topic. The act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010) by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Finland which is aim at promoting the integration, equality and freedom of choice of immigrants through measures which help them to acquire the essential skills needed to function in the society, integration here means individual and group level attachment to the societal center and dominant culture. As a result of the increasing numbers of immigrants and the cultural differences between immigrants and the members of their host society, the formation of immigrant associations remain very significant.

Based on the contributions of various authors and researchers on this topic, social integration is seen as a gradual process through which individuals and groups become active participants in the civic, economic, political, cultural and social life of the receiving country. Heckmann's (2003, 2004) views and ideas are very resourceful in explaining this point. Heckmann, basing himself on Esser's (2000: 272-275) four basic forms of social integration – acculturation, placement, interaction and identification – conceptualized four integration variables of his own:

1. Structural integration: signifying the acquisition of rights and the access to positions and membership statuses in the core institutions of the immigration

society: economic and labour market, education and qualification systems, housing system, citizenship as membership in the political community.

- 2. Cultural integration or acculturation: entails acquiring core elements and competences of the culture and society immigrants are migrating into. These preconditions of participation refer to processes and states of cognitive, behavioral and attitudinal change. This concerns not only the immigrants and their descendants, but it is also an interactive, mutual process that changes the receiving society as well, which has to learn new ways of relating and adapting to the migrants.
- 3. Social integration: is indicated by people's private relations and primary group memberships. Indicators are social intercourse, friendships, partnerships, marriages and membership in voluntary organizations.
- 4. Identification integration: shows in feelings of belonging and identification, particularly in forms of ethnic, regional, local and/or national identification or in combinations of these

Berry's Model of Acculturation is one of the greatest theories used whenever immigrants and integration is being discussed. Berry's model is very important since it recognize the importance of a multicultural society. I found it very important and also a number of researchers have theorized about the dimensions of acculturation (see Berry, 2003, for a review). Working within the dimensional model of acculturation, Berry crossed the independent dimensions of receiving-culture acquisition and heritage-culture retention to create four categories. These categories are assimilation (acquires the receiving culture and discards the heritage culture), separation (rejects the receiving culture and retains the heritage culture), integration (acquires the receiving culture and retains the heritage culture), and marginalization (rejects the receiving culture and discards the heritage culture). Within Berry's model, integration represents biculturalism, and these terms are used interchangeably here.

While it is common for immigrant associations to be founded in order to preserve the identity and culture of their members, inevitably these associations also end up playing a major role in the settlement processes of their members such as education, housing and jobs, either through pathways of assimilation or segregation. This point clearly states the mission and guides the functioning of ASSOGRAF. In addition, immigrants often come together and create formal associations in order to protect mutual interests, to mobilize support over issues of concern and to make representations to political authorities concerning their welfare (Sardinha and Joâo 2009). It is in this light that Cameroonians from the grass land region took it upon them to come up with such an Association to defend and lobby for their needs. Immigrant associations are also very important instruments when it comes to the social integration of the individuals they represent. Schrover and Vermeulen (2005) utilize what they refer to as the 'offensive-defensive dichotomy' in describing the two opposing roles of associations when it comes to the social integration of the community.

ASSOGRAF not only attend to issues of solidarity, recreation and culture, but also apply pressure and lobby the political, legal and economic authorities in Finland and Cameroon through MONIHELI which is the umbrella organization to immigrants groups in Finland and the embassy of Cameroon respectively to meet up with the needs of its members. These associative actions are what Layton-Henry (1990b) refers to as the mediating and bridging roles of associations. Along the same line of argument, Morén-Alegret (2002) states that associations fulfil a context of 'survival' and 'resistance', with 'survival' coming in the form of ethno-cultural preservation, and 'resistance' becoming a rallying point for collective action in the struggle for resources and power, or indeed to challenge directly the hegemonic policies of the host country.

Looking at the point of cultural awareness which is also one of the goals of the ASSOGRAF and also one of the central themes of this project, the association is pushing hard in getting recognition within the Finnish society. Cultural awareness is a foundational element in a human relationship and also within a group since it is virtually impossible to acquire the attitudes, skills, and knowledge that

are essential to cultural competence. Our experiences, our values and our cultural background lead us to see and do things in different ways. Being aware of our cultural dynamics is also a challenging task because of the complicity involve in the task. The association tries to encourage its members to show case positive aspects of the culture of the grass landers in Finland and also encourage them to preserve and uphold the rich culture through their activities. For this purpose I have looked at the explanations and views of Winkelman on the issue of cultural awareness. According to Winkelman (2005), awareness of cultural differences and their impact on behavior is the beginning of intercultural effectiveness. He states that "cultural self-awareness includes recognition of one's own cultural influences upon values, beliefs, and judgments, as well as the influences derived from the professional's work culture"

It is safe to say that when a community of immigrants is physically located in a country different from the one they originate from, while at the same time retaining links with their homeland, these immigrants may encounter identity issues, which, in turn, may lead to problems of integration in the host society. This considered, it is common for the obstacles that arise during the immigrants' settlement process to influence the ways in which immigrants organize their collective interests in order to be able to construct a harmonious interactive relationship with the host society (Sardinha, Joâo 2009). Heckmann (2004) goes a bit further, on this point by when he considers integration as a process of inclusion of migrants in the core institutions, relations and statuses of the receiving country. He further explains that integration of migrants refers to a process of learning a new culture, an acquisition of rights, access to positions and statuses, a building of personal relations to members of the receiving society. It is an interactive process between migrants and the receiving society. Favell (2003: 14) also follows this logic, emphasizing that:

[...] immigrant integration is what happens after [migration and settlement];

Conceiving practical steps in a longer process which invariably

Includes the projection of both deep social change for the country Concerned, and of fundamental continuity between the past and

Some idealized social endpoint. (Emphasis in the original)

Integration is one of the most central themes in social sciences, and one does not need to go through much of the literature on integration before it becomes clear that the concept has many different meanings and is used in many different contexts. The way in which immigration states relate to and handle the meeting between immigrants and the national population is today at centre-stage. What conceptions are attached to the encounter, what economic and social factors influence these conceptions, what policy is developed on this basis, and how do these encounters affect the parties in question? These are just some of the central issues which are up for debate whenever this topic arise Sardinha and Joâo (2009). It in this light both the Finnish civil society and Cameroonians living in Finland are devising ways and method to help both parties

4 DESCRIPTION OF THE VIDEO PROJECT

I conceived the idea behind this project and it's realization brought me in contact with a series of collaborators and partners. This documentary was created by collecting interviews and individual stories of the participants in the video on how this group has helped them in Finland and also through a follow up of the associations activities during general assembly meetings so as to get a the participants. The participants and actors in this video but for the president were gotten randomly from the association, the only criteria I used in getting them was just the fact that the person must be an active member of the association. I used quite a series of methods from the conception, filming and interviewing the individuals and participants in the video to the editing and publication.

I started up with the whole process in December of 2014 by acquiring the equipment's, footages and stories that were to be used in this video. I realized it was going to be difficult for me to handle the project alone especially getting the interviews done since I was supposed to in the video. I tried contacting some of my friends for help especially during the filming and editing of this video. After this phase I had to choose the participants needed especially for the interviews. In the beginning I came up with quite a large number of people to interview but along the line I realized it was going to be very difficult and also very stressful for me to get them all interviewed so I had to reduce the number to three so as to keep the video short and also avoid too much repetition.

They all agreed to be filmed and gave their concerns to this by accepting their faces to be seen in the video I had to travel considerable distances to meet with these individuals and also I had to participate in lots of events organized by the Associations especially in Finland and also attain lots of their meetings so as to get all the information and footages I needed and have used. It was not so difficult for me to get the actors I needed in this video since I am also a member of the organization and also know most of the members personally so I had to go for those whom I trusted and was confident I was going to get the information I

needed from them. They all were happy to participate in the video especially the president who saw it as a medium to sell the association to the public and the educational community. The only itches I encounter with the participants were that of getting the time and also a convenient environment for the interviews. I either had to go do the interview in their homes, or persuade them to come to my own place and also the fact that most of them where extremely busy with work and other personal commitments so I had to reschedule my appointments with them many times. I didn't have seek permission before I interview any of the participants since there are no minors or children within the group and even if there were to be, they didn't fall within my target group so I only had to get their consent to the video since they all are adults which they did. In other to get the exact information I needed I had to guide the participants with interview questions which I gave them early enough to prepare and also think about the information I will be needing to get from. This was to avoid repetition and going out of context. I also had to explain the whole situation and the purpose of the video to them.

Talking about the challenges and difficulties that arose throughout this process, I will be very candid to say I had quite a good number of challenges from the beginning to the end of this project especially when it came to editing the interviews, subtitling and putting them together. I had to meet with my editor on several occasions and we spend long hours before we could actually come up this work since most of the participants in the interviews had so much information to give out so we had to try and narrow it down to the topic in context. Also as I earlier mentioned time management and location both on my side and those I interviewed was really a great issue since I needed to conduct the interviews with them at their free time. This was difficult in that most of the times they were free were either no compactable with my own program or didn't permit us to do the interview at that moment as a result I had to change some of the participants.

Getting the right and also good equipment's for this project was also I problem for me since I didn't understand getting a video directly takes too much space so my storage device was not able to carry all the footages I needed so I ended up using about three different cameras and in other to put up this video. The greatest challenge I encountered was that of health as I fell sick during this period and was supposed to be operated so I was disconnected from this process for about a month and it was really a big problem to me and the participants I intended to interview.

In other to realize this project and also makes the vision clearer to the viewers, I had to design some questionnaires to guide both me and the people I interviewed these questions were in two parts and the first part was for the president. I tried to use short and direct questions that needed direct answers as well. In the first part of the questions I tried to ask questions that descript and present the activities of the organization and in the second part I seek to

A - President

- 1. Who are you (description of ASSOGRAF)
- 2. What is the mission of the organization?
- 3. Who do you help (clients) and how
- 4. How and from where do you get your funding?
- 5. Structure (hierarchy and branches)
- 6. Cooperation with other organizations, Finnish government, Cameroon government and others
- 7. How is supervision done? (How and by whom)
- B Any two or three members

- 1. What has this organization done for you to help you in your integration in Finland?
- 2. In your own words and context what does the organization do to Cameroonians in Finland and what is your role (position and contribution)
- 3. Do you feel happy for what you do for this organization and what it those to other members
- 4. What will you change or do more or less if you have the chance and opportunity.

5 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPEMENT

It actually a difficult task to determine precisely how professionally developed I have become as a result of this documentary work. I have realized, but still not withstanding it will be an understatement if I say I have not learned anything after coming up with a documentary like this. To be able to come up with this work I have actually gone through a series of theories, books, seminars and discussions on this topic of integration in Finland and beyond and to be candid I will say I have really learned a lot and my understanding of this term has really been greatly widen

Professionally speaking also I can categorically say I gained a lot from the execution of this project as I developed new skills needed in becoming a successful social worker and my motivation most at times came not only from some professionals I envied in this field, but also from the participants in the this project from conception to realization and also from my supervisor.

This project helped greatly to improve my critical thinking skills, as I was able to analyze and assess things around me during this time and through this I was able to come up with several suggestions on how to improve on the welfare and development of the association and its members.

Punctuality was a key development skill during this period. During the project, I realized that I was supposed to always be on time especially when it came to meeting the participants in the interviews since most of them had very tide and busy schedules and also during meetings and other activities of the group. This really helped to build my punctuality skills.

I noticed the importance of the code of ethics as social workers during the execution of the project and I did try my best in implementing them throughout this project. The code of ethics were very useful and its serves as guide to me, this

helped me to establish and maintain professional development skills throughout this project.

Networking was an important tool to me throughout this project from conception to execution especially as I had to meet with different service providers, organizations and members to get my target group and also venues for the interviews and I noticed it was very important to me during this project. Going to meetings, exhibitions and different events organized by ASSOGRAF made me to be conscious of the fact that I needed to update myself weekly to be able to come up with an elaborate and comprehensive report.

As an immigrant seeking to be integrated into the Finnish society I will say the experience gained from a project like this are quite enormous and has really been very useful and helpful to me as I journey through this process. Thanks to this study I have come to a greater understanding of how to be integrated and I have realized that coming together as a group will ease the process of integration of an individual in the sense that through this knowledge and information is shared.

The realization of this project has come as a result of the knowledge and skills I have gained throughout my three years studies as a social works student so being able to put in practice some of the things I have learned during this period as a student has been a great moment for me thus making me feel so proud with the quality of knowledge I have acquired.

This was my first time to come up with a video project and I must be very candid that the experience I gained from this first project are really many and through this I have come to realized that the easiest way to pass on information is through a video project.

6 CONCLUSIONS

It will always be very difficult to draw a conclusion whenever it comes to this topic of integration. For as much as the word demands, there can never a 100% integration because of the complexity of the process but rather we can be integrated in one domain or another. Many immigrants or people has misunderstood this word and has always considered integration as speaking the language, getting a job or being married forgetting to know these are just some of the processes of being integrated.

In the case of Cameroonians in Finland many are instead trying to be assimilated rather than being integrated thus making the mission of ASSOGRAF and its existence very important. This situation can better be illustrated with the words of Malcolm X who said that "integration is just like when you've got some coffee that's too black, which means it's too strong. What do you do? You integrate it with cream, you make it weak. But if you pour too much cream in it, you won't even know you ever had coffee. It used to be hot, it becomes cool. It used to be strong, it becomes weak. It used to wake you up, now it puts you to sleep."

Berry's Acculturation Model

Identification with Minority Group Strong Weak Integrated Assimilated Weak Weak Strong Weak Strong Weak Strong Marginal

Amongst the numerous points advance by those interviewed, the different activities organized by the association and also the chance of getting together seeks to preserve the culture of Cameroonians whereas the role of peers and those who have lived in the country longer towards new members on educating them on how things work in Finland, importance of language courses help towards adapting to a new culture.

The findings from this research work have proven that the role of immigrants association is very important in their integration in a new country. From the views and opinions of those interviewed, ASSOGRAF has played a great role in either helping them get integrated or guide them towards that process. Thus cooperation between stakeholders and immigrants associations is very necessary for their integration.

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APPENDIX

- A President
- 1. Who are you (description of ASSOGRAF)
- 2. What is the mission of the organization?
- 3. Who do you help (clients) and how
- 4. How and from where do you get your funding?
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- 7. How is supervision done? (How and by whom)
- B Any two or three members
- 1. What has this organization done for you to help you in your integration in Finland?
- 2. In your own words and context what does the organization do to Cameroonians in Finland and what is your role (position and contribution)
- 3. Do you feel happy for what you do for this organization and what it those to other members
- 4. What will you change or do more or less if you have the chance and opportunity.