

 ISSN NO. 2320-5407	Journal Homepage: www.journalijar.com INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR) Article DOI:10.21474/IJAR01/12363 DOI URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/12363	 INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR) ISSN 2320-5407 Journal Homepage: http://www.journalijar.com Article DOI:10.21474/IJAR01/12363
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

LAND TENURE INSECURITY AND LAND CONFLICTS IN THE BAMENDA GRASSFIELDS OF CAMEROON: PUZZLING EVIDENCE FROM BALI NYONGA/BAWOCK LAND CONFLICT

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 25 November 2020

Final Accepted: 28 December 2020

Published: January 2021

Key words:-

Tenure Insecurity, Land Disputes, Bali Nyonga/Bawock, Bamenda Grassfields

Abstract

This paper examines the challenges of land tenure insecurity and land conflicts in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon. Colonial and later, postcolonial governments of Cameroon introduced different and most often, conflicting land policies. These divergent land policies, later on, replaced collective ownership of land with private ownership. This paper, focuses on the different causes of land tenure insecurity such as inequality, outside encroachment, and common property challenges. It also tackles the measure causes of land conflicts such as multiple land sales, land scarcity, population growth, poor boundary demarcation, land laws and contested records of land conflicts. Despite these challenges, land tenure security was achieved through customary land, state land and individual titling. However, the case study between Bali Nyonga and Bawock demonstrates efforts by different parties to confront, manage and resolve land dispute. Based on a wide range of primary and secondary sources, this paper argues that, land tenure insecurity and land disputes have benefitted the rich, and fostered social inequalities. The study concludes that, despite the lessons and opportunities for intervention advanced, land tenure insecurity and land conflicts in Cameroon could only be overcome, if the present structures and institutions of land management are modernized and restructured by stakeholders to benefit the majority.

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Introduction:-

The colonial encounter in Africa has been a subject of debate among scholars on issues related to insecurity and conflicts for a long period of time. While some glorify colonial land laws and policies in Africa, others blame the colonialists for the problems of land tenure insecurity and land conflicts in Africa (McAuslan, 1985, p. 8). In the Bamenda Grassfields, people with insecure tenure face the risk that their rights to land will be threatened by competing claims, and even lost as a result of eviction. More recently, tenure insecurity has been seen as a particular factor in the generation of conflict, linked for example to land conflict and violence. Specifically, insecurity of tenure has resulted in land conflict where land rights were limited in terms of scope or duration, conflicting, or unenforceable. Insecurity of tenure has been identified as one of several increasingly serious threats to urban security and safety, alongside disasters and violence (USAID, 2005, p. 3). In the urban informal settlements which house the majority of residents in the Bamenda Grassfields, the effects of insecure tenure include forced eviction, displacement and resettlement. Insecurity of tenure has thus been identified as one of several increasingly serious

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threats to urban security and land conflicts (Moser & Peake, 1987, p. 17). However, these effects of land tenure insecurity have often been addressed through clarifications, titling and registration initiatives, initiatives to demarcate and record tenure rights without granting title, has improved security of tenure for customary and indigenous rights holders.

Land conflict, which is defined as a “social fact in which at least two parties are involved, the roots of which are different interests over the property rights to land” (Wehrmann, 2008, p. 4) has posed a serious threat to development in the Bamenda Grassfields. Development research suggests that land conflict is widespread in rural settings, with recent concerns focusing on land grabs involving the illegal or unjust acquisition of land by investors (Zagama, 2011, p. 23). Land’s multiple dimensions mean that factors of scarcity and psychological attachment can increase the potential for conflict between different parties with interests in the same area. In particular, issues around land rights, land access, and injustices relating to land have been highlighted as obstacles to development. Moser and Rodgers suggest that increasing inequality in access to natural resources, including land, can create potential for violence in “non-conflict” situations (Moser & Rodgers, 2005, p. 11).

When land tenure is secured, land can be a cornerstone for economic growth and an incentive for investment, but when land rights are insecure, this can lead to land conflicts, instability and the exclusion of vulnerable groups, such as women, indigenous people and the poor. In the Bamenda Grassfields, different land tenure systems have contributed to land tenure insecurity and land conflicts.¹ Customary systems, which are often based on traditional, unwritten, and locally relevant rules about how to use and allocate land and resources, are responsible for women’s land tenure insecurity. They have not been able to withstand increasing pressure on land and resources both from within the community and from the outside - compared with statutory systems which provide written legal rules or written case law about these issues. Individual land ownership has put land to the most economically efficient use, but it has excluded disadvantaged populations, such as the poor, and limit state land management options in the Bamenda Grassfields (Ministry of State Property and Land Tenure, 2009, p.1). Public (or state) land ownership has withhold land for conservation purposes or public land management and has facilitated more equal access to prime locations. However, it has led to poor land use and land management outcomes as a result of bureaucratic inactivity and corruption. For inclusive and sustainable land governance, land systems should be evaluated holistically, to understand how and why decisions on land and natural resources are made, implemented and enforced in both formal and informal settings to overcome land tenure insecurity and land conflicts (Coldham, 1978, p. 7).

This study presents the results of an investigation of the following questions: What factors were responsible for the land tenure insecurity in the Bamenda Grassfields² of Cameroon? What were the causes of land conflicts and to what extent have they impacted on the different societal groups in Cameroon? Were there some case studies of land tenure problems and land conflicts that were so peculiar in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon? In answering these questions, the author seeks to also delineate some of the lessons and opportunities in a bid to overcome land tenure insecurity and land conflicts in the Bamenda Grassfields.

Background:

Land tenure insecurity and land conflicts are not new in Cameroon. The Germans and later, the British and the French introduced land laws to resolve land tenure insecurity and land conflicts. After independence, precisely in 1974, the government of Cameroon introduced new land laws that gave opportunities for individuals to register and own lands without giving any attention to customary laws on land management. This created land tenure insecurity and land conflicts in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon. This explains why a brief presentation of this Region is very important.

Before 1972, what existed and integrated the present study area were British Southern Cameroons and West Cameroon. In 1972, the United Republic of Cameroon came into effect with the creation of seven provinces, which were later increased to ten. Following a Presidential Decree in 2008 transforming provinces into regions, the North

¹ The President of the United Republic of Cameroon was authorized by the Constitution of 2 June 1972, and by Law No.73-3 of 9 July 1973 to establish by ordinances rules governing land tenure and government owned land and properties.

² The Bamenda Grassfields for the past several years has also been referred to as “Bamenda Grasslands”, “Western Grassfields”, “Western High Plateau”, “North West Province”, and presently, it is referred to as the “North West Region” of Cameroon.

West Province³ of Cameroon became the North West Region of Cameroon. This Region is bounded by the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the north, the Adamawa Region to the northeast, the West Region to the southeast and the South West Region to the west. Besides, the region has seven divisions whose names are all derived from geographical features. These divisions include: Bui Division, Boyo Division, Ngoketunjia Division, Mezam Division, Momo Division, Menchum Division, and Donga Mantung Division.

The geographical location of the region, characterized by mountains, valleys and hills has also favoured the emergence of land conflicts. In fact, the region lies between latitude 5°15' north and stretches from longitudes 9°17' East to 11°25' East (Tam, 2004, p.37). It has a surface area of 17,302 square kilometres and a population density of 91 persons per square kilometer (Ministry of Information and Culture, 2001, p. 63). Following the 1987 census, the region had a population of over 1.2 million inhabitants. In 2000, the total population was estimated at 1,790,164 inhabitants (Fogwe, 2005, p. 25). Finally, the 2005 population census results proclaimed by Prime Minister, Philemon Yang on Wednesday 14 April 2010 gave the total population of Cameroon at 19, 406,100 people and that of the North West Region estimated at 1,804,695 inhabitants, with Bamenda having 269,530 inhabitants.⁴ The population of this region depends mostly on land for livelihood. This has led to persistent conflicts among farmers, pastoralists, and the indigenous population. The immediate ripple effect of this daunting dilemma has been land tenure insecurity and land conflicts in the Bamenda Grassfields.

Causes of Land Tenure Insecurity:

Land tenure security protects people against arbitrary forced eviction, harassment and other threats. However, it is clear that there is no single land issue in Cameroon, but many different issues that may be linked in various ways. In the Bamenda Grassfields, policy instruments that affect resource use and potential land conflicts are numerous and highly varied. They include legislation, executive rules and regulations, financial instruments, public projects and programmes, environmental policy, and policy related to health and demographics. It therefore makes sense to adapt the use of instruments to the different causes of land tenure insecurity. In June 2006, Lund, Odgaard and Sjaastad⁵ proposed and used a wide range of instruments that have caused land tenure insecurity. These instruments have been the major causes of land tenure insecurity in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon. These include inequality, institutional insecurity, outside encroachment, undermining of common property and internal conflicts.

The most common causes of land tenure insecurity in the Bamenda Grassfields is inequality. Past inequity has led to the political desire for individual land ownership and redistribution by the state and this has affected so many communities negatively. In some cases, the state has permitted gross inequality in resource access, either through grants or through sales. In 1987, Alhadji Baba was granted a license by the government of Cameroon to open a ranch in Ndawara in Boyo Division of the Bamenda Grassfields. The problem of land tenure insecurity came in because the land allocated to him had no limits and he was requested to compensate all the herders who were to be ejected from the area. Despite this, Alhadji Baba ejected about seventy Mbororo families with more than 10,000 cattle from Ndawara without any compensation and established the Elba Ranch in the area and constructed an imposing structure there as his residence. Since then, the land rights of the Mbororo have been threatened, and as such, there is constant land conflicts within the area.

The first instrument has recently been employed in some parts of Cameroon with mixed results. This form of redistribution is quite radical and lends itself to politicisation, which may easily jeopardize the declared purpose of the reform. A further instrument that affects distribution in the Bamenda Grassfields include laws related to succession, which have profound effects on property fragmentation, women's access to land, and possible investment - depending on whether succession is within the nuclear family or not. This has been the case in some powerful chiefdoms like Bafut, Nso and Mankon.

³ On 20 May 1972, the two Federated States - West and East Cameroons - were abolished by a Referendum. West Cameroon was divided into two provinces. The former Bamenda Grassfields became known as the North West Province.

⁴Yussuf Sariki, "Release of Population Census Results: Enactment of ELECAM Amendments and Referendum Procedure Law," *CHRONOCLE*, No. 210, 19-25 April 2010, 2; the populations of the other nine regions were: Centre (3,525,664), Far North (3,480,414), Littoral (2,865,795), North (2,050,229), West (1,785,285), South West (1,384,286), Adamawa (1,015, 622), East (801, 968), and South (692,142).

⁵For more information, contact Christian Lund, Institute of Development Studies, Roskilde University; Rio Odgaard, Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen; Espen Sjaastad, Noragric, Agricultural University of Norway.

Second, in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon, if the problem is not so much past inequity, it is possible future institutional insecurity. There exist broad types of causes of institutional insecurity of tenure within customary systems with a couple of examples going from smaller to bigger problems and less to more state involvement in regulation and management. As Fitzpatrick points out, there has in recent years been a change in the official attitude towards customary tenure (Fitzpatrick, 2005, pp. 449-475). Agencies such as the World Bank now recognise that customary systems of land tenure are often more flexible and adapted to local circumstances than centralised and uniform systems (Deininger, 2003, p.11). Fitzpatrick further argues that “in other circumstances, customary systems may well be deficient, and yet regulatory intervention will simply serve to dispossess vulnerable groups and enhance uncertainty by creating parallel systems (Fitzpatrick, 2005, p. 453).” It has been shown, for example, that in the matrilineal communities of Kom and some patrilineal communities in Ndop, regulatory intervention, even though there are deficiencies in the customary systems, may in such contexts have a very negative impact on women’s land rights.

Third, a good example of outside encroachment is from the rice area of Ngoketunjia Division. Here, land in the peri-urban areas is converted at a brisk pace from inalienable customary tenure to various forms of exclusive and alienable holdings. The rapid increase in the value of land has led speculators and bureaucrats to acquire land at the urban fringe from the customary land holders, and this has contributed to tenure insecurity. Customary land tenure is not effectively recognised by the state, and customary land holders face a difficult choice. That is, either to sell the land to speculators in order to at least make some benefit from their land holding or to risk being de facto expropriated by the state, which is the legal owner of the land without receiving any adequate compensation (Benjaminson & Lund, 2003). A possible instrument could be the demarcation of customary areas in which land matters are left in the hands of local customary authorities (Toulmin & Quan, 2000, pp. 6-8). One major difficulty is that internal equity issues are not dealt with in this model, and weaker groups’ interests within the community are not represented.

Fourth, indigenes were constantly undermining common property. Practically, some Bamenda Grassfields groups control common property and sometimes preferred transacting with outsiders for access to land resources. This ranged from grazing and watering of animals, over small-scale mining to larger longer-term investments. Often, the resource was held in common by a community, but once the community was not recognised as a legitimate and legal landholder, free-rider problems undermined customary rights and led to depletion of the resource. One possible instrument could be to recognise the customary group as a corporate entity with “legal personality (Deininger, 2003, p.7).” This way, the group could not only engage in transparent contracts with outsiders, it could also formalise internal rules for revenue sharing. One major difficulty lies, of course, in defining membership of the group, whether it is hereditary, requires residence, or is marketable.

Finally, land tenure insecurity in the Bamenda Grassfields are also caused by internal conflicts. In some situations, the existing customary rules and customary authorities in the Bamenda Grassfields were unable to provide adequate security to its members. Hence, a simple formalisation and recognition of existing rights was insufficient to provide security and certainty of tenure. Also, one possible instrument in this case could be to establish a local agency for recognition and recording of land transactions. In many places, this role was assigned to a fonby colonial and post-colonial authorities. Recently, with democratisation, such agencies took the form of village committees with the possibility of a more genuine representation of community interests. However, they have not adequately represented the views and interests of all groups in the study area. Alternatively, Land Consultative Boards under the responsibility of local government operated to validate and guarantee transactions and land holdings.

Causes of Land Conflicts:

The causes of land conflicts in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon can be briefly examined from the economic, political and social domains. Economic factors include land sale, increasing land scarcity, population growth, shortcomings of the land market and its institutions, poor functioning of the land market and rapid urbanisation. These factors also worked against economic development in the Bamenda Grassfields (Hauge & Ellingsen, 1998, pp. 299-317).

First, land conflicts are caused by increasing resource scarcity caused by population growth. Following the 1987 census, the Bamenda Grassfields had a population of over 1.2 million inhabitants. In 2000, the total population was estimated at 1,790,164 inhabitants (Fogwe, 2005, p. 25). Finally, the 2005 population census gave the total population of Cameroon at 19, 406,100 people and that of the Bamenda Grassfields estimated at 1,804,695

inhabitants, with Bamenda having 269,530 inhabitants. The population of this region depended solely on land for livelihood and the high population growth rates have led to land conflicts.

The second economic factor deals with land sales. The rich were buying land with increasing frequency and then registering it, thus dispossessing poor people. These rich people are mainly new businessmen and politicians who invest in agribusiness, buying large tracts of land in rural areas and sometimes transforming small farmers into agricultural labourers on their own land. There are also land conflicts between farmers and herdsman. For example, Wum and Ndop where cattle breeding was well developed and where there were frequent conflicts between crop and livestock farmers. The former often complained that their harvests were destroyed by the latter when they came with their herds. In some places such conflicts have led to the loss of human lives.

Third, urbanisation of towns threatens autochthonous peoples. The rapid expansion of towns takes place by absorbing neighbouring villages, resulting in expropriation of rural communities. In some cases, the people were re-located elsewhere, sometimes they were given compensation but it never always worked as they wished. On the contrary, there were land conflicts between local populations and the authorities that date back several years (Baes, 1983, p. 14).

Political factors have also precipitated the escalation of land conflicts in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon. These factors include contested history of the conflicting parties, modification of political constituencies, competing reference points for justification of land claims, contested boundaries and no demarcation of boundaries, institutional change as catalyst for land conflicts, land conservation, expropriation for public use, application of laws and regulations on land ownership, and record of land conflicts. Some of these factors shall be highlighted below.

First, a contested history of the conflicting parties had caused land conflicts in the Bamenda Grassfields. Each party to the land conflict most often claimed to be the first community to have settled on the land, thereby claiming for themselves, the notion of being a more rightful land owner. Following the idea of "first come, first serve," parties claimed to have "older rights" to the land and therefore being more justified in their claim (LUKMEF, 2009). In addition, the common history is constructed by each side to fit its own point of view and the own interest. In land conflicts there is seldom one common version of history. This leads to the fact that the other side is generally viewed as less trustworthy and not being upright, since they distort or deny the true history.

The second concerns the modification of political constituencies. Attempts to change the size, boundary, or the location of the headquarters of a division or sub-division usually led to land conflicts due to a perceived sense of being disadvantaged by at least one concerned party. When the reason for the attempted change was not obvious, this would be perceived as politically motivated or being favoured by those in the ruling party. For example, the Balikumbat-Bafanji land conflicts are always stimulated by this factor, especially as Bafanji is located in Balikumbat Sub-Division.

The third treats contested boundaries and the absence of boundary demarcation. Parties usually assume that the other party knows the boundary, even if the party refers to a different boundary. This, most often, results in land conflicts. No boundaries might as well be a problem in settings of clear distinctions between communities in question, especially under circumstances of geographical proximity. When communities feel they are different, the need to have a proper territory and a clear line between them and their neighbour is there. However, while one party seeks to have a boundary demarcated, the other negates the need for a boundary due to the fact that they belong to one constituency (Ibid).

The last focuses on the record of land conflicts. Some of the violent land conflicts in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon were caused by the keeping of poor records. In some instances, records of previous land conflicts were either distorted by corrupt administrative officials or reported missing. This was often spearheaded by senior officials or elites of the ruling class. Once this happened, the image of the other party was generally distorted and at times cemented into stereotypes and prejudices that lived on even beyond the actual land conflict (NAB, 1965).

Social factors have played a primordial role in the outbreak of land conflicts in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon. These factors that have acted as obstacles to development include: migration and population mobility, land conflicts between migrants and autochthones, land conflicts over protected areas, opposition between land

users and owners' rights, group identity, and escalation of individual acts. An explanation of some of these factors is necessary.

First, Migration and population mobility are among the root causes of land conflicts in the Bamenda Grassfields. Push as well as pull factors cause migrations that are classed under different forms, including rural/rural migration, rural/urban migration and trans-national migration (Lane & Pretty, 1990, p. 11). There are two fundamental and general issues that relate to migration and land conflicts. One is the aspect of being first or late comers to certain areas, or indigenous versus non-indigenous people. While this may not cause a big problem when the land is plentiful, it certainly does cause problems when competition for land begins (Juul & Lund, 2002, p. 10).

Second, land conflicts between migrants and autochthones were also responsible for land conflicts. In certain areas of the Bamenda Grassfields, the population is much, whereas in others, the population is small in relation to the available land. Some people therefore migrate from the over populated to the less populated areas. This might be caused by government action or by civilian authorities. The intrusions do not always work out well; the original inhabitants usually end up reclaiming their land.

Third, land conflicts over protected areas were also among the social causes. Defenders and promoters of the environment have created natural reserves to save plant and animal species in danger of extinction. Unfortunately, there are always autochthonous people living on the peripheries of such spaces. People naturally exploit resources on unprotected land but as these resources become scarce, they do not hesitate to enter protected areas to exploit as well, which often lead to serious conflict with local administration (Ibid).

Finally, the escalation of individual acts has resulted in violent land conflicts. Individual acts triggering collective reactions are regularly playing a role in the escalation of tensions in the Bamenda Grassfields. The escalation process is not only unnecessary, it is sometimes ill-founded when only perceptions trigger a reaction. The disappearance of a person might be attributed to kidnapping or murder by the other party, interpreted as an aggression and a reason for a violent reaction, even when it is not clear what actually happened to the person. The Bali-Nyonga/Bawock land conflict in 2007 was provoked by an escalation of an individual act. It surrounded the annual ritual performed by the Bali Nyonga people. This attacked by the people of Bawock on Saturday 3 March 2007, culminated in serious confrontations between the people of the two villages and ended in the defeat of the people of Bawock (Sumelong, 2007, p. 2).

Ways to Increase Tenure Security:

Even though formal title will increase tenure security in many situations in Cameroon, experience indicates that it is not always necessary and often is not a sufficient condition for optimum use of the land resource. The goal of providing tenure security for the long-term, administered in a cost-effective way through institutions that combine legality with social legitimacy can be achieved in a variety of ways, depending on the situation. These ways, according to Klaus Deininger,⁶ include customary land, state land and individual titles.

We shall start by examining customary land. In customary systems, legal recognition of existing rights and institutions subject to minimum conditions is generally more effective than premature attempts at establishing formalised structures. Legally recognising customary land rights subject to a determination of membership and the codification or establishment of internal rules and mechanisms for conflict resolution in the Bamenda Grassfields can greatly enhance occupants' security. Demarcation of the boundaries of community land can remove the threat of encroachment by outsiders while drawing on well-defined procedures within the community to assign and manage rights within the group. Conflicts historically often erupt primarily in conjunction with land transfers, especially to outsiders. Where such transfers occur and are socially accepted, the terms should be recorded in writing to avoid ambiguity that could subsequently lead to land related conflicts (Delille, 2002, p. 20).

We shall also handle state land. Occupants of state land especially in the Bamenda Grassfields have often made considerable efforts to increase their level of security, in some cases through significant investments but often remain vulnerable to eviction threats. Because of their limited land rights, they generally cannot make full use of the land they occupy. If existing institutions can credibly commit to lease contracts, giving users secure, transferable, long-term lease rights will permit the realisation of most, if not all the investment benefits associated with higher

⁶ Klaus Deininger is a Senior Economist, Development Research Group, World Bank.

levels of tenure security (FAO, 2002, p. 10). In these cases, the recognition of long-term peaceful occupation in good faith and the award of long-term land leases with provisions for automatic renewal will be the most desirable option. If the leases awarded by state institutions are not credible, measures to increase tenure security or alternatively full privatization, will be required to give users sufficient security of tenure and the associated benefits. An indicator for limited credibility of leases may be that, even where there is strong effective demand for credit, financial institutions will not accept long-term leases as collateral (King, 1977, p.101).

The last way of increasing tenure security is through individual title. Where, after considering the arguments advanced earlier, formal and individual ownership title will be the question of choice, inefficiency in the land administrative institutions responsible for demarcation of boundaries, registration and record keeping, adjudication of rights, and resolution of conflicts can still preclude realization of many of the benefits of secure tenure. If these institutions are not working well or are poorly coordinated, inefficient or corrupt transaction costs will be high thereby reducing the level of transactions below what would be socially optimal, and in many cases excluding the poor completely (Cheung, 1969, p. 11). In the extreme, lack of clarity about who is responsible for specific areas between institutions has evolved and authority of titles or certificates of land ownership distributed during different intervention periods. In such situations, institutional reform, including improved coordination within the government and with the private sector will be a precondition for the ability to deliver property rights in land effectively. If this is achieved, then property rights in land would be effective.

Case Study of Land Conflict Between Bali Nyonga and Bawock:

This case study effectively elaborates the close connection between postcolonial reforms and land conflicts in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon. It reflects efforts made by ethnic groups, civil society, non-governmental organizations, government and individuals to confront, manage and resolve land conflicts.

Bawock and Bali Nyonga are found in Bali Nyonga Sub-Division in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon. The land/boundary conflict between these ethnic groups sparked up a lot of speculations after it erupted and took a dramatic turn on 6 March 2007 (Nke, 2007, p. 6). There is one question that must be answered for the proper understanding of this land conflict. Is Bawock a quarter in Bali Nyonga or is it a village on its own? During an interview granted by The Post on 24 March 2007 to the Fon of Bali Nyonga, DohGahNyonga III, he concludes that:

Bawock is right inside Bali. If you want to go to Mbu, Baforchu, you have to pass through a Bali Nyonga village. So there is no way we can make a boundary for Bawock including Mantum. This is why an attempt on 6 December 2009 to create a fictitious illegal boundary was done behind my back. We went to the administration to let them know that such an exercise was out of place. It did not help. That is why we have decided to take the matter to court. We know Bawock people have a lot of money. But if there is any justice, we expect justice (Manyong, 2007, p. 5).

Before this interview was granted, the Fons of Baforchu and Pinyin with the Fon of Bawock, Theodore Wanda Nana met at the Pinyin Fon's palace and addressed a letter on 14 November 2006 to the Senior Divisional Officer for Mezam, Jules Marcelin Ndjaga. These Fons requested the administration to assist them by providing appropriate technicians and experts to demarcate their boundaries. The administration responded by programming the exercise on Wednesday 6 December 2006 in the morning through a letter with reference No.00/L/E29/PS/A1. This move already signaled danger especially as the Bali Nyonga interpreted it as an attempt to expand Bawock village. At this juncture, conflict analysts knew boundary conflict could start at any time. The BOTFON Human Rights Watch visualizes this danger when it states that:

Despite efforts by high level Bali Nyonga traditional authorities headed by the Fon to meet the Governor and his concerned collaborators, the Mezam administration moved to the field with uncharacteristic promptitude, barely three weeks after the Fons addressed their memo. Given that the villages of Mantum, Gola, Kumbela, Kumcha, Mbelu, Jangman and Kopin are found between Bawock on the one hand and Mbu and Pinyin on the others, the Bali people interpreted the administration's move as a deliberate and insidious move to carve out portions of Bali land to expand Bawock village without consulting the Bali villagers in the buffer zone (Manyong, 2007, pp. 7-8).

The conflict that started on 6 March 2007 was immediately provoked by the annual ritual performed by the Bali Nyonga people through the Bali Juju known as Voma (Sumelong, 2007, p. 2). The Fon of Bali Nyonga, DohGahNyonga recalls that "... one Peter Limen and his sons... attacked the Voma and took its equipment and even had the guts to say they should go and tell the Fon of Bali to come and collect the Voma (Ibid)." In addition to

the fact that the traditional house at the entrance of Bali NyongaFon's palace called Banchu, constructed in 1889 by Dr. Eugene Zintgraff was burnt to ashes by unidentified arsonists (Lajong,2007, p. 2), the Bali Nyonga people still think "Bawock is a quarter in Bali (Manyong,2007, pp. 7-8)." Despite some of these causes, the consequences were far-reaching on the indigenes and the North West Region of Cameroon. The Post highlights some of the devastating effects of the boundary conflict:

Limen who was severely beaten and his car smashed was hospitalized in the Bamenda Provincial Hospital. A provision store estimated at 10 million Francs CFA belonging to one Christopher Nono was burnt to ashes. Some 350.000 Francs CFA and two motorcycles were burnt. Another trader, Francis Bianda, was dragged out of his car and beaten, before his car was set ablaze. Jacob Yimi lost 150 bags of Robusta coffee in the flames. The Headmaster of Government School Bawock, Philip Ngaso, was helpless as flames engulfed a two-apartment building. The pillars and billboards meant to demarcate the land including two vehicles were all smashed. Many people were displaced while others lost lives and properties (Nsom, 2007, p. 2).

These land tenure and land conflict problems have fostered social inequalities with potentially destabilizing consequences in both fondoms. Members of the Land Consultative Boards must always prevent these conflicts before they escalate into violence.

Lessons and Opportunities for Intervention:

The review of existing customary and statutory land tenure systems in the Bamenda Grassfields, coupled with the experiences of recent land conflicts caused by land tenure insecurity, helps to delineate some of the critical opportunities (Nsom, 2007, p. 2) and lessons learned from the area. We are going to summarize potential intervention opportunities in the following priority areas:

Recognizing and Recording Local Land Rights:

Despite the passage of the 1974 land ordinances that replaced customary land laws with statutory land laws, evidence in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon makes it clear that customary law and statutory land tenure systems continue to exist alongside one another. In some fondoms, the customary system still takes precedence in spite of land tenure reforms and decentralization efforts. In areas where only statutory land laws are being implemented, latent land conflicts were unavoidable, thus reducing tenure security. In this context, reconciling the two systems through the formalization of local customary rules surrounding land ownership and use is a clear priority for development interventions. While this should recognize the wide diversity of different forms of customary tenure rather than simply seeking the rapid absorption of local rights into a framework of private ownership (Delville, 2010), pp. 10-18) and be made as simple and accessible as possible, registration of customary systems should be careful not to formalize discriminatory practices that disadvantage vulnerable groups, including women, pastoralists and the poor.

Strengthening Capacity to Develop Effective Land Management Systems:

Decentralization efforts have created opportunities, if not always the means, for effective local land management in the Bamenda Grassfields. There is a critical need to build the capacity of relevant institutions – including those at the national, local, village, and community levels – to resolve land conflicts, register customary rights, issue land titles, and manage local land resources. Support to local government offices in realizing revenues from land management could strengthen their ability to sustain their work and improve public services. The intersection of new land tenure laws and policies, coupled with increasingly decentralized land management, have created institutional frameworks whereby shifting land uses can be more effectively planned or managed.

Interventions that Improve Indigenous and Women's Land Rights:

The experiences of indigenous and women-focused land tenure interventions in the Bamenda Grassfields illustrate both the pressing need for change and the imperative for patient, well-designed development projects that take into account deep-rooted cultural sensitivities. Projects should be initiated to allocate land rights to indigenous people and women that would be readily acceptable in the society; sought to develop approaches to allocating land that would encourage, but not force, inclusion of women; and looked for multiple avenues for allocating land rights to women so that if one failed, others would be available (Diarra&Monimart, 2006). Allocating plots to women's associations for small-scale livelihood projects, building awareness of the importance of improving women's rights to land through local dialogues, encouraging joint titling of household land, and strengthening systems for securing land titles for women are good examples of local approaches to reduce land tenure insecurity.

Enabling Herders and Farmers to Access Grazing and Farming Lands:

Examples from the Bamenda Grassfields illustrate the potential to develop locally negotiated by-laws that regulate herder and farmer access to and use of land and other natural resources. Given the critical importance of pastoralism to the Bamenda Grassfields and the broadly recognized importance of pastoralist mobility to social, economic, and environmental resilience, this stands out as a priority for our proposal. Water access is a critical entry point to securing livestock mobility, with lessons learned from previous state-led attempts to make water points open-access resources (Dembélé, 2008, p. 6). There is a need to strengthen pastoralist organizations' capacities and to ensure their representation in local management committees to fight land tenure insecurity and land conflicts in the region.

Conclusion:-

The significance of this paper to the historiography of land insecurity and conflicts in Cameroon cannot be over emphasised. The thrust of the analysis of this paper has been that land tenure insecurity and land conflicts have fostered social inequalities with potentially destabilizing consequences. However, despite the many innovative attempts to address land tenure and land conflict issues, many tools have shown promises in addressing landholding inequalities, tenure security, population displacements and other contentious areas that could make land a significant factor in widespread conflict. From our findings, the rich were able to benefit from opportunities to appropriate and register land, while the poor, especially women, lose their rights to land, and as such, are victims of land tenure insecurity. Besides, traditional rulers indulge in illicit practices, selling land and causing landlessness among their own people, while corrupt administrators collect bribes and leave these land problems unresolved. While many lessons have emerged as development practitioners pay greater attention to the relationship between land tenure and land conflicts, no single formula explains how to plan successful programmatic interventions to address land issues.

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