

Cameroon: Endemic Agro-Pastoral Conflicts in Menchum

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Abstract. *This paper aims at dispelling the misconception that the prevalence of agro-pastoral conflicts in Menchum Division of North West Cameroon is because stakeholders have no interest in resolving them. Such disputes have been a common feature in the country where economic resources generate protracted clashes not only between ethnic groups, villages and individuals, but also over the choices of economic activity. From simple crop damage, the opposition between farmers and graziers has been taking many forms, ranging from daily quarrels, frequent exchange of blows, mob demonstrations and litigation, to the use of mystical powers and conventional weapons. Although these struggles are common throughout the division, Esu, Kuk, Mmen and Wum have singled themselves out as hotbeds. The consequences of these clashes are reflected in almost all spheres of life, including the economy, education, ethnicity, gender, health, human rights, justice, nutrition, peace and politics. In the face of these catastrophic effects, the administration and people of Menchum have been trying in many ways to curb the disputes, albeit without any remarkable success. In 1947, Cattle Control Rules were instituted by Native Authorities who, unfortunately, lacked the legal basis to enforce any decisions and so the 1962 Control of Farming and Grazing Law was brought into force. But it also proved unworkable because stakeholders openly and obstinately refused to obey its provisions. Even the 1978 Presidential Decree creating a statutory organ (the Farmer Grazier Commission) for the settlement of conflicts has remained a toothless bulldog. Other administrative policies, such as demarcation of land, introduction of mixed farming and the barbed wire scheme intended to facilitate peaceful coexistence between the two rival activities, were implemented without any remarkable success. The holding of meetings with stakeholders, the proposals made by the World Food Organization (FAO) in 1962 and the laying down of resolutions by commissions of inquiry like the Nseke Commission (1973) and Koumpa Issa Commission (2003) were other unsuccessful measures aimed at resolving disagreements. Instead of dissipating, conflicts rather escalated, becoming acute and chronic.*

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Introduction

On February 3, 2017, an enraged group of farmers armed with machetes, knives, sticks and rifles in Truwa (Furu-Awa in Menchum Division) brutally killed 180 cattle and burnt down the houses of a grazier named Dogo for masterminding the gruesome murder of a cocoa farmer. To further avenge the death of their colleague, the farmers invaded the administrative quarters in Furu-Awa and asked for the immediate release of the assailant who was under gendarmerie custody. When government officials attempted to defend the culprit, members of the crowd assaulted the officials and almost hacked the Divisional Officer and Brigade Commander to death. They broke into the cell, seized the prisoner and squeezed the life out of him. These recent events are symptomatic of the type of unhealthy relationship that has been existing between two rival groups in the whole division for decades. Menchum Division, found in the North West Region of Cameroon, is one of the fifty-eight administrative units that make up the country. It covers approximately 5,000 square kilometers and according to 2005 population estimates, there were roughly 150,000 inhabitants in the area. These are the Aghem, Beba-Befang, Mbororo, Fungom and Furu-Awa people. Whereas most of the grasslands that are free from tsetse flies are found on the undulating hills and valleys where the Aghem, Fungom and Mbororo are settled, the others inhabit forestlands interspersed with patches of grass. This paper has been streamlined into two parts, with the first situating farmer-grazier conflicts (FGCs) in context by describing their frequency, analyzing the causes and assessing their impact. The second segment of the work discusses attempted solutions that were put forward in the form of legislation, administrative policy, proposals by FAO and recommendations by commissions of inquiry.

The Context Of FGCS in Menchum Division

Farmer-grazier conflicts (FGCs) can be defined as the perennial, prolonged and recurrent disagreements or rows between cultivators and pastoralists arising from damage to crops by cattle, leading sometimes to affrays with fatalities. The frequency of these disputes in the area was appalling as has been confirmed by the fact that between 1946 and 2005, approximately 400,000 farmers and 5,000 graziers lived in the area. Within this span, an estimated 21,074 conflicts were registered making an average of 339 hostilities a year. The highest numbers were recorded in 1973 (150 conflicts), 1981 (175 conflicts) and 2003 (180 conflicts) in Wum; in Esu the highest figures were 150 conflicts in 1966, 210 conflicts in 1988 and 195 conflicts in 1993. From 2004 to 2005 when this study was carried out, 150,000 people lived in the Menchum area. Of this number, 75,000 were farmers while 1,500 were graziers. As a result, fifty per cent of the population was engaged in farming and about one per cent in grazing. The number of clashes between farmers and graziers during that year was 1,750, giving a monthly average of 145 (Ngwoh, 2006).

From the analysis above, it is clear that although the number of graziers was negligible, the frequency of conflicts was very high. This is because a single grazier could be involved in conflicts with many farmers at the same time since communal farming was the *modus operandi*. A case in point was in 1988 in Esu where Moi Issa Yante, with his aggressive attitude, compelled 120 farmers to abandon their age-old farms after his cattle destroyed their crops. In this study area, FGCs were so numerous that talk about them was on every lip and groups of women composed songs to express their frustrations. Their frequency certainly left a strain on every muscle and a pain in every heart, thereby creating a situation wherein the complaints, petitions and presence of contestants became a thorn in the flesh of traditional, administrative and political officials. The situation in Menchum was similar to the one Kaberry described in Nso in 1959 when she pointed out that:

Something will have to be done... Do you think I can get these women to talk about anything except the Mbororo and their cows? No matter what I try to discuss: house building (the cows eat the thatching grass); cooking (the cows have eaten the corn); the size of farms and harvest (cows); sickness of children (the cows have eaten the children's food). Women's work (its hard because of cows)... It all comes back to this *bete noire*... I don't want to be a scaremonger, but if matters continue like this for another couple of years or so, the administration may be up against real trouble (1959, p. 14).

What she had in mind is that FGCs had transcended all the fabrics of social life in Nso. Although her mission in Nso was to study the status of women, the responses she got from them were largely about cattle damaging their crops. Conflicts affected housing, education, nutrition, health and even productivity. The picture that Kaberry painted of Nso land actually transposed itself to Menchum Division where all stakeholders seemed to have raised their voices against graziers.

Conflicts were more prevalent during the transhumance period when cattle was compelled to move from the hills where the scorching heat had rendered them bare of vegetation to the valleys where there was still fresh grass. But more often than not, they ran into trouble with the farmers who were still to harvest crops like potatoes, cassava and egussi. During the planting season, conflicts were generated mainly by negligence on the part of graziers whose herds went accompanied by inefficient *gainako*. Some farmers too often planted crops in isolated farms in grazing areas thereby exposing them to cattle. Conflicts recorded during the harvesting period were due, in the main, to willful and capricious acts of farmers and graziers based on economic rivalry between the two groups, each with the intention of reducing the productivity of the other (Kum, 1983).

The recrudescence of FGCs in the Menchum Division is the product of a sum total of factors that contributed in various degrees to their outbreak. While physical and economic factors made conflicts a regular feature, socio-cultural factors determined their

intensity. The physical environment was very unfriendly to the region's two principal economic activities, farming and grazing, because of the uneven topography riddled with steep barren hills and deeply incised stony valleys.

Seasonal changes, soil exhaustion, overgrazing and erosion forced them to move from place to place in search of better conditions. Over and above all, the absence of permanent boundaries (demarcations) between farming and grazing land worsened relations between the two communities. The cattle industry continued to suffer because the leading Mbororo graziers, like elsewhere in the country, remained glued to their traditional notion that cattle was an object of prestige and a symbol of capital. In this way, they viewed their cattle not as an economic asset but as insignias of riches and social standing (Simo, 1997). This explains why most of them remained poor despite their very large herds whereas grazing was not a project for the poorer peasants.

Originally, the Mbororo method of grazing was acceptable because human and cattle populations were low, making transhumance possible. But with both populations growing annually at rates of three and a half and ten per cent respectively, the land is unlikely to 'survive' (Chief of Sub Sector Wum, 1973, p. 4). Since the absence of conservational grassland management system provided a leeway for farmers and graziers to continue with archaic methods that were noted for their unsustainability, the land risked becoming permanently lost to both activities, as was the case with parts of the Mambila Plateau of Nigeria (National Archives Buea (NAB), 1961). For example, at the Esu Elba Cattle Ranch, the four important types of grass for fattening cattle disappeared as a result of trampling and overgrazing giving way to a scrubby vegetation that cattle could not live on.¹ Added to the economic malaise were socio-cultural factors that led to disputes.

The emergence of indigenous graziers and the revival of mixed farming schemes, mainly by non-indigenous people, should have been signs of a positive evolution in the habits of farmers and graziers. This, however and unfortunately, became a new point of discord because the less wealthy farmers viewed it as a means of knocking them off food supply lines. The negative attitude of the administrative, traditional and political authorities towards the land tenure system undermined its principal tenets leading to its weakening. In most cases, these authorities sought to promote their personal interests, thereby converting the *res publica* into *res private* (Koumpa Issa Commission, 2004). Even the rules laid down by Native Authorities and later adopted by the government to pre-empt overgrazing, overstocking, erosion and conflicts were ignored in most cases by stakeholders who, for various reasons, became intransigent and obstinate. While indigenous farmers refused to obey the rules because they claimed the right to exploit

1 There are four important types of fattening grass for cattle, which any skilful *gainako* should be able to detect, depending on the season. The wet season feeds are: the *birigiwal*, *saabaye* and, notably, the *safore*. The main dry season grass is called the *tolore*.

their land the way they deemed fit, Mbororo graziers on their part brandished certificates of occupancy, issued by incompetent authorities as land titles. This gave them the nerves to flout farming and grazing rules, defy administrative orders and even ignore the resolutions of FGCMs.

The alleged corrupt tendencies of administrative officials, their conflicting roles and failure to implement recommendations constituted the administrative factors that led to the outbreak of conflicts. The findings of the Koumpa Issa Commission revealed that both elites and traditional rulers, as well as politicians, acknowledged the complicity of traditional rulers in violating the principle that could have averted the incessant agropastoral conflicts at least for some time. Most measures taken in the past to resolve clashes fell at the level of implementation by administrative and traditional authorities. Political factors added injury to an already hopeless situation because civil unrest, the collapse of traditional authority, the misuse of democratic principles and political victimization provided an adequate recipe for the outbreak of FGCs in the North West Region of Cameroon.

While it might be agreed that the factors responsible for the eruption of FGCs were holistic in nature, it must also be recognized that they contributed in varying proportions to the outbreak of conflicts. Even if it was possible to eradicate administrative and political factors, conflicts would still have broken out, an indication that socio-cultural, economic and physical factor together played a primordial role in causing them. But the economic and socio-cultural foundations of the conflicts were products of physical factors because it was neither poverty nor bad habits that changed the seasons nor they that created high gradient slopes on the land. Hence, the physical environment contributed about thirty five per cent to the outbreak of FGCs that manifested themselves in different ways (Ngwoh, 2006).

Although the whole division was ridden with conflicts, localities like Esu, Kuk, Mmen and Wum positioned themselves as high-risk zones because, more often than not, conflicts there degenerated into armed confrontations with fratricidal results (personal communication, December 19, 2005). Two main factors possibly accounted for their prominence as conflict zones. First and foremost, the pressure on land in the four towns was higher than in other parts of Menchum as a result of rapid human and cattle increases. Within thirty years, the human population more than doubled while that of cattle quadrupled (personal communication, April 18, 2006). The second factor was the solidarity among members of the opposing community who reacted against what touched one person as if it had touched all. This explains why the graziers of Kuk went on the rampage in 2001 when Simon Tegha gunned down Yakoubo and why Aghem women were able to organize sit-down strikes in Wum in 2003 and 2005.

The prolonged conflicts between cultivators and pastoralists created a sort of "cold war" relationship in Menchum Division with catastrophic economic, social and politi-

cal effects. The impact on the economy was visible at three levels, namely: the retardation of development because of the misuse of resources and the wastage of labor; the minimization of government's efforts at poverty alleviation and the reduction of agricultural productivity through crop damage, the abandonment of farm work and poor harvests.² Graziers were impoverished more through the regular selling of cattle to raise funds demanded by dubious officials to maintain them on their land holdings. The snowball effect was the loss of government revenue since some graziers were forced to migrate with their cattle to areas where they could live in peace. At the social level, these conflicts led to the wanton abuse of human rights through assaults, destruction of houses, killings and crass injustice against women. In addition, conflicts generated social strife and anarchy with far reaching effects on peace and social integration. Apart from the economic and social implications, the animosity and contempt for the ruling government engendered by the struggles were reflections of their political repercussions (Ngwoh, 2014).

As already stated, if FGCs orchestrated the abuse of human rights through assault, murder, arson, torture, arbitrary arrests and discrimination, then it is easy to understand the magnitude of the social impact on the people. What is more, strife and anarchy were generated by the callous attitudes of administrators, exacerbated by the slowness of administrative officials and prolonged by the exuberance and anxiety of young persons who wanted quick solutions to farmer-grazier problems. All this created an unhealthy political atmosphere in the Bamenda Grassfields. The major economic consequences of farmer-herder conflicts were retarded development, individual impoverishment and loss of government revenue. As has already been noted, even though the people made attempts at raising their standards of living through farming and grazing, they remained impoverished because of FGCs. This impoverishment was reflected in their inability to provide for their basic needs at reasonable levels. The purchasing power of a good number of farmers and herders remained low, making it difficult for them to have adequate health facilities, education, food and housing for themselves and their families. As a result of low incomes, they could not add inputs into their economic activities to raise their standards of living (Ngwoh, 2014).³

2 Government's efforts at poverty alleviation are contained in the Cameroon Strategic Document for Poverty Reduction and are a response to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Some of the measures aimed at poverty alleviation include the institution of a Special Support Programme for Self Employment and Micro Projects whereby the Ministry of Small and Medium Size Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicrafts gives out loans to individuals and groups. In the same vein, the Ministry of Agriculture and Territorial Development assists farmers through a loan scheme in the Inland Valley Development Programme.

3 The required standards of farming and grazing, especially as they obtain in a developed country like Britain entail a lot of financial investments. Farmers use machines for tilling, planting and

Attempted Solutions

Numerous attempts were made by the administration to put an end to FGCs with the objective of restricting farming and grazing, preserving soil fertility and pasture, preventing soil erosion and, above all, averting rows between the two parties. They were legal frameworks instituted by competent authorities to prevent the occurrence of FGCs and to settle them when they occurred. They included the Native Authority Cattle Control Rules of 1947, the Control of Farming and Grazing Law of 1962 and Presidential Decree No. 78/263 of July 3, 1978. The genesis, exigencies, implementation, strengths and the weaknesses of these instruments shall be discussed. There were also policies like demarcation of land, the barbed wire scheme and mixed farming. Reasons for the failure of FAO proposals and the recommendations shall also be scrutinized.

In 1947, Native Authorities (NA) laid down cattle control orders that determined the number of cattle permitted in an area, stipulated the proportion of herdsmen to cattle and established modalities for issuing or withdrawing grazing and farming permits. In short, these ordinances made rules prohibiting, restricting and regulating the keeping of livestock. But these cattle control orders had two weaknesses: first, the NAs proved either to be unable or unwilling to exercise them effectively; secondly, the rules made no provision for the establishment of legally recognized boundaries between farming and grazing lands, which could be enforced in the courts (Chief of Sub Sector Wum, 1973).

Thus, the Control of Farming and Grazing Law was enacted in 1962 to overcome the weaknesses of the 1947 Ordinances. Its main purpose was to provide the statutory powers to determine which land could be used for farming and which for grazing. This law concerned the use of land and not its ownership or title. The law was specific and spelt out six guides to relations between farmers and graziers. These were: the number of cattle allowed in any area at any given time, the authority to admit cattle in specific areas, the possession of grazing and farming permits, the size of herd when grazing, the number of herdsmen to be employed and the distance to separate farm land from cattle trails. Its main difference was that it transferred responsibility for ensuring the enforcement of proper farming and grazing practices from the NAs to government in the belief that the latter had greater resources, better qualified staff and larger powers to perform this function more efficiently. Even though the law was concerned only with the use to which land was put and had no effect upon title, it was better than the Native Authority Cattle Control Rules because it obliged the inspectors to consult the local people whenever allocation of land for farming or grazing was to be done.

The flagrant and permanent disrespect of these rules by farmers, graziers and administrators greatly contributed to the outbreak of FGCs in Menchum. The guide about the

harvesting. Herders need well maintained paddocks, sown grass and clover mixtures for silage, roots, cattle-cake feed and tractor driven machinery.

number of cattle in any area within the jurisdiction of the chairman of the farmer-grazier committee specified that they should not exceed the number laid down by his commission. This rule was pertinent in order to enable cattle have enough pasture to keep them healthy since "each animal needed from five to ten acres of grazing according to the soil" (Berrill, 1960). This implied that 100 cattle required 1,000 acres of grazing land at any one time. But this was hardly the case because cattle had been brought indiscriminately into the four Farmer-Grazier Commission areas that existed in Menchum Division. This was in contravention of the rule. For example, in the Wum Commission grazing area, where there were 50,000 acres of grazing land available for a maximum of 5,000 heads of cattle, more than 30,000 cattle scrambled over the land. In Esu, where there were 100,000 acres, more than 60,000 cattle were found instead of 10,000.⁴

This unhealthy situation could be blamed on two factors: the desire by the administration to increase revenue through the collection of *jangali* (cattle tax), and the dishonest tendencies of the graziers who hardly declared the correct number of their cattle. Thus it was that a grazier with about 2,000 heads of cattle might declare only 200. The result was overgrazing because of overstocking leading to the depletion of pasture. Faced with this situation, cattle were bound to stray into farmland to cause havoc (personal communication, April 15, 2006). Concerning the entry of cattle to an area, the rule specified that no person should permit cattle to enter or remain in an area without the prior permission in writing of the committee. Any person wishing to bring cattle into the area was expected to apply to the chairman stating the number of cattle to be brought and the particular part of the area in which he wished to graze them. In this way, the rule gave powers to traditional and administrative authorities to permit the entry of cattle into their areas of jurisdiction. But this rule was abused in many ways in that some authorities admitted cattle without taking into consideration the cattle needs of their areas and so in most cases this contributed to overstocking (Kebei, 2005). This was to be understood because the authorities at times worked single-handedly without consulting other commission members who could give them the actual picture in the field. In addition, some overzealous commission members who arrogated to themselves the power of admitting or transferring graziers into areas of operation, usurped this role and so always indiscriminately admitted cattle (personal communication, April 17, 2006). A case in point was the traditional leader of the Mbororo graziers of the Moslem community (*Ardo*) in Esu village who claimed that all grazing land in that area fell under his jurisdiction while all farmland was managed by the traditional ruler (Fon) of the Esu indigenous society. According to the *Ardo*, he had control over the graziers and so had the powers to determine their movements. Some indigenous persons who were members of the traditional council equally claimed the powers to admit cattle

⁴ These figures were rough estimates from three different field trips.

even without prior authorization from administrative or traditional authorities. When the competent authorities later annulled such decisions, the graziers in question got stranded and so left their cattle on farmland in protest and out of frustration (personal communication, December 27, 2005).

The rule concerning grazing permits specified that cattle owners should graze their cattle in any area only when in possession of a permit issued by the competent authority. Such a permit stipulated the number of cattle, specified the area of activity and defined the grazing duration. On expiry, it could either be withdrawn or extended. But in many cases, their owners valued these permits as if they were land certificates.⁵ In a letter to the Chief of Mufu village, the DO and Chairman of the Fungom FGCM made him to understand that grazing land was national land. A grazier with cattle could have a grazing permit only if he had cattle. When he did not have cattle any more, he had to quit the grazing land in favor of others with cattle. Such permits were not land certificates because the issuing authority had no powers to issue such certificates. The value of such permits was limited to "the use to which land was put; it had no connection with or effect upon land title". The Provincial Service Head of Lands was the only competent authority to deliver the land title (Ngwoh, 2014).

The 1962 law limited the size of any herd when grazing to seventy-five cattle. This implied that the herd needed approximately 750 acres of grazing land. This restriction was intended to ensure maximum control of cattle so that adequate grazing could be done in order to preserve and improve on the pasture. If this was done, overgrazing and its consequences would be avoided. Much earlier, during the British period in 1942, the Senior Veterinary Officer in the Cameroons Province made the following remarks on the subject of overstocking and preservation of grazing areas:

To ensure the preservation of the pastures, the control of the cattle population is essential... It must be borne in mind that the Mbororo themselves, although fully alive to the dangers of overstocking, if left alone will do nothing to prevent or arrest the despoliation of the pastures that are so essential to them. They will continue to use the same grazing area, crowding in as many cattle as they wish without any fear of the consequences until the land becomes so impoverished that it is of no further use to them, then they will depart in search of fresh pastures and the same process will be repeated (Ministry of Town Planning and Housing, 2006, p. 2).

He made this remark because he had realized that the graziers had more interest in increasing their stock than in preserving the pasture on which their stock depended.

5 This was a common feature amongst the ignorant graziers that caused them to be obstinate. These permits made them to see themselves as title holders.

If nothing was done to arrest the situation, then there would come a time when the whole area would be barren. Perhaps FGCs could still be arrested if grazing areas were controlled and also if controlled grazing was observed. The rule concerning herdsmen stipulated that there should be at least one herdsman accompanying seventy-five heads of cattle at all times. This was because left uncontrolled, animals quite naturally stray and would trample down and destroy greater areas in their search. Unrestricted open range feeding by large herds and no herdsmen to control resulted in much damage to crops.

The insufficiency or near absence of herdsmen was one of the principal causes of FGCs in Nso, as Kaberry explained in 1959, that there were far too few cow boys and in many cases there were no cowboys at all. Her clerk's list of cowboys for tax showed eighteen names to look after 16,669 heads of cattle as many Mbororo felt far too superior to look after their cattle properly (Kaberry, 1959). This insufficiency of herdsmen equally prevailed in Menchum. It was observed in parts of Esu, Wum, Weh and Zhoa during fieldwork that while some herds were without herdsmen, others were looked after by male and female teenagers of ten to fifteen years of age. The major reason was that herdsmen were disgruntled at their working conditions.⁶ Those who had made sufficient savings were even diverting their attention to the motor-taxi business in the townships and were looking at herdsmanhood with scorn, as a niggardly occupation. The worst damages on crops by cattle were usually caused at night and on market days. Having tasted town life, many herdsmen (or *gainakos*), often left their cattle at night untended for the town where they danced, smoked, drank and slept with the prostitutes in the motels or brothels while the cattle were destroying the farms. On market days, these *gainakos* also went to town leaving the cattle untended. The Senior Farmer-Grazier Inspector in Wum substantiated this point in 1966 in the following words:

The *Aku* as known in the past have been the best graziers, who tended to their cattle from dawn to dusk, and as such, there have been fewer farmer-grazier cases brought up. If they now deviate from this practice for which they were admired and esteemed high, and tend to loiter in markets and towns for luxuries... the only answer... can be to do strict supervision, and prosecute owners of herds found untended (Divisional Archives Wum, 1972, p. 19).

The inspector was expressing dissatisfaction with the attitude of the Mbororo that was evolving negatively. They were beginning to admire town life forgetting that their major economic activity did not permit them to live like ordinary town-folks.

Despite the indispensability of cattle control, some Mbororo held the erroneous view that cattle could not be controlled. But it is well known that cattle were well controlled

6 In the past, these herdsmen were paid in kind and they earned 2 cows at the end of every year. This was later changed to cash payments of 18,000 FCFA a month. As time went on, some employers did not honour such payments leaving these herdsmen disgruntled.

in Adamawa and northern Nigeria where herdsmen took cattle to graze between farms and left without damaging the crops. Even in areas where Mbororo graziers decided to do mixed farming, farms and cattle coexisted side by side without destruction. The role of a herdsman is preponderant in animal husbandry and can be likened to that of a driver of a vehicle. In many places though, herdsmen are known to be careless. An intelligent, hardworking and duty conscious herdsman can always make an itinerary whereby cows are milked between 6:00 and 8:00 am, grazed and watered in two shifts until 6:00 pm when they retire and are corralled or locked in the paddocks. But quite often, there is no itinerary and some herdsmen do not even corral the cattle leaving it to invade adjacent farmlands at night (personal communication, December 24, 2005). The importance of implementing cattle control rules was well articulated by Berrill when he said that difficulties arose between farmers and graziers because pasture was not fenced and the cattle were not corralled at night. Although land was divided into farming areas and grazing areas with some waste between, damage to crops was unavoidable unless herds were kept manageably small and the herdsmen's supervision continuous and diligent (Berrill, 1960).

The rule concerning farms and cattle trails stated that no land could be farmed or fenced within fifty yards on either side of a recognized cattle trail or water point nor may the route of any trail be altered without permission. The importance of this rule was to prevent cattle from invading farmland when moving to and from grazing areas, water points or cattle markets. This was however, not the case in many instances. Farmers preferred to plant crops along cattle trails where cow dung had fertilized the soil. The land adjacent to raffia bushes was also attractive both to farmers and graziers leading to incessant conflicts between them (personal communication, April 15, 2006). In spite of the inevitability of this rule, some farmers had the conviction that they owned the land and so had the power to decide where, when and how to use it. Graziers too believed that although they had no natural rights over the land, their financial standing and the available legal instruments could give them economic hegemony over it. Based on this certainty, both parties took the laws into their hands. It was noticed that some farmers calculatingly farmed on isolated pieces of land within grazing zones that usually escaped the graziers' notice and even around water points. This obstinacy was based on the erroneous view that "farms did not move, but cows did". Nevertheless, in such cases where farms were located in the heart of grazing land, it could be said that they had moved (personal communication, December 18, 2005).

The 1962 West Cameroon Farming and Grazing Law remained in force until 1978 when it was repealed. It was replaced by Decree N° 78/263 of July 3, 1978 that provided a legal framework for the settlement of FGCs. Even though it was a re-enactment of the 1962 Law, it had three differences from the former: first of all, it transferred the power of enforcement from the Senior Inspector to the Divisional Officer (DO) acting in a constituted commission; secondly, it set up a Farmer-Grazier Commission as well

as define its composition. This law equally specified the commission's duties which were to organize rural areas into farming and grazing zones, define the mode and way of utilizing mixed zones, exercise permanent control over the agro-pastoral area, and above all, settle farmer-grazier conflicts in its area of competence (Duni, Fon, Hickey & Salihu, 2005). The third difference was that the law made specifications as to penalties in case of any infringement that "any person acting in contravention of the requirements of this decree shall be punished in accordance with the provisions of Sections 317, R368 (6), R 369(6) and R370 (12) of the Cameroon Penal Code". Although the 1978 law had other fortes as it laid down a clear procedure for the settlement of disputes, identified the source of funding for the activities of the commission and explained the method of deliberations in commission,⁷ the functioning of the FGCM that stood as its symbol *par excellence* was riddled with a lot of weaknesses which, instead of reducing the incidence of these disputes, rather complicated the solutions to their problems as follows:

... Unbalanced membership of the commission in favour of the crop farmers; the exorbitant rates used for the evaluation of farm damages, which are said to be dictated by agricultural technicians who also claim the authorship of these rates in favour of crop farmers; the alleged corrupt practices and or partial influential attitudes of some commission members; the apparent ineffectiveness of MINEPIA technicians as members of this commission to defend the rights of the graziers (Mbaku, 2000, p. 1).

The ten commission members included the chairman who had to be the DO, a secretary who had to be from the service of lands, and eight other members, three of who should be from the services of agriculture, livestock and surveys. The rest included the chief of the area concerned, two notables, one farmer and one grazier. The imbalanced nature of the commission was based on the fact that since the chief and notables were usually of the indigenous population, their number might influence the decision of the commission to the detriment of the graziers whose interest was often defended by only one person.

Consequently, graziers argued that their low status in terms of land rights leaves them with little choice but to draw on 'extra-legal' means of acquiring access to land. Another weakness of the commission is that agricultural technicians without the opinion of livestock officials imposed the rates used for evaluating payment for damages done to crops. According to the technicians, the text in force was intended to protect crop farmers during expropriation of land for public utility such as the construction of a road or the building of a school. Therefore, such a measure could only be applied if the

7 The procedure for resolving conflicts began with the lodging of a complaint by a victim to the Chairman of FGCM who on receiving it, set up a sub commission of technical staff to evaluate the damages within three days. After this he convened a meeting attended by all commission members, the complainant and defendant who deliberated and agreed on concrete measures to be taken. Funds for the functioning of the commission were to be provided by the Ministry of Lands.

destruction was total, complete and permanent. But surprisingly, the destruction of crops by cattle was often partial and even when it was total or complete, farmers still had the opportunity to replant or cultivate the crop again. Yet, in such circumstances, graziers were still expected to pay for the damages. This critique would have been better appreciated if livestock officials proposed a better option like using current market prices in each locality while appreciating other factors such as labor.

Apart from setting up legal frameworks to guard against conflicts, three administrative policies were also put into use, namely the demarcation of land, mixed farming and the barbed wire scheme. The systematic and malevolent opening up of farms in the middle of authorized grazing areas was another major cause of FGCs simply because there were no clear-cut boundaries between farming and grazing land which led to cattle trespass and crop damage (FAO). The Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) of Menchum expressed the necessity of such demarcations in 1965 when he said that:

Since I took over this Division in March, I have from time to time been worried by the inhabitants because of farm damage by cattle. The trouble here is that no farmer-grazier boundaries have been defined. This has caused the cattle owners to build their *rugas* near farms and villages and graze anyhow. Many of the Mbororo have no *gainakos* and the result is constant farm damage... Some Mbororo have made large farms in the grazing areas and if the law was followed strictly, they ought to have been prosecuted... If we allow the Mbororo to farm in the grazing area and fence their farms, then the indigenous inhabitants are equally right to do so since no grazing boundaries exist (SDO Menchum, 1965, p. 10).

At that time graziers were actually settled with their animals close to the main villages. Since their number was insignificant, they pursued a *laissez faire* attitude that paved the way for the frequent invasion of farms by cattle. Following the SDO's observation, it was realized that the demarcation of land was a *sine quo non* for peaceful coexistence between farmers and graziers. Dr. Jeffreys had begun the task of demarcating grazing land in the Bamenda Grasslands back in 1941 and by 1945 had completed the exercise in the Wiya Native Authority Area in the villages of Sinna, Nsob, Ntumbaw and Ngelu.⁸ He also started the same work in Nso and completed about half of the Nso Native Authority Area by 1945. The initial success of this project in Wiya was due entirely to the tact and good sense of the *Ardo* and the local chief. But the rapidly increasing demands for land by both graziers and farmers slowed down the process and even killed the initiative. From every indication, demarcation entailed that specific areas, particularly the

8 Dr. Jeffreys was a British administrator who was given the task of demarcating land in the Bamenda Division. He did his work from 1941 to 1945 in parts of present day Donga Mantung and Bui Divisions where these villages are presently found.

hills, ought to be left for grazing while lowland areas were to be left for farming. This was risky because the erosion of soil was more likely to occur on the highlands and to aggravate the conflicts. Therefore, from the point of view of soil conservation, the demarcation of land did not strike at the root of the problem because it did not safeguard agricultural requirements.

In this connection, Kaberry noted that it was not simply a matter of giving land in the valleys to women and on the hilltops and upper slopes to cows; it was a matter of good black soil being kept for farms since women needed some valley land and some land on higher slopes for their different crops (Kaberry, 1959). Her point of view gave the impression that the policy of demarcation was unworkable as a measure to curb FGCs. This was as a result of its high cost, time factor and hostility from the indigenous inhabitants who viewed it as a means of permanently alienating their land. Since this policy was actually a potential source of more conflicts, mixed farming was perceived as a better option.

The concept of mixed farming was a rotational system of farming between crops and cattle adopted by the administration to improve relations between farmers and graziers in the Bamenda Grasslands in general and Menchum Division in particular (Simo, 1997). The idea behind promoting mixed-farming was that the indigenous people would realize the advantage of farmer-grazier land interchange. At the initial stage, this design was very welcome and well suited to the indigenous system of farming whereby communal land was allowed to fallow for about four years so it could regain its fertility (Njeuma & Awasom, 1989). The fact that cattle were left to graze on such land also meant that cow dung added to the fertility of the soil (personal communication, December 18, 2005). The government of West Cameroon made many attempts to encourage mixed farming. According to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Local Government in a letter to the Prime Minister:

... It is government's policy that the Mbororo should be regarded as Cameroonians... [since] the great national asset represented by [them] cannot be fully developed in an atmosphere of suspicion, distrust and violence... This ministry is therefore making strenuous efforts to reduce the present animosity between farmers and graziers... and a group consisting of two farmers, two graziers, the Secretary of State for Local Government and myself are flying to England to attend a course on mixed farming (Local Government Permanent Secretary, 1962, p. 1).

The West Cameroon government took such measures after realizing that, since reunification, there was growing friction between the Mbororo graziers and the farmers on whose land they grazed their cattle.

Though the steady growth of human and cattle population provoked this escalation, the situation was aggravated by the aggressive attitude of the farmers who claimed exclu-

sive rights over the land thereby making the Mbororo uncertain about their status and security. After several trials in various parts of the NWP without satisfactory results, the program was abandoned in the early 1960s in view of the fact that there was a feeling of mistrust by the indigenous inhabitants of the Mbororo as well as a lack of interest and experience. Over and above all, “the main explanation for the failure of the scheme was that the Mbororo way of life had not yet evolved to a more ‘sedentarized’ system as it can be observed today” (Simo, 1997).

Although mixed farming was not new in the administrative reports, its widespread implementation was seriously considered in the 1950s. It involved the alternate use of land wherein a section of a plot of land was reserved for farming while grazing took place on another one. After several years of activity, farmland would be transformed into grazing land and vice-versa (personal communication, January 2, 2012). This approach to farming enabled crops to grow on former pasture-land that had been fertilized by cow dung, while cattle thrived on a new type of vegetation on the former farmland. In order to cause indigenous farmers to appreciate the advantages of coexisting with Mbororo herders, the government opened mixed farms at Babungo, Oku, Nso and Wum in the 1940s (Njeuma & Awasom, 1989). They were to serve as experimental and demonstration farms to the local people. The first farm was the Bambui experimental and demonstration farm which was started in 1944 with a 100 percent Mbororo staff. But by 1951, only one Mbororo herdsman was still in the farm, the rest having deserted, probably due to Mbororo dislike for permanently staying in one area. Local people were however recruited to fill the space created by the departure of Mbororo. The Nso demonstration farm was started in 1952 and the main activity was planting of kikuyu grass on two acres for the purpose of initiating the diversification of sources of pasture. In this way, Mbororo herders would be able to generate their own pasture and put an end to free range grazing. Four bullocks and six young bulls were put into use and they produced fifty-six tons of manure prior to February 1954. The agricultural department realized that it was a failure because most of the young men who had been recruited in 1951 showed little inclination to work on their own. They were not interested in making farming a career and instead looked forward to white collar jobs like secretaryship and teaching commanded more prestige in the colonial society. After several trials in various parts of the NWR without satisfactory results, the program was abandoned in the early 1960s mainly because of a feeling of mistrust by the indigenous inhabitants of the Mbororo as well as a lack of interest and experience (Simo, 1997). Over and above all, “the main explanation for the failure of the scheme was that the Mbororo way of life had not yet evolved to a more ‘sedentarized’ system”.⁹

9 Although mixed farming was rejected in the 1960s as unworkable, some farmers resorted to it some 30 years later. It gradually gained grounds in the area as the *modus operandi* owing to its numerous advantages. No wonder that by 1999, many farmers and herders in Wum, principally

When the colonial and post-colonial administration realized that there was resistance to mixed farming, the barbed wire scheme was introduced. This design entailed the construction of cattle proof fences using barbed wire to enclose crops or cattle in order to prevent destruction. This plan that began in the early 1950s went into full force by 1960. According to Simo, it was “proposed by an adult education officer, Elizabeth O’Kelly, who came to Cameroon in 1950” (Simo, 1997). Although it was proposed mainly to NAs, government eventually realized that if the Grassfields were properly managed, both categories of users would realize that their interests were complementary and not opposed. In this regard, fencing projects were started wherever cattle damage was consistently heavy. Transport facilities, rolls of wire and nails were provided by government for gratis. The quarterly report for the period July to September 1972 by the Wum farmer-herder inspector assessed that “the scheme is running well. Three cattle proof fences have been completed at Waindo, Naikom and Mbinjam. Other four fences were started and have not been completed at Esu, Bum, Mmen and Kuk. About twenty-four rolls of barbed wire and nails were used” (Divisional Archives Wum 1972). The following year, he embarked on fencing areas in Weh and Kumfutu. Yet in spite of the numerous resources mobilized to ensure its success, the scheme was short-lived because it faced a multitude of difficulties in that:

There was resistance from traditionalists and herders... most husbands were unwilling to devote free labour to setting up the farm enclosures: crop farming was ‘women’s business’ and of course the Mbororo disliked the idea at the time. Even temporary protection round farm areas was resisted by many on the grounds that users might as a result claim property in fenced land from lenders... In the past, farm tracts had been protected by special plants and mystical devices. The barbed wire, especially since it was a free gift, was suspect as an alien device (Simo, 1997, p. 387).

Even though government provided material for the fences, their actual building was the responsibility of the beneficiaries and since this was work for men, women were always helpless without them. When the men proved unwilling to cooperate with their wives because they looked upon the scheme with suspicion, it ran into difficulties.

It is necessary to examine the proposals and recommendations for resolving conflicts already mentioned earlier. In 1962, FAO officials realized that the farmer-grazier problem was the greatest impediment to the economic development of the area and so needed urgent attention. This, therefore, gave them an opportunity to propose solutions to solve it. They recommended the creation of a farming zone where the indigenous peoples’ rights to land were completely guaranteed and unlimited. But these people were not to

Alhadji Nguni, Mathias Ndong, Godfred Ita and John Fru Ndi had invested a lot of resources in the scheme.

sell, rent or abandon their portions of land. The advantage of this proposal was the fact that if the woman farmer knows that she will have to farm the same plot forever, it will compel her to pay more attention to the advice on better cultural practices, use of better varieties and soil conservation (FAO, 1962). Long-term settlement contracts on pasture land whose duration was twenty-five years were to be made between government and graziers. After this period, if the community had extended in such a way that it needed more land, the contract of the nearest located pastures was not to be renewed and the land would be taken over without any sort of payment or compensation. This scheme envisaged a lot of advantages such as suppressing FGCs automatically, restricting cattle to areas where there would be less walking and much rotation,¹⁰ making the collection of manure feasible, reducing the number of cowboys so that “the Fulani himself would find time for more interesting activities than the eternal and dull watching of cattle” making possible the inventory of pasture reserves and above all, obliging the Fulani to readily invest in fences, water points, buildings, and anti-erosion measures because he would have acquired security and guaranty for twenty-five years. This design equally made provision for mixed farming in the sense that patches of land on the farming zone could be used for grazing while farming would equally be allowed in grazing zones with the farmers having the compulsion to build fences (FAO, 1962). But these noble goals remained a paper tiger because local authorities were not willing to implement them.

In 1973, the governor of the North West Region, Guillaume Nseke, created what became known as the Nseke Commission. This was prompted by the march of Aghem women to his office in February 1973 to draw his attention to the seriousness of the conflicts in their locality. The task of the commission was to “proceed with the delimitation of grazing areas in Wum Central Sub Division” which was effectively done in addition to recommending that farmer-grazier boundaries should be made. It equally declared that all land in Magha, Waindo, Kusu, Wanengwen and Naikom should be for farming and that all cattle in these places be moved to grazing areas. Although these recommendations were actually implemented on the ground by cattle control officers, their effectiveness was short-lived. This is because as soon as the technicians left the field, indigenous traditional rulers invited the graziers to return to the same areas which had clearly been earmarked for farming by both the recommendations and their effective execution (Koumpa Issa Commission, 2004).

The non-implementation of the recommendations of the commission provoked women in Wum to stage other demonstrations in 1979 over the destruction of their farms in the

¹⁰ Pasture is easily ruined when cattle walk a lot due to trampling. With the proposed system, the cattle is kept on restricted areas which, when properly managed, have carrying capacities equal to three to four times the capacity of unmanaged pastures. Cattle that walk less, fatten and grow faster as well as multiply better.

heart of the farming season by Mbororo cattle. They organized themselves into a crowd of over 6,000 that barricaded the palace of their traditional ruler to seek the immediate expulsion of the Mbororo herders from Wum as the only solution to the problem of cattle trespass. They all appeared in white painted faces with clubs in their hands and some carrying children on their backs. When the paramount ruler tried to appease them, they instead accused him of complicity with the Mbororo because of material gains. By 2003, another traumatizing farmer-grazier skirmish broke out in the Aghem clan. This was when cattle occupied farming areas leading to the destruction of crops. The indigenous farmers demanded the evacuation of cattle in the areas and the payment for damages. The 2003 Aghem women's strike attracted the attention of Governor Koumpa Issa who set up another commission to probe into the perpetual agro-pastoral conflicts in Wum, carry out necessary investigations and propose definite realistic and concrete solutions (Ngwoh, 2006). After working for two months holding meetings with stakeholders, using documentation and making field visits, members of the Koumpa Issa Commission advanced short, medium, long-term and global recommendations. In the short-term, thirty-seven graziers who were occupying farmland were to move their cattle to grazing areas of their choice with immediate effect.¹¹ The medium term recommendations were to take effect from the next farming season (2005) and involved eight graziers on farmlands in Zongefu. These were to own their compounds and areas around them for viable living but to evacuate their cattle to recognized grazing areas of their choice. In the meantime, areas in Wum and Esu occupied by the Elba ranch were to remain communal grazing land. Under the long-term plan, individual farmers were to own permanent pieces of land while graziers were to practice intensive modern grazing, pasture development and paddocking. The global recommendations talked of the permanent suspension of grazing permits and government financing of all operations related to the implementation of these recommendations.

In Mezam Division, an inter-ministerial commission was set up in 2003 by the President of the Republic "to probe into the conflicts between the Mbororo of the North West Province and El Hadj Ahmadou Danpollo". The commission was chaired by Magistrate Leonard Jani and carried out its work from the August 15, to December 17, 2003. This consisted of interviews of the parties and their witnesses, field visits to the areas in dispute and working sessions with administrative authorities. In its report, the commission made three proposals to the Presidency of the Republic which were further transmitted to the head of government for implementation one year later. These recommendations were that the legal boundaries of Elba Ranch were to be retraced and limited to 4,726 hectares as embodied in Land Certificate N° 140 Menchum of December 1, 1989. In

11 Prefectorial Order No. 42/2003 of February 19, 2003 had earlier identified twenty-six graziers while the commission fished out eleven. The fate of Mathias Ndong, Ardo Umaru and Alhadji Guni was unsettled because of the huge investments they had made.

the same vein, his transhumance grazing land was to be restricted to the initial area of 1,335 hectares. He was also to ensure the payment of accrued compensation to victims of destruction in Kedjom Keku amounting to 49 161 910 F CFA whose expropriated lands were to be returned to them. The defendant simply ignored this decision because this ill-fated land grabbing attitude was allegedly developed with the complicity of state and traditional authorities. It actually incensed a cross section of the people who depended solely on land for their livelihood.

Conclusion

In the heat of the incessant conflicts between farmers and graziers from 1947 to 2006, stakeholders in Menchum Division did not remain apathetic as they made enormous efforts to eradicate the gangrene that had constituted a veritable economic, social and political impediment to their progress. They resorted to the instruments of conflict prevention in the form of legal frameworks instituted by competent authorities to thwart the occurrence of FGCs and to settle them when they occurred. These included the Native Authority cattle control rules of 1947, the control of farming and grazing law of 1962 and Presidential Decree No. 78/263 of July 3, 1978.

In addition, administrative strategies were put in place to restrict farming and grazing to certain areas so as to preserve soil fertility and pasture, prevent soil erosion and, above all, avert rows between farmers and graziers. To achieve these, the demarcation of land was carried out, the barbed wire scheme was introduced, mixed farming was put into practice, meetings were held while commissions of inquiry were set up. The observations and recommendations of these commissions were intended to facilitate the achievement of the set goals. But all this was like throwing water on a duck's back because conflicts continued to persist and instead developed new ways of manifesting.

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