

THE FARMER-GRAZIER CONFLICT: THE CASE STUDY OF MPUNDO-BALONG VILLAGE IN MUYUKA SUB-DIVISION

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ABSTRACT

The Farmer-Grazier Conflict is a perennial challenge in most African Communities, especially in sub-saharan African countries. In most sub-Saharan African countries, the farmers and graziers cohabit side by side and there's no clear and distinct boundary between farmland and grazing land. This is the case in Mpundo-Balong village. A land that was used for grazing this year can be used the previous year for farming and vice-versa. This situation facilitates conflict between the farmers and graziers on a perennial basis. The case of Mpundo-Balong village is an intriguing one and thus the essence and *raison d'etre* of this article. This study has as its main objective to examine the Farmer-Grazier Conflict in Mpundo-Balong village in Muyuka Sub-Division. The attainment of this objective was guided by the empirical and the doctrinal research method. The internet was a principal source of data and this was accompanied by first hand information and interviews of some key informants. Our findings reveal that, the measures put in place to prevent farmer-grazier conflicts in Mpundo-Balong village are insufficient. We therefore recommend that a clear cut distinction should be made between grazing land and farm lands.

Keywords: Farmer-Grazier, Conflict, Mpundo-Balong village.

INTRODUCTION

The challenges that Farmer-Grazier Conflict possess to African Communities and most especially countries in sub-saharan Africa is enormous. Most sub-Saharan African countries have agriculture and grazing as the mainstay of their economies. This has led to the growth of Farmer-Grazier conflicts in areas such as Northern Nigeria, Southern Sudan and in parts of Cameroon like in Northern Cameroon and the grass field areas of Menchum Division in the North West Region of Cameroon.ⁱ

It's only of recent that oil and gas was discovered in most sub-Saharan African countries.ⁱⁱ In most African Communities, there's no clear and distinct boundary between farmland and grazing land. A land that was used this year for grazing purposes can be used the subsequent year for farming. There's no particular ownership of community land as such. Therefore, no one person has proprietary rights over community land in most sub-Saharan African villages. This in itself breeds conflict. The case of Mpundu-Balong village in Muyuka Sub-Division isn't very different.

The first part of this work dwells on the historical and Sectoral overview of the conflict. The second section examines both Endogenous and Exogenous factors causing the conflict. The third part deals with the drivers of the conflict while the fourth section gives a vivid insight of the main actors of the conflict and the role of the CDC manager of Mpundu-Balong rubber estate. The work ends with a conclusion and recommendations.

HISTORICAL AND SECTORAL OVERVIEW OF THE FARMER-GRAZIER CONFLICT

Historically, African Communities are homogeneous in nature. Community land of any typical African village is owned by everybody in that village. Nobody has absolute power over community land, the problem here, is that this tradition is fast eroding in most African Communities, especially as some powerful traditional rulers have grabbed large portions of community land for their personal and family use. Mpundu-Balong village is found in Muyuka Sub-Division in Fako Division of the Southwest Region of Cameroon. Muyuka Sub-Division

is one of the seven Sub-Divisions found in Fako Division of the Southwest Region of Cameroon.

This is the oldest and largest among the seven because it was created in 1963 immediately after independence by Presidential Decree No. 63/DF/436 of 5th December, 1963 with code number Reference G. 37/1.ⁱⁱⁱ It's bounded to the east by River Mungo as a natural boundary between the Littoral and Southwest Region, in the west by mount Cameroon and west coast Sub-Division, in the south by Buea and Tiko Sub-Divisions, and in the North by Mbonge Sub-Division in Meme division. It covers a surface area of approximately 1300 square kilometers with a diverse estimated population of over 1 million inhabitants.^{iv}

The Sub-Division is composed of eighteen (18) villages. Namely: Muyuka, Yoke, Mpundo-Balong, Malende, Mautu, Ekona-Mbenge, Ekona-Lelu, Mundame, Lio-la Bwea, Masuma, Owe, Bavenga, Ikata, Bafia, Lykoko, Lilale, Munyenge and Masone. Mpundo-Balong village, our focus in this write-up is one of the villages. It's interesting to note here that, the first four (4) villages are of Balong extraction and the remaining fourteen (14) villages are of Bakweri extraction and are the original settlers of the Sub-Division.

CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT

The causes of farmer-Grazier conflicts in Mpundo-Balong village are both endogenous and exogenous. The main and most important cause of the conflict is land scarcity. According to empirical research carried out in most sub-Saharan African Communities, the scarcity of land is very acute. Land is in short supply while demand keeps skyrocketing on a daily basis. The increase in pressure resulting from resource degradation and scarcity is aggravating the situation of competition between farmers and pastoralists. In the areas where the two production systems interact, both communities are increasingly considering the option of expansion to each others' holdings.^v

The primordial factor here is the increase in human and livestock population over the years but land remains static and fixed. Therefore, the pressure on land is unbearable for grazing, farming, building of infrastructures such as airports, mining stations, road construction, railway network, etc Note the rising rate of conflict on land ownership in Cameroon, especially in Fako Division of the Southwest Region alone is alarming.

Of recent, the Honorable Minister of State Property, Surveys and Land Tenure sat on most of the files for land certificates from Fako Division by instructing its devolved services to hold on with some of the files. Another major factor that accentuates the conflict is the lack of clear and distinct demarcation boundaries between farmland and grazing land. The two exist side by side and this inhibits conflict in itself. The situation in Mpundu-Balong is not different.

Endogenous factors

Our forebears still practice shifting cultivation and slash and burn methods which is outdated, damaging and less productive. The graziers too on their part move from one place to another in search for fresh green grass to feed their cattle. Farmers as well as graziers are not stable. This instability breeds conflict. The case of Mpundu-Balong is peculiar in the sense that some scholars consider the area not to be a grazing land. If so, then why is there a Conflict between the farmers and graziers of the area? This intriguing situation can be unveiled by looking at the case of transhumance that takes place mostly in the dry season.

Most of the cattle in Douala and neighboring towns are grazed in Mpundu-Balong in the heart of the dry season. These cattle in the course of movements to these areas don't use the authorized cattle routes for fear of veterinary officers and to evade jangali taxes taxed per cow. The evasion of authorized cattle tracks tantamount to using illegal routes and thus causing enormous destruction to crops. Another major internal factor is the traditional belief that cattles that feeds on maize grows healthier and fatter than those that feed solely on grass. The Fulani (Aku) herdsmen believing in this tradition most often neglect or intentionally allow their cattle to stray into farmland causing destruction.

Despite persistent education and sensitization of both the farmers and graziers, most of them are still adamant to change. They still practice the traditional methods of farming and grazing. Cattle rearers have equally refused to construct paddock (fences) to secure their cattle at night when the herdsmen are sleeping. During this period cattle strays into farmland causing enormous destruction to crops. Another factor is the refusal by graziers to plant improved grass variety (accasia) recommended by the technical team from the veterinary services.

Exogenous factors

In most of sub-Saharan African counties, the wealthiest cattle rearers are Muslims. Cattle owned by Muslims have quadrupled than those owned by the natives. The growing and keeping of cattle was/is the traditional business of the bororos/akus (Muslims). It is just of recent that

natives have started venturing into this trade. Cattle owners are generally rich and well-to-do and most often use this as an advantage over the farmers. The premise that people are strategic actors who take advantage of opportunities, even if it means breaking rules and taking advantage of others, is common in the recent literature on African political systems.^{vi} During conflict most often, they prefer to bribe administration rather than paying for compensation to the farmers. They see themselves as Superior to farmers.

The legislature has provided laws to guide the Farmer-Grazier commission headed by the divisional officers^{vii} but these laws are often trampled upon by some unscrupulous administrators for their personal gain. In Cameroon for instance, Alhadji Danpulo^{viii} alone owns thousands and thousands of hectares of Land and cattle at the detriment and expense of the local Communities. Even at the judiciary the situation is not different. Matters of crop damage that goes to court are at times poorly handled. The grazier is always ready to bribe his way through.

Another Exogenous factor is the tight solidarity that exists among the Muslims. The Muslim religion has cemented their oneness and unity. Muslims can easily come together than any other religious body in the world and they are ready at all times to support their kind. This is not the case with farmers. Their numbers too, play a very big role. When any of them is involved in any conflict, they rally behind him/her and follow the manifestation of the conflict right up to the end. Another factor is the fact that cattle grazers because of their financial might can easily get loans from financial institutions to boost cattle business. This puts them in an advantageous position *vis-a-vis* their farming counterparts.

DRIVERS OF THE CONFLICT

Rich powerful stakeholders in the cattle business are the main drivers. They are ready to use their wealth and influence to go places. As the years go by, they increase their flock as well as the hectares of Land to graze their cattle. This situation is greatly exacerbated by the fact that they can easily buy their way even in very high circles of the government's machinery.

Another important driver is the government that encourages these wealthy cattle rearers. Most of the cattle are owned by government officials behind the scenes. The elitist class is not left

out. The elites in most African Communities are increasingly joining the cattle Business. The lucrative nature of the business lures most African elites.

ACTORS OF THE CONFLICT

Three main actors can be identified as far as this conflict is concerned. The two major actors are those directly involved -the farmers on the one hand and graziers on the other. The third actor is the government. A combination of the three actors and how they interact as explained *supra* gives you a vivid picture of the conflict situation. The third actor is supposed to play the role of an arbiter, but is it playing its role as it's outlined in the text? This is another debate for the future.

The Role of the Manager of CDC Mpundo-Balong Rubber Estate

The role played by successive managers of the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) isn't an insignificant one, especially as most of the cattle that come for transhumance in Mpundo-Balong village take refuge in the rubber plantation. In the morning period, the herdsmen lead the cattle to the river banks^{ix} where fresh green grass is richly available for the cattle and at night, they return to the plantation to sleep and rest. The herdsmen construct temporal huts all around the plantation where they sleep, cook and rest at night. It is Paramount to note here that no paddocks are constructed by the cattle owners to secure their cattle at night thereby allowing them most at times to wander into farmland and cause destruction.

Another intriguing insight into this conflict is the fact that cattle can't just come and station in a plantation without the knowledge and consent of the manager that is in charge of that Estate. Most often the cattle owners see the manager or some other higher authority at the CDC head office in Bota Limbe. According to Human Rights Watch report of 2005, the corruption perception index in Cameroon is very high.^x

As Divisional officer for Muyuka Sub-Division and chairman of the farmer-grazier commission from 2013 to 2020, I registered numerous complaints in my office from Farmers in Mpundo-Balong for destruction of crops and the assessment was done by the competent service of agriculture. The litigation in most cases is too long and time consuming because the cattle owners are hardly available, often it's only their herdsmen that are on the spot and before

convocations get to them in far off places like Banyo, Douala, Yaoundé etc it takes a very long time and this prolongs the litigation unnecessarily. Most often cases are handled in the absence of the cattle owners after three to four adjournments. In cases of this nature the matter is transmitted to court because the law on Farmer-Grazier commission doesn't allow for constraints by the administrative authority.

This is a big gap in the law that needs to be bridged for the commission to be effective. The Farmer-Grazier Conflict in Mpundo-Balong village is a peculiar one because the area isn't a grazing zone and most of the grazing is carried out during periods of transhumance mostly in the heart of the dry season.^{xi} This vividly captures the picture of Mpundo-Balong village that is located in a valley along the banks of river Mungo. The availability of fresh green grass is therefore all year round contrary to other grazing areas in Cameroon like Wum in Menchum Division of the Northwest Region.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Farmer-Grazier Conflict in most sub-Saharan African Communities can be pre-empted by the following measures. In this light, we have made recommendations to the Farmers and Graziers as well as to the Administrative authorities and the Legislator.

Recommendations to Farmers and Graziers

This study recommends that, there must be a clear and distinct boundary demarcating farmland from grazing land as what obtains in the west where farmland is distinct from grazing land.^{xii} Farmers should avoid encroaching on grazing lands in search of fertile soil and use chemical fertilizers to improve the output of food crops. Graziers are also recommended to create night paddocks and employ experience herder in the day to prevent crop destruction. Both farmers and graziers should be conversant with the law regulating the gro-pastoral activities in Cameroon.^{xiii}

The old archaic methods of farming through shifting cultivation and slash and burn and equally the old traditional methods of grazing should be modernized with new and modern technology and techniques. Both the farmers and graziers should be encouraged to remain on the same

land while improving it through modern technology year- in- year -out. Improved variety of grass should be encouraged that grows throughout the year.

Recommendations to the administrative authorities

Cases of Farmer-Grazier Conflict should be well handled in both the administrative and judicial circles when they crop up and sanctions meted out accordingly without bias or favour. Several measures have been put in place to mitigate and resolve farmer-Grazier problems in Mpundo-Balong village but these have proven ineffective as a result of bribery and corruption as a result of high financial cost born by the parties during administrative litigations which is most at times lengthy and energy sapping. If the administrative authorities speed up litigations and avoid corrupt practices. The domain of farmer-grazier conflict in Mpundo-Balong village will be improved.

The local government authorities^{xiv} in Cameroon should urgently carve out the grazing lands from the farm lands so that the crop farmers may not be confused on where to and not to cultivate their crops for fear of destruction by cattle. They should ensure the partitioning of these areas amongst the graziers where cattle should be permanently maintained.

Recommendations to the Legislator

The law regulating the Farmer-Grazier dispute^{xv} is old and needs harmonization to the new dispensation. Some of the ministries have changed their nomenclatures but the old acronyms are still in place which isn't supposed to be the case.^{xvi}

Over almost sixty (60) years since most sub-Saharan African countries gained independence, the Farmer-Grazier Conflict has remained a challenging one despite all efforts aimed at resolving it. A sane and equitable governance Management policy on conflicts in Africa can therefore be the panacea.

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ENDNOTES

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ⁱⁱ Ukoha Ukiwo, December 2018) Centre for Research on peace and Development working paper No. 69.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cameroon archive of 1963 in Buea.

^{iv} Last projected population census of Cameroon in 2005.

^v Adelokun O.E, Adurogbangba B and Akinbile L; A (2015). Socioeconomic Effects of Farmer-Pastoralist Conflict on Agricultural Extension Service Delivery in Oyo State, Nigeria.

^{vi} Moritz M (2006). The politics of permanent conflict: Framer Herder conflicts in Northern Cameroon. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, pp101-126.

^{vii} The commission is composed of the following: The sub-prefect or District head as chairman, a representative of land service as the secretary, a representative of the ministry of agriculture, a representative of the ministry of breeding, a representative of the survey service, the chief and two leading members of the village concerned, a farmer and a stock breeder of the head of stock breeders (ardo).

^{viii} A business man born in Cameroon in 1950. He was the richest man in French Africa and the South Sahara as per the 2019 forbes statistics.

^{ix} They are led to the River Mungo.

^x It is above 80% and the ripple effects trickles down to the common man on the streets.

^{xi} Transhumance is the constant movement of livestock from their natural habitat because of scarcity of food (green fresh grass) to areas where fresh green grass is readily available like river banks and marshy areas.

^{xii} Nchinda, Che, Ijang, Shidiki and Chi (2014). Expert interview report for the project "In Search of Common Grounds for Farmer Grazer conflicts in the North West Region of Cameroon.

^{xiii} Decree No 78/263 of July, 3 1978 regulating the agro-pastoral activities in Cameroon provides for the mapping out of grazing and farm lands.

^{xiv} The Senior Divisional Officers and the Divisional officers.

^{xv} Decree No. 78-263 of 3rd July 1978 to establish the terms and conditions for settling Farmer-Grazier disputes in Cameroon.

^{xvi} Most of these nomenclatures have changed over time. For instance, district heads no longer exists because all districts were upgraded to Sub-Divisions, the ministry of breeding no longer exists because now it's the ministry of livestock, fisheries and animal husbandry. Land service and survey service here is ambiguous and vague in the sense that it's the same ministry presently called the ministry of State Property, surveys and land Tenure that englobes surveys as a department and land Tenure as another department.