



Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Fungom Subdivision

Ngwoh, Patrick Zih

PhD Student, Department of History of African Civilization, University of Buea, Cameroon

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***Corresponding Author**

Ngwoh, Patrick Zih

E-mail: ngwohzih@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the political economy of farmer-herder conflict and Ahmadou Baba Danpullo activities are the major linkages between agro pastoral and farmer herder conflicts in Fungom Subdivision of Menchum Division in the North West Region of Cameroon. This conflict is primarily driven by access to agricultural land, the main economic activity in the area. The conflict also derives from ideological differences between indigenous natives and the Fulani and the coming of the ranch entrepreneur Alhaji Danpullo with more than 5000 cattle's into Esu, discourse, and questions of who controls the cattle industry. This study investigates why this conflict persists despite the government's effort to solve it. Qualitative research methods were used to analyse the data. The findings reveal that the herders, with some complicity from the administration, failed to respect the indigenous people's land rights. The findings also trace the gaps in policies implemented to prevent and resolve the conflict, this study however identify indigenous institution and peace building provide a platform for coexistence.

INTRODUCTION

The main economic activity in most African societies is agriculture, including crop cultivation and animal rearing. Conflicts often occur over the use of farming and grazing space, so it is unsurprising that social or ethnic conflicts also emerge due to the inequitable distribution and control of land. Such conflicts occurred between "insiders" and "outsiders" in the Fungom Subdivision

from 1980 to 2016 Land disputes became common in the area around Esu village after the Elba Ranch—owned by Cameroon's wealthiest man—expropriated farm holdings from indigenous farming groups. It was an encounter of force and resilience between a new economic competitor the ranch entrepreneur and the community, principally perennial farmers who asserted their history as the rightful occupants. The phrase 'farmer-herder conflict' typically refers to conflict over

economic land use between farmers and grazers. As the human and cattle populations increased in Esu but land for production remained static, farmers and herders began to tussle for land. However, the phrase 'farmer-herder' may be misleading since it implies that farmers and herders are two separate groups. In Fungom, people practice mixed farming—herders cultivate crops and farmers rear some cattle.

Over the last 25 years, farmer-herder conflicts have increased in the region. The native people began to enter the cattle industry, which threatened the traditionally-nomadic Sahel herder-traders, the Mbororo (Wodaabe), who sought control over the industry. The Mbororo devised ways, including cattle theft, to push the natives out of the industry. Understanding the relationship between the farmers and herders is key to managing the conflict.

Farmer-herder relations in Cameroon (and Africa generally) are multidimensional. Like most social relations, they are characterized by both conflict and cooperation. (Tumer MA 2003) The conflict is generally associated with crop damage and field encroachment during the rainy season. However, cooperation between farmers and grazers occurs during the dry season, when the farmers seek manure and milk from the herders.

Herders from other parts of Cameroon have recently migrated into Menchum Division in search of pastures for their cattle. The North-West Region, also called the Grassfields, is suitable for farming and cattle rearing, especially in Nkambe, Kumbo, Boyo and Wum. However, the increased number of cattle in the Division put pressure on the available land and meant that the boundaries between grazing land and farmland diminished. The region became a site of ongoing conflict between farmers and herders, and government efforts to resolve the conflicts have been futile.

The location of Fungom Sub Division

Fungom sub division is an administrative unit in Menchum Division, North West Region of Cameroon. Fungom is bordered to the North by Fru-Awa Sub Division, south by Wum, West by the Taraba and Benue states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, East by Bum and Fundong Sub Divisions, South East by Menchum valley and North East by Misaje sub division. Bafmeng, Weh, Esu and Zhoa feature as the main towns of the sub division that covers some 35 villages. But for planning it was curve into 36 planning units.

The villages of the sub division are divided into four zones for easy administration. The zones are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Zones and their villages

Zone	Villages
Upper Fungom	Zhoa, Mekaf, Kumfutu, Small Mekaf, Cha'a, Biya, Kung, Yemge and Weh
Lower Fungom	Fungom, Abar, Mundabili, Marshi, Koshin, Fang, Buu', Missong, Ngun, Mumfu, Munken and Aju Mbu
Esu Zone	Esu, Gayama I, Gayama II, Melang, Munkep, Torkisong and Munkar
Bafmen Zone	Bafmen (Mmen), Kuk, Nyos, Ise, Ipalim, Akang and Imo

Source: Divisional Officer's Office for Fungom

Manifestation of Conflicts in Fungom Subdivision

The initial relationship between indigenous farmers and Fulani herders in the 1940s and 1950s was mutually beneficial, based on peaceful coexistence, and characterized by economic and social cooperation. Nevertheless, these relations soured when economic interest in farmland began to clash with the herders' affairs. In the early years, the conflicts were neither frequent nor serious and often ended in amicable settlements, in which herders offered compensation for damaged crops (Ngwoh, 2014). During the planting season, herders' negligence generated conflicts, though farmers also planted crops in isolated areas exposed to cattle. Conflicts recorded during the harvesting period were attributed to wilful and unpredictable acts from both parties meant to reduce the other's productivity. According to Fon Buh Meh II of Esu, the cattle-related infringement in the Fondom first occurred in 1944 when women discovered, at harvest time that cattle belonging to the newly settled Mbororo had destroyed their finger millet. (Fon Meh Buh II 1954-2007) Relations between herders and farmers deteriorated over time, and crop damage often provoked violent confrontations between the two groups. This manifested in the burning of houses or the injury and killing of animals. In addition, the natives constructed trenches and fencing to prevent the cattle's movement to grazing areas and water catchments. The principal causes of farmer-herder conflicts were the extreme shortage of cowboys. In 1959, according to the tax records, there were only eighteen cowboys to control 16,669 herds (Kaberry 1977. p.8) some herds were supervised by young teenagers, while others lacked herders entirely.

The situation along the banks of River Imieh worsened when Alhaji Ahmadou Danpullo—one of the most powerful tycoons in Africa—arrived with his cattle. (Sam Kum testimony 1990) It was tradition for livestock farmers to migrate to heavily forested areas (the "black bush") for transhumance during the dry season. However, during these movements, careless herders damaged crops and destroyed springs, leading to water scarcity.

Danpullo's arrival and settlement at Ibe Wundele in Esu in 1987 further accelerated land sales. He

extended his property to Torkisong a farm areas about 6 kilometres from Esu, Fungom Sub Division, a predominantly agro-pastoral farming estate in Esu, (Balgah Sounders Nguh, Amos Fang Zeh 2016) and one of the areas not included in the 1987 land allocation. (Uka John 2016) Torkisong is known for its thick forests (fondly called the "black bush") and vast grazing lands. His arrival hurt many farmers and herders since the influx of cattle required much land. Aku settlers (referred to as settlers within this study) and farmers in Torkisong criticised this land transfer.

Before Danpullo arrived in Torkisong, the cattle herds there traditionally belonged to four families. The largest proportion of cattle belonged to Mallam Tashi who also had the most independent adult male children during Danpullo's encroachment. Consequently, the previous settlers were denied their landholding rights, which were transferred to Danpullo

Generally, each cattle owner had two areas of grazing land, one for the dry season and another for the wet season. In the dry season, the grass is burned to allow fresh grass to grow. This practice is beneficial to the herders but detrimental to the farmers who use the grass for compost or to thatch their houses. The absence of clear demarcation between farm and grazing land significantly contributed to the antagonism since, at times, burning crossed into the farmland and damaged crops. According to Kum, (2014) land demarcation is very difficult because cattle commonly left the hills for the valleys in the dry season, which then attracted farmers to use the newly empty and fertile highland grazing pastures. The constant movement between upland and lowland caused conflicts between crop farmers and nomadic herders. (Interview with Tem Peter 2018)

A commission charged with land demarcation in Esu was headed by the Divisional Officer and bypassed the influential local authority. (Interview with Kam Okocha 2018), Therefore, the commission was ineffective and only fuelled further conflict as the disgruntled parties (including the traditional authority) did not accept the new boundary. (Interview with Ngeh Ephraim 2018 in Esu) For example, when a wealthy herder, "Alhadji Musa", moved to Torkisong in 2014, Fungom Divisional officer authorized the move without consulting the Fon of Esu. The Fon, in turn, refused to sign the land documents. (Ngwoh 2014)

Human factors like poverty also engendered this conflict. Impoverished farmers did not have the resources to construct cattle proof, barbed wire fences around their fields. Instead, they used bamboo and sticks to build fragile fences, easily destroyed by cattle. (Interview with Ngeh Ephraim 2018 in Esu)

The growth of the human and cattle populations and the influx of cattle from other places caused land scarcity and the continuous exploitation depleted the land, causing it to become infertile. The expansion of farmland and settlements over the last 30 years has also reduced the amount of pastureland available for increasing livestock numbers. (Amos Fang Zeh MSc Thesis 2013 University of Buea) Both herders and

farmers have moved into the valleys for survival which dramatically changed the people's relationship with the land, and in the lowlands, resulted in severe agro-pastoral conflicts (Ngwoh 2019). Farmers, herders and administrators also ignore the farming and grazing rules in Fungom. These rules were established in the Control of Farming and Grazing Law of 1962, enacted by the legislature of West Cameroon (House of Assembly and House of chiefs) and enforced by the senior inspector of the Farmer-Herder Department. They offered statutory powers to determine which land could be used for farming and grazing. However, the law focused on land use and not ownership or titles, which confused the farmers and grazers and paved the way for conflict. The corruption of traditional and administrative authorities, the conflicting roles of farmer-herder control officers, and the failure to implement recommendations all exacerbated the frequency and intensity of farmer-herder conflicts. The 2004 Koumpa Issa Commission into the causes of protracted agro-pastoral conflicts revealed that traditional and administrative authorities were compromised by greed and interpersonal conflict

Arrival of Danpullo in Esu

In 1986, El Hadj Amadou Danpullo, a major player of the Central Committee of the national governing party, the Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement (CPDM), was granted a license by the government of Cameroon to open a ranch in Ndawara in the Boyo Division of the North-West Region. He was granted grazing rights by HRH Joseph Meh Buh II for a specific portion of land at Ibi Wundele. However, he continued his quest for land in Esu by purchasing the adjoining grassy highlands. The Fondom urged the ranch management to purchase a large parcel of land beyond the initial portion, spreading into communal land as far as Kendzong, Melang, Ida, Kemeweh and Toukising. This exposed the explicit tensions between public administrative decisions and traditional land customs. Wealthy cattle owners were never satisfied with the land at their disposal and manipulated modern land laws using their considerable political and economic power. According Alang Kum, (2018) difference between the affluent and poor facilitates land grabs.

Before Elba Ranch, land ownership in Fungom was clearly defined and partitioned into seven clan heads. However, traditional land laws were altered to make way for the Ranch, but clan heads were neither informed nor consulted about land allocation in their spheres. Tumnde argues that Cameroons unequal application of land legislation favours this undemocratic system, which causes chaos, not solutions. Clan heads and subjects often disagree with their Fons' allocations and take up confrontational tactics to recover their land.

Population expansion and land-grabbing by ranches put the Esu community at loggerheads with ranch management. On February 14, 1988, the Quarter Heads of Esu wrote a letter to the President of the Republic of Cameroon to complain about Danpullo's

fraudulent acquisition of land. A few months after the establishment of the ranch, violence emerged between both parties.

Conflict escalation

The conflict escalated between 1993 and 1995 following the eviction of many farmers in Ibi Wundele, Melang, and Torkisong. Some had their crops razed, while others who resisted were tortured by ranch employees. (Ngwoh 2014). This situation is best captured in a complaint aired by the son of one of the victims:

My father had a very big compound in Torkisong as well as farms and livestock, but this fulani men drove them out and burnt down the houses. [He] has seized the land and has prohibited anyone from farming on it. It truly hurts when you think of things like this and all the other victims who were rendered homeless and deprived of their farm holdings. (Kum George Fuh 2018)

The ranch entrepreneur's, Danpullo obsessive quest for land had immense implications. Arable crop farmers lost most of their livestock, foodstuffs, and some belongings to ranch workers.

In 1998, young boys banded together into a group. They used hit-and-run tactics to scare the ranch employees. This insecurity led to law enforcement officers being stationed at the ranch. The ranch management also orchestrated the arrest and detention of Esu locals, including Charlie Meh Kum, Charles Ndong, Charles Fuh Chu, Victor Bin Akang, Venantius Kah Buh and Venantius Tem in 1988 for raising the alarm about the expropriation of ancestral farmland. In response, on March 19, 1993, approximately 2,500 women trekked to the administrative centre of Wum to demand that the Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) provide a lasting solution to Elba land-grabbing and terror tactics.

Between 2000 and 2005, many other farmers lost their livestock in the Ranch's raids. To save the peace and their animals, many herders left Esu, travelling to Fouban or even as far as North Cameroon.

Although the indigenous population made early efforts to resolve the conflict amicably, the ranch management remained repressive, sending law enforcement to arrest all who were suspected of trespassing. Several youths and farmers were punished for trespassing, a charge they strongly repudiated, denouncing the stigma that ranch workers and uniform officers bestowed on them. (George Fuh , The Esu Elba Ranch 2018).

The government often ignored the disputes between the Esu farmers and ranch management. As Wehrmann notes, the poor often do not resist the powerful in court. When they do pursue this route, or if the powerful sue them first, their chances of winning a case are quite low. Often cases brought by the poor involving powerful actors are never heard (bribery plays a significant role. Alternatively, the wealthier party can simply afford a better lawyer. The injudiciousness of herders (the Fulani), who preferred to bribe the courts with huge sums than reach win-win conciliation with farmers. This further justified the irregularity in land conflicts between the rich and the poor for more than two decades, until 2008, the strained relations between the Esu community and the ranch management were unresolvable.

Women's demonstration

Indigenous women's institutions in Fungom deployed women's power and coercive measures to attempt to resolve farmer-herder and other conflicts. (Ngwoh PhD thesis 2014) Through public singing, verbal insults, dancing, demonstrations, physical confrontations and a sit-down protest, they refused to tolerate any attempt to destroy their farmland and endanger the livelihood of their families. Their activism is part of a long legacy of African women fighting against exclusion from state resources, inequality of access, neglect, and outright oppression.



Figure 2: Esu Women Trek to the Divisional Headquarters in Wum (Photo by Author, October 2016)

Esu women went on strike following the illegal arrest and detention of two youth leaders for instigating violence in Esu. According to Enseng Linda, one of the women on strike, the youth were detained for fighting, but their behaviour mirrored Baba Danpullo land grabbing activities. For that reason, older women, especially those 60 years and above, travelled to Wum on foot to demand their release.

Youth group involvement and military actions

Youth group involvement was another novel expression of resistance. Mmen, a town about 37 kilometres from Wum was subjected to an unprecedented act of military terror in October 1991. The administration cracked down, hoping to defuse the potentially explosive farmer-herder conflicts between Mbororo herders and indigenous farmers. However, it resulted in military action because indigenous farmers took the law into their own hands and decided to eject all herders found in disputed areas. (Cameroon post No 89. 1991).

The youth of Bafmeng funnily called Mmen descended on the grazing land, burnt the Mbororo settlements, rustled cattle, and assaulted herders. When the administration caught wind of the situation, gendarmes were sent to Mmen to stop the strike action termed 'continuous harassment and exploitation of the Mbororo by the Indigenes'.^{However}, the plan leaked and the youths barricaded the main road into the village with an enormous tree trunk. (Interview with Raymond Che Farmer 2018) When the soldiers arrived on October 25, 1991, villagers immediately rounded them up, disarmed, and threatened to kill them. Fortunately, one of the captives escaped from the village's barricade and ran through the night to Wum to alert the authorities. The military quickly mobilized units at Wum to free the prisoners and bring order to Mmen (Interview with Joseph Timbong, Herder, in Mmen by Venantius Kum Ngwoh 2007).

The sub-commission in charge of resolving the farmer-herder conflicts had send its reports to the President of the Central Commission responsible for bringing the matter for hearing in a subsequent sitting of the central commission. Unfortunately, this procedure was so lengthy that the parties involved in the dispute between farmers and herders lost confidence in the commission. Furthermore, it forced farmers (who were often victims of crop damage) to take the law into their own hands, which stifled peace-making efforts. (Interview with Raymond Che, farmer, 2012).

The 1978 decree led to financial difficulties which plagued the malfunctioning farmer herder conflict. According to Article 3 of the 1978 decree, the commission's funding needed to be annually renewed in the Department of Land budget. However, this line was never added to the budget; instead, parties in the dispute often had to bear the costs of the investigation to solve

their problems. Farmers in this area live hand to mouth, so financial constraints made it impossible for them to take their cases to the authorities (the legal fees might total more than the value of the damaged crops). In many instances, only one party in the conflict was capable of making his/her financial contribution at that given moment, and the commission often ruled in favour of those who could pay. For this reason, some farmers resorted to maiming cattle to enact revenge for the destruction of their crops.

Efforts to resolve the conflict

The local and administrative authorities in Fungom devised measures to resolve the conflict and restore peace. One plan was the demarcation of land into dedicated farming and grazing areas: land in the valleys was allocated for farming, while the hilltops were reserved for grazing.¹ This plan was criticized since some crops are only cultivated in hilly areas and cattle herders needed access to the valleys, especially during the dry season for water and pastureland.

Between 1945 and 1965, another measure known as mixed farming was introduced. This interdependent production system was designed and promoted by the administration to improve relations between farmers and herders. The plan aimed to educate the indigenous population about the importance of farmer-herder interchange. It also required depleted portions of land to remain fallow for about four years, during which time cattle would be reared on the land to increase its fertility. This plan was initially welcomed by the indigene but ultimately failed due to population increases and the pressures on land from farming and construction. (Ngwoh 2014).

From 1952-1975, the colonial and post-colonial governments acknowledged the resistance to mixed farming. They subsequently introduced a barbed wire scheme to construct fences around demarcated farmland and grazing land. To realize the scheme, the government provided rolls of wires and nails free of charge. According to a 1972 report by the Wum farmer-herder inspector, the scheme was effective. Three cattle proof fences were erected in Waindo, Naikon, and Mbinjam and four more fences were under construction in Esu, Bum, Mmen, and Kuk. However, this attempt to solve the conflicts also ultimately failed due to poor collaboration between the local administration and the government. None of the schemes were well-coordinated, allowing greed and corruption to impact the outcomes. These factors all contributed to the failure to resolve the farmer-herder conflict in Fungom.

Impacts of the conflict

The conflict had devastating impacts on both parties and, especially, on women who constitute 80 per cent of the

population involved in agriculture. During violent escalations between 1970 and 1972, herders in Esu poisoned palm wine, leading to the death of three people. Another life was lost in 2001 when Simon Tegha gunned down Yakubu (Ngwoh 2006) many farmers and herders were imprisoned or tortured by the gendarmes and, even after the conflict ended, intimidation remained the norm as people settled old grudges.

The conflict also caused food insecurity in Fungom and throughout Cameroon. Many agricultural products were destroyed: farm products were set ablaze in barns and some herders intentionally sent their cattle to wreak havoc on farms. In turn, farmers tried to kill cattle and were often detained, leaving them unable to care for their crops.

This conflict also catalysed mass youth migration out of Fungom. Like women, youths were highly engaged in agriculture. However, the conflict discouraged some youth and the insecurity threatened their farming activities. Those who remained became involved in illegal activities like prostitution, money laundering and armed robbery and some developed HIV/AIDS. Those who migrated became commercial bike riders in cities like Douala and Bamenda. (Ngwoh 2006). The living standard in Fungom also plummeted, forcing many parents to pull their children out of school since they could not afford the basic needs. (Abbass IM 2014).

Farmers and herders alike suffered from arbitrary arrest and detention. For example, Abar, a herder, petitioned the gendarmerie commander in Wum in 2004 to complain that he was summoned and intimidated to accept charges levied against him. The gendarmes extorted huge sums of money from the Mbororos, who paid 10,000 to 25,000 frs to secure their release.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, in this regard, it becomes clear that for a developing country to achieve sustainable development, a significant proportion of its development policies must be dedicated to development of rural areas which often are anchored on agricultural activities. (Nji 1960) Agriculture is the single largest contributor to the well-being of the rural poor in Fungom Sub-Division sustaining 90% of its inhabitants.

The indigenous population in the Fungom Subdivision resisted Danpullo, an elite ranch owner who expropriated vast expanses of land and strained relations between farmers and herders. The indigenous people settled in the area earlier than the Fulani herders and their claims of ancestral land were endorsed by colonial legislation. Corrupt administrative and traditional council authorities and their "underhanded" activities also exacerbated the farmer-herder conflicts in the area.

The principal factors that had led to the increasing farmers-herders conflict with sequence of event to the conflict in the community are destruction of farmlands by herders due to migration caused by climate

change and the search for pastures for cattle, cattle theft and rustling been carried out by bandits within and outside of the community. It is important to note that bandit do disguise as Fulani herdsman to commit crime in the community, therefore, increasing the animosity. Furthermore, the failure of the state to help tackle the conflict has instead increase the violence.

Besides, cattle are being handled by young Fulani "herd boys" who lack physical strength to control the herds from entering people's farmland and destroying crops for consumption, The hired herders-cattle owners' dichotomy contributed immensely to the breakdown in existing symbiotic relationship between the two groups that have existed over the years. Sometimes between 150 and 200 cattle's will be managed by a child between the ages of ten to fourteen.

Indigenous or communal peace building mechanism in the community remain a better option to easily resolved the farmer-herder conflicts.

However, a mutually beneficial relationship was eventually established as cooperation improved both parties' living standards. This cooperation manifested as mixed farming, dung and stubble exchange, and the transport of herders' luggage to the black bush". Herders should acknowledge that they do not have a monopoly over the cattle industry. The Mbororo were threatened by the indigenous people's growing number of cattle and attempted to drive them out of business, including through theft. In turn, the indigenous people must do away with their concept of 'insider and outsider, as it does not facilitate coexistence. The government should also diversify the economy and create jobs to reduce the area's overall dependence on agriculture and alleviate the pressures on the land.

Recommendation

Massive loss of lives and properties as a result of Fulani herdsman and Farmers conflict have negative implications on crop production and pastoral production which results to extreme poverty and hunger. It also has great implications to the Cameroon national security in different forms of humanitarian, economic, and social institutions and serve as a threat to the peace and stability of the country. In order to resolve the conflict, the government must therefore come up with policies that are designated to enhance the Fulani herdsman by ensuring that they Secure rights to land usage in order to minimize insecurity and mitigate the spate of conflicts

This will bring about peaceful co-existence between the Fulani herdsman and the indigenous communities. The government must also prioritize vegetation and reforestation, as well as address the climate change effect on the conflict from a holistic approach. Following the increasing conflict, there are various structural mechanisms that have been attributed to the cause of farmers-herders conflict in Cameroon and in the Fungom community.

These recommendations will help fight the conflict and provide a long-lasting solution to the increasing conflict in the regions and there has been a communal conflict resolution mechanism that was practice by the community, the state and local government should strengthen communal conflict mediator, that will ensure compliance of the compensation rules caused by both groups, and to stand as a peace builder in case of conflict escalation.

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