

Bamenda Grassfields Communities in Bamumland, 1972 - 2021: Land Acquisition, Conflicts, Agricultural Development and Challenges

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Abstract

This study examines the contributions of Bamenda Grassfields communities to the agricultural development of the Bamumland from 1972 to 2021. The outbreak of the Anglophone Crisis witnessed an unprecedented increase in the population of Bamum from the North West Region of Cameroon. To provide proper context for the study, the study begins with the geo-historical background, the reasons for the migration of Bamenda Grassfields communities to the Bamum kingdom, their agricultural activities, as well as the strategies put in place to improve the quality and quantity of the products. The study argues that, these communities introduced new crops like huckleberry, Okru, waterleaf, and Igbo cocoyam cultivation. They provided high yielding seeds through the Integrated Agricultural Association (IAA), and introduced livestock rearing like pig farming, organised workshops and provided beehives through Cameroon Gender and Environment Watch (CAMGEW) to bee farmers in the Bamumland. The study made use of historical methods of data collection and analysis, and unveils that the greatest challenges faced by Bamenda Grassfields communities in agriculture were land conflicts and multiply and illegal sell of farmlands by the Bamums to the population. The study concludes that the Bamenda Grassfields communities contributed immensely in agriculture, which has influenced the socio-economic development of the Bamumland.

Keywords: Agriculture, Development, Land Conflicts, Bamumland, Bamenda Grassfields Communities

Introduction:

Agriculture is and remains a vital tool for the world's economy. It plays a primordial role in the process of a nation's development through the provision of food items, creation of employment opportunities, generation of foreign exchange earnings, and contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and expanding markets for industrial outputs. In addition, it provides about 70 percent of the income and employment to the world's rural poor societies, with 32 percent of GDP of these countries derived from the

agricultural sector. Globally, 75% of the world in rural areas rely on agriculture, and it has contributed to the world's economic growth, poverty reduction, and environmental sustainability (African Human Development, 2012). Integration in agriculture in Cameroon was seen as a medium to enhance a peaceful development through economic, political and cultural cooperation. Agriculture in Cameroon has been given an important position because it helps in economic development at the local and national levels.

Agriculture provides 60% of all employment, it constitutes the backbone of most African economies and it is the largest contributor to the GDP. Agriculture in Cameroon over the past years has been the main employment sector that employs about 70% of its working population. It equally contributes about 45 percent to the GDP and provides food to the population, as well as feed for livestock (Achu & Lee, 2020). The country equally produced several agricultural products meant for local and international markets and it remains one of the world's main producers of certain commodities like cocoa, coffee, banana, and palm oil.

Agriculture was long practiced in the Bamumland. As the main economic activity in the Bamum kingdom, it later on became an activity mostly carried out by the Bamenda Grassfields communities. For better understanding, Bamenda Grassfields communities shall also be referred to as North West Communities or population in the North West Region of Cameroon. The Bamumland being a cosmopolitan area attracted many North West Communities in the land for different reasons. These North West communities were mostly the Nso, Babessi, Oku, Nkambe, Nwa, Awing, Bambili and Ndop Fondoms. With the coming of North West communities, they integrating themselves in the Bamumland and made tremendous impact in the agricultural development of the land through the introduction of new crops, provision of labour services and high yielding seeds, introduction of pig farming, and organisation of to train bee farmers. Also the engagement of North West communities in agriculture influenced the socio-economic development of the Bamumland. Nevertheless, agriculture was still very labour intensive and operated at the 'second generation level' unlike in developed nations which operated on the 'fourth generational level' due to capital intensive technologies.

Several scholars have written on agricultural development. At this juncture, we are going to draw knowledge from existing works and locate the

research within its wider discourse as well as fill the existing gaps and extent the scope of the research. Fanso (1989) treats the economic development of Cameroon under the Germans and British. He examines agriculture as the main economic activity of the Germans in Cameroon. Ngoh (2019) presents the causes of population movement of states and kingdoms, as well as their involvement in agriculture. Some of the reasons he mentioned included Jihads, inter-tribal wars, trade and economic changes, payment of tribute, and searching for grazing and fertile land. Ndam Bachirou (2005) identifies the geo-political, natural potentials and the origins and settlement of the Bamum kingdom. This work offers an important background on how the geographical features attracted some North West communities to move into the Bamum kingdom and got involved in agriculture. Mouguel writing on the cohabitation of the Massangam, Bamum and Bamileke holds that Massangam is viewed as one of those areas of Cameroon where national integration is an undisputable reality. It is made up of a cosmopolitan population with the majority being the Bamums because of their position in settling permanently and the domination or assimilation of conquered population who consider themselves as aborigines. Multitude of ethnic groups considered as allogenes of which the majority of the Bamileke populace coming from the present West Region of Cameroon and the North West Communities like the Nso (Mougnol, 2013). Neba identifies animal rearing as one of the major economic activities of Cameroon, and focuses on the factors that favoured and disfavoured cattle rearing activities in Cameroon and singles out the climatic conditions (Neba, 1987). His study is relevant to this piece of work because it helps us to understand that both physical and human aspects played a great role in animal rearing activities which was an important aspect of agriculture. Achu and Lee write extensively on the factors influencing efficiency of small-scale farmers in the Foubot and Fouban subdivision in Cameroon. The exuberant impact of hired labour in Maize cultivation was passively mentioned. This study brings to the limelight the

contributions brought by the North West communities in the agricultural sector in the Bamumland. Adeline Nih (2019), researches on the contribution of agriculture to the socio-economic development of Mmen. This study, though limited to Mmen, has contributed in giving a clue on the impact of agriculture in the Bamumland. Moreover, Poumogne and Randoll (2010) examine the impacts of aquaculture development projects on the Noun Division in Western Cameroon, while Fonjoh (2022) writes extensively on the implantation and influence of the Nso Community in Fouban from 1888 to 2022. He portrays agriculture as the back bone and main occupation of Cameroonians in which it contributes enormously to the economy of Cameroon and outlined proposed strategies to sustain productivity. The works of these scholars are relevant because they ease our understanding of the development and impact of agriculture in the Bamumland. This study would certainly help policymakers, scholars and researchers to scrutinize and upgrade policies in the agricultural sector in Cameroon.

Agriculture plays a critical role in transforming economies to achieve essential development goals. Agriculture has been the backbone and mainstay of the Bamumland in particular. This explains why some strategies have been put in place by the government, Non-governmental organization (NGO) to improve sustainable production. The efforts of each and everyone in this sector will not only benefit oneself but the community at large in ensuring food security, providing more employment opportunities and improvement in livelihood. The Bamum kingdom was an open pole of migration at a certain point in time especially from 1972 and became a cosmopolitan spot. Due to migration of North West communities, the Bamumland contained different communities such as the Nso, Nkambe, Babessi, Bambalang, Nwa, the Bamilike and Mbum. The burning issue is that in 2016, a strike action initiated by lawyers and teachers trade unions in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon later degenerated in to an armed conflict. Many schools were shot down in the North

West and South West Regions, economic activities came to a standstill and an atmosphere of insecurity made many people from North West communities to forcefully migrate to the Bamumland for their safety and security. This North West wave of migration to the Bamumland increased their population size tremendously, exerting pressure on the resources in the locality like land, especially as land was one of the main requirements for agriculture. This often led to land conflicts between the Bamum and North West Communities. It is from this basis that the study seeks to examine the contributions of North West communities to the agricultural sector in the Bamumland and the impacts of agriculture to the Bamum and North West communities.

It is in this context that the paper examines the geo-historical background of the Bamumland and the reasons for the migration of Bamenda Grassfields communities, the agricultural activities of the North West Communities, the strategies put in place to improve the quality and quantity of the products, the challenges encountered by the Bamenda Grassfields communities and the impact of their agricultural activities to the socioeconomic development of the area.

Geo-Historical Background:

The Bamumland is found in the West Region of Cameroon. It occupies the whole of Noun Division. It is enclosed by the rivers Mbam and Mape to the East and river Noun to the west. The kingdom occupies a total surface area of about 7300 kilometres. It is bounded to the North West by Dongamantung, Bui, and Mezam Divisions, to the South by Mbam and to the North by Banyo in the Adamawa Region. It is one of the most famed and largest kingdoms in the Grassfields of Cameroon in terms of its surface area. Due to availability of vast land in the Bamumland, it attracted the Bamenda Grassfields communities to migrate into the area. In relation to topography, the kingdom comprises the Fouban highlands (plateaux), the Malentouen and Magba lowlands, which have altitudes of 1,500 meters and 750 metres respectively. Bamumland in Noun Division comprises of Magba, Koutaba,

Foumbot, Massangam, Njimom. Bangourain and Malentouen sub-divisions.

The Bamums are a prominent Tikar group in the grasslands of Cameroon. Their history is summed up in the history of their dynasty. The Bamumland was founded in 1394 after the brutal wars of conquest carried out by its founders. The Bamum were led out of Tikar just ahead of the Nso by a prince of Tikar, Nchare who eventually became the first fon establishing the Bamum dynasty. Nchare, Ngonso and Morunta, two Tikar princes and a princess broke off from the main kingdom in Rifum due to succession quarrels. When they arrived in Mbam, they separated and moved in different directions. Ngonso moved southward and settled with her followers at kovifem and then in Kumbo, where she founded the Nso kingdom. Morunta (Mfonmbam) continued North East of the Mbam and found the Mabe and Mwi rivers. The Bamum found a new settlement beyond the Mabe and Mwi rivers where the Bamileke and other early Tikar migrants had already settled. Nchare and his companions on their part crossed the river Mbam and moved to in Njimom (Fanso, 1987:51). They carried out wars of expansion against the population they met on their way and they first settled in Njimom. It was at this time, that Nchare was proclaimed and enthroned as Fon and the Bamum dynasty was founded. He later took the country of the Pa Mben (present day Fouban) as the capital of the kingdom and adopted their language referred to as *Shu Pa Mben*. The name Fouban derived from *Mfem-Mben* signified the ruins of the Mben people which revealed the state that preceded the conquest of the Pa Mben. Nchare Yen and his followers administered the kingdom and put in place its first institution (Fanso,1987).

Migration of the Bamenda Grassfields Communities to the Bamumland:

Several factors motivated and attracted the Bamenda Grassfields communities to migrate into the Bamumland. These factors included the geographical proximity, natural potentials, historical links, public imperatives, political

instability, trade, intercultural activities, inter-marriages, and others.

Geographical proximity of the Bamumland to the Bamenda Grassfields was the first major factor. The Bamumland covers the whole of Noun Division, which is an integral part of the West Region of Cameroon. It is bounded to the North West by Donga Mantung, Bui, and Mezam Divisions. Its proximity to Bamenda Grassfields communities like Babessi which is 5 kilometres away from Bangourain, Jakiri shares boundary with Koutopit. Also, Bambalang shares divisional boundaries to the East with the Bamums at Bangourain, Koumougmba and Ngon-Njitapon villages. The geographical proximity of the Bamum Kingdom to some North West communities attracted them into the area (Ndam, 2005:33).

Natural Potentials of the Bamumland also attracted Bamenda Grassfields communities. The climate in the Kingdom is the Sudano-Guinean climate which is fresh and comprises two seasons of uneven duration, the long rainy season from March to October with an average temperature oscillating 25°C and 32°C and the short dry season from November to March with an average temperature ranging from 14°C and 21°C. This climatic condition made it favourable for cereal and vegetables cultivation in the Bamumland. This attracted North West communities that shared boundary with the Bamum communities like the Nso, Babessi and Nwa. The Bamumland is characterised by a varied vegetation and soil types that have influenced crop cultivation in the area. The geography of the area has made the region to have good soil with suitable qualities for extensive agriculture to be carried out. There is great presence of ferralitic soil which has encouraged agriculture. The rich volcanic soil in Foumbot has made the area the greatest food crop community in the kingdom. From the above, it is certain that fertile soils pushed most people to the Bamumland. Thus, the availability of vast and fertile lands in Bamumland gave birth to the migration and active participation of North West communities in the

Bamumland. Finally, the division is boarded at the level of its frontier with other administrative units by rivers with the noun in the west and north west, the Mape in the north east and south east (Ibid). The present of water bodies favoured fishing activities that attracted some communities in the Bamumland.

Public Service imperatives serve as a pull factor. Some group of persons who migrated to the Bamumland were triggered by the burning desire to engage in the public sector. Amongst these group were teachers, most especially within the period from 2016 to 2020. Thanks to the numerous bilingual schools found in the Bamumland, they needed to keep their brains active and make much money in the area. Due to this, some got engaged in agriculture so as to increase their sources of income and for home consumption.

The influence of socio-political instability in the North West Region of Cameroon. Socio-political instability played a major role to attract the North West communities to the Bamumland. This crisis which reached its height in 2016 resulted in the exodus of the population into the Bamum areas like Fouban, Koutaba, Foubot, Magba and others. The hospitality of the Bamum during the difficult moment made these communities who migrated to the area to feel relief from their pains. Some of them even received farmland from Bamums and, have started constructing. This crisis directly or indirectly influenced the living together of these communities.

Historical links between the Bamums and the Bamenda Grassfields Communities attracted majority of the population to Bamum. The Bamumland is one of the most famous and largest Kingdom in the Grassfields of Cameroon. Given the fact that the founder of the Kingdom was a Tikar prince, the Bamum share the same ancestry with North West communities who claimed descent from the Tikar ethnic group. some of these North west communities included the Nso, Babessi, Bangoland, Bamumka, Mbem, Oku, Bafut, Baba 1 and Kom. Baba 1 was a refugee Fondom which broke away from the Bamumland

when the Sub-Fondom of Papai was attacked by King Mbembwe of the Bamum Kingdom. After crossing the Nun River, the group launched an abortive attack against Bamum. From then part of the group settled in Bali-Kumbat and the main part settled towards the East of Babungo in the Northern part of the Ndop Plain (Fanso, 1987:46).

Trade had a strong connecting influence because it integrated traders and border communities. Trade therefore become a major interface where people of different ethnic groups and cultural background met. The Bamums imported salt, iron, beads, cotton goods and copper objects during colonial period from neighbouring villages like the Nso in precolonial Cameroon. Some traders travelled to distant chiefdoms like Nso to sell their products which were mostly agricultural products. Also, Bamenda Grassfields communities like Nso, Babessi, Nwa, and Nkambe travelled to the Bamumland to buy and sell some goods like fabrics, agricultural products. During the colonial and post-colonial eras, the trading partners of the Bamumland extended to include countries like Germany and France and after the independence of Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Chad. Goods like tomatoes, vegetables, maize, carrot were mostly exported. So due to trading activities between the Bamenda Grassfields communities and the Bamumland, some of the population settled in the Bamum and later on got involved into agricultural activities (Fanso, 1987:172).

Intercultural activities and visits played a significant role in the movement and settlement of the Bamenda Grassfields communities in the Bamumland. For example, immediately after the settlement of the dispute between the Nso and the Bamum, they started carrying out intercultural visits. Whenever there was death or cultural commemoration in Nso, the Bamums were invited. This was the case during the celebration of the disappearance of Sembum II. The Bamum visited with their masquerades to commemorate with the Nso. This was in turn returned by the Nso during the death of Sultan Njoya. The Nso had to visit the Bamum so as to pay homage which cemented the alliance between the two Fondoms.

Also, inter-marriage was one of the ways that brought many Bamenda Grassfields communities to the Bamumland. Due to the geographical proximity of the Bamumland and the Bamenda Grassfields Fondoms like the Nso, Babessi, Bangolang, and others these people got into intertribal marriages and eventually some had to cross or migrate into the Bamum kingdom especially the case of a woman getting married to a Bamum man. Nso and Bamum as earlier noted traced a common history as documented and oral tradition holds that the two people migrated from Rifem dynasty. Their settlement in their various areas permitted the intermingling of the two people. Oral tradition holds that *Mfon* Nsangu whose head was beheaded during the 1885-88 war got married to a princess from the Nso Kingdom but due to bad advice, he killed her. This is to confirm the fact that the people inter-mingled among themselves. Oral tradition pointed that there are several households in Bamumland who spoke purely Nso, Babessi, Bambili, Awing or other languages as a result of inter-marriages. Stella Yongho testified that she got married to Tita Mou of Bangourain in 1968 and since then, they have been living in harmony and happily. She revealed that her children spoke both Babessi and Mum. For this reason, their children shared two culture and fit properly well in both.

Furthermore, the hospitable and receptive nature and artistic works of the Bamums became a source of admiration and attraction to those still in the North West Region due to the aura portrayed by those that had had encounters with the Bamums. This attracted most communities into the Bamum Kingdom and some eventually got involved in agriculture and other activities like business, trade and education. Art occupied an important place in the history of the evolution of the Bamum Kingdom and attracted its neighbours. It served as a point of contact between the past and the present. The Bamums actually saw art works as a means through which their history could be stored and preserved for the future generations as well as veritable means of communication. Because of its long-standing artistic tradition, the Bamumland in

general is obviously a region whose cultural heritage in artistic work attracted both tourist and persons interested in partaking in this sector for income generation (Mama and Datidjo, 2021:5). As a result, many North Westerners saw this as an opportunity to get involved in artistic production and agricultural activities.

Bamenda Grassfields Communities and Land Acquisition:

The Bamenda Grassfields communities had good knowledge of the availability of abundant farming lands for crop cultivation. Equipped with these facts, they nursed the desire to invest in agricultural practices. In order to carry out agricultural activities, these communities rented land and carried out crop cultivation. The price allocated depended on the size of land. After gaining acquaintance with the land owners within a few years of farming, they purchased parcels of land which they continued to cultivate. Gradually they came to occupy parcels of land in main towns like Foubot, Magba, Koutaba and Fouban where agricultural activities were practiced.

The Sultanate of the Bamumland, Sultan Mbombouo Njoya offered vast land to the Nso community in Fouban due to the ancestral link the Bamum and Nso shared together. The founders of the land were brother and sister, that is, Ngonso founded the Nso land while Nchare brother to Ngonso founded the Bamumland. This piece of land was under the control of the Nso General Meeting in Fouban. To have a plot one was supposed to contribute 30,000 Francs CFA, and register in the Nso General Meeting. But from 2008, other communities like Ndop, Nkambe, Babessi, Awing, and Bamendankwe had access to this land on basis that they were married to Nso man or woman. This land was no longer only meant for the Nso community but open to other communities. This piece of land was used for agricultural purposes, and construction of houses.

Some of the Bamenda Grassfields communities in the Bamumland had access to land for agricultural purpose through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in

Africa (AFSA) in Fouban whose objectives were to ensure good health to vulnerable persons, safeguard the rights of children, protect the environment, promote the integration of vulnerable persons in the society and promote agriculture gave land to Bamenda Grassfields inhabitants for crop cultivation due to the Anglophone Crisis that started in 2016. Plots were distributed to members of these communities who were interested for free to farm on it for a period of three years and could still renew the contract after that time frame. AFSA contributed in providing land for agricultural activities. About 500 persons benefited from this scheme since 2016. AFSA helped these communities in carrying out agricultural activities like maize, beans, cassava, vegetables cultivation and others.

Also, the AFSA group were not only involved in the sharing of farm lands, they provided these communities with farming equipment like hoes, cutlasses and fertilizer. The call for assistance were circulated in *njangi* houses by individuals and quarter heads. Communities in Fouban and Foubot had access to land for agricultural purpose through the help rendered by the AFSA group in Fouban.

Bamenda Grassfields Communities and Agricultural Activities in Bamumland:

Concerning agricultural activities by Bamenda Grassfields population in Bamum, emphasis will be laid on cereals, tubers, vegetables and animal husbandry. Major cereals were maize and beans, while tubers were cocoyam, cassava and yams. Vegetables were heavily cultivated with the aim of selling to nearby markets. Livestock varieties like sheep, goats, pigs and chicken were raised. Within these agricultural activities, these communities offered labour services, distributed agricultural facilities like seeds, fertilizer, hoes, cutlasses and beehives.

The Bamenda Grassfields communities were actively involved in the cultivation of staple crops like maize in the Bamumland. Maize was a staple food crop cultivated by every family. The quantity of maize produced and conserved determines the

wellbeing of that family. Recently, the demand for maize exceeded the supply as a result of its additional use for baking and brewing industries, and as livestock feeds. Bamenda Grassfields communities were actively involved in Maize cultivation and also rendered labour services to Bamum farms owners, because having labourers to work on large farms was a problem. This was mostly done by organizing themselves in groups and standing at some particular spots in the Bamumland either during tilling, planting, munching or harvesting periods. The Bamenda Grassfields communities used this staple crop to prepare a traditional corn bear drink called *Nchaa*, highly loved by Bamums and used during social occasions (Mougnol, 2021:7).

Beans was another crop grown in the Bamumland. Bamenda Grassfields population cultivated red beans, white beans, and black beans. The red bean was highly cultivated and consumed by the indigenes. Beans was often planted alongside maize; white and black beans especially grown on the stem of the maize and eventually pulled the stem down. Beans cultivated in the Bamum kingdom was done in two phases, the first phase in mid-March and the second in late September. The second phase of beans was mostly cultivated on its own without mixing them with other crops like maize. Beans upon harvesting were sold fresh or dry depending on the needs of the farmers. Farmers from the North West Region produced beans in bags especially red and black beans in areas like Foubot, Magba and Bangourain. It should be noted that those who focused on agricultural productivity had enough to eat since they were the main producers.

The cultivation of vegetables in the Bamumland was mostly by women who relied on agriculture for their livelihoods. Some of the vegetables were tomatoes, pumpkin leaves, cabbage, lettuce and huckleberry. They equally introduced new vegetables like waterleaf commonly prepared with *eru* leave and huckleberry. The cultivation of vegetables was labour intensive requiring several inputs. Land was to be cleared followed by the

raising of beds, sowing of seeds by broadcasting, weeding, watering and harvesting. Due to the high labour requirements, farmers with huge land areas had to hire labour or rent water pumps. However, the farmers mostly used buckets and watering cans to convey water from streams to their farms which were often farther away from water resources. Tomato was one of the vegetables highly produced in Bamumland of Cameroon. Most of communities cultivated, harvested and preserved tomatoes in baskets for export. The Bamenda Grassfields communities improved upon the cultivation of vegetables by providing different types of crop seeds to household in the Bamumland. Vegetable seeds like onion, pepper, cucumber, cabbage, okra, carrots, huckleberry, watermelon and peril were provided. Integrated Agricultural Association (IAA) founded by Dongrila Pascal and his team have been distributing high yielding vegetable seeds to the Bamum community. IAA in collaboration with Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) and the Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries (MINEPIA) in Fouban trained 54 households representing 378 people in Menkwen Menka 25 km away from Fouban town on vegetable diversity and kitchen garden techniques. IAA trained 15 trainers and 6 stakeholders on sustainable vegetables gardening who acted as community ambassadors in helping the organization plant 5000 kitchen gardens.

Tubber crops cultivated in the Bamumland by Bamenda Grassfields population included cassava, cocoyams, potatoes and yams. Cocoyams was mostly cultivating in the Bamum Kingdom both for home consumption and for commercial purposes. The common cocoyams that the Bamums cultivated was the Macabo cocoyam. It was mostly consumed and prepared in the form of porish by the Bamums. The commonly called the Igbo cocoyams was introduced and intensified by the North West communities. These communities cultivated the Igbo cocoyams, ate some in the form of porish, or used the rest in preparing *Achu*. Bamums have also been actively involved in the cultivation of the Igbo cocoyams because of its high demand in the

market. Cassava was a common tuber crop cultivated in the Bamum kingdom. Its production was often for home consumption and for sale because of its increase demand in the market and in the nearby urban centers. Cassava was consumed in the Bamum Kingdom either as boiled, transformed as garri or use in making *bobolo*. As a result of the engagement of Bamenda Grassfields communities in cassava production, *waterfufu* was introduced, and consumed with *eru*.

Bamenda Grassfields communities were also involved in animal husbandry. This aspect of agriculture involved the rearing of animals. They kept livestock for socio-economic purposes through controlled breeding, scientific feeding, proper care and profitable marketing. Animal rearing in Bamum was on a small scale. Some of these animals kept included sheep, goats, cows, horse, rabbits, ducks and fowls. The vast hilly and green vegetation of the Bamum encouraged the rearing of cattle in the milieu. These animals were kept around the compound and also in fields. Cattle rearing and sheep were essentially for economic benefits and consumption was occasionally. Pig farming involving the raising and breeding of domestic pigs as livestock. Pigs were farmed principally for consumption or sometimes skinned. The Bamenda Grassfields communities alongside the Bamilekes were the ones that introduced pig farming in the Bamum Kingdom.

Apart from animal husbandry, these communities practiced local fishing and bee farming in the Bamum kingdom. Fishing was a process where the farmers exploited the rivers for fish. It served as food which gave protein to the body. The people were equipped with nets, hooks and robes which were used in catching fish. The fishermen went in the evening and returned in the morning. The catch was sold either fresh or dried. Bee farming or apiculture was another aspect that characterized agriculture in the Bamum Kingdom. It was an important activity because the honey derived from bee farming was a source of medicine, food and income. However, those mostly involved in bee farming were from the Bamenda Grassfields. In

Malantuen of about 30 bee farmers 20 are from North West Region. The Cameroon Gender and Environment Watch (CAMGEW) has been one of the active non-profit organization from the North West Region of Cameroon encouraging and promoting bee farming in the Bamum Kingdom. It was founded by Wirsy Emmanuel Binyuy in 2007 with its headquarters in Oku (Wirsy, 2023). North West communities through CAMGEW provided 20 beehives and organized workshops whereby they trained community members on honey production and management in Magba.

Bamenda Grassfields Communities and Challenges Faced in Bamumland:

The Bamenda Grassfields population faced several challenges in the agricultural sector in Bamumland. These barriers were both physical and human. The physical challenges included heavy storm, climate change, pest and diseases, while human challenges were land tenure system, insufficient and unskilled labour, poor farm to market roads, price fluctuation, poor storage and facilities.

Bamenda Grassfields population encountered physical challenges in a bid to enhance agricultural activities in Bamumland. These natural difficulties were encountered by farmers in the process of growing crops and rearing animals. Although these physical features also attracted farmers, they sometimes obstructed agricultural activities. Most of these extreme conditions were often beyond human control such as drought, soil, heavy storms, climate change, pest and crop diseases amongst others. Tropical storms occurred mostly during the growing or weeding season and destroyed crops such as maize, bananas, plantains, beans and cocoyam's and a host of others mostly in the months of July and August due to heavy rainfall. On the other hand, soil erosion has been a problem to farmers. Due to the fact that farms that lies on a hilly region having an insulating area with slopes, erosion was bound to occur. During the rainy season, much water runs down the slope washing away the top soil which resulted in leaching in some areas.

Climate change has been the direct cause of income inequality amongst individuals in Cameroon and the world at large. Predicted estimate of the socio-economic sector on Cameroon are forecast to be worse if negative climate change impacts continue (Abia, 2016). Climate change had influenced a lot on agriculture in the Bamum kingdom. Climate exerted the greatest influence over the world distribution of agricultural types. It was essentially the question of climate that maize, beans, plantains, potatoes are grown in the tropics. Each crop had the climatic condition under which it was grown, for instance. The main climatic elements that affected agriculture in the Bamum land were temperature and rainfall. Very low or high temperature have not been good as far as agriculture is concerned. Inadequate rain mostly in March, April and May dried off the crops and thereby reducing output. Heavy rains in July and August attracted floods and destroyed crop which discouraged some communities. Therefore, extreme climatic conditions in the Bamumland was a major factor hindering agricultural productivity.

Pests and diseases have affected plant growth in the Bamumland. The warm moist climate had encouraged the prevalence of pests and diseases. For example, tomatoes production in Foubot suffered a great set back from fungi infection called blight. Blight was regarded as the most important disease of garden huckleberries, potatoes and tomatoes (Suh, 2005). Also, tse-tse fly attacked animals causing sleeping sickness. Panama also attacked bananas and insect *nematu* in the soil affected the roots of the coffee plants. Insects like crickets, and grasshopper have also affected plant growth as they feed on them. Farmers faced the problem of poor health caused by mosquitoes such as malaria. Once the farmers were not in good health, agricultural activities were slowed thereby leading to low output. Also, the overuse or misuse of pesticides involved in agriculture was degrading both to human health and the environment (Fon, 2020)

The Bamenda Grassfields and Bamum populations have also faced human challenges. Some of these

challenges in agricultural were financial problems, land tenure system, illiteracy, insufficient and unskilled labour, poor transport infrastructure, unstable market prices, and lot more. There was the problem posed by the land tenure system. In the Bamumland with traditional privileges, entitled some people to largescale of land. A relatively small percentage of the population owned proportionately largescale share of the productive land while the rest though productive owned little or nothing lands. In this area land was believed to be owned by the *Fon* and was the only custodian to the land. Land was also acquired through inheritance. Communities from North West Region had difficulties in buying lands directly for some of Bamums who considered them as strangers and referred to them as *Mencoutou*. Worst of it all lands allocated alongside the road was considered as a taboo to the Bamum to sell to strangers. When some people even succeeded in purchasing a land at times it led to family conflict. The rigid land tenure system in this part of the country has often frustrated many farmers.

Agricultural productivity also suffered of insufficient and unskilled labour. Insufficient labour because the labour population was ageing out and the youths were migrating into urban centers in search for greener pastures. Due to this, farmers sometimes never had the required human labour to employ. Unskilled labour equally was a problem to agricultural production because even when the labour was available the technical know-how was lacking. The services of experts and free agricultural seminars organised were not attended by majority. These farmers were so adamant to the point where the agricultural officers were discouraged and withdrew their services and skills. In addition, agriculture in the Bamum was highly affected by illiteracy. Most farmers were uneducated and sometimes refused to embrace modern techniques of agriculture.

Transport infrastructures like farm to market roads which were supposed to encourage farmers were poorly constructed or maintained. Most of these roads from farm to market were either absent or in

a bad condition. These roads were used by *buyam sellams* and other traders to evaluate their goods to the main markets in the Bamum kingdom. The condition of these roads had been an obstacle to the farmers as it was inaccessible at certain periods. This negatively affected the prices of agricultural goods in the Bamum kingdom. During the rainy seasons, roads were muddy and slippery and during the dry seasons they were dusty. Most farms to market roads were not motorable, with even bicycles and motorbikes stuck in most situations.

Prices of agricultural goods started fluctuating since 2000 in the Bamumland. Prices of goods have not been stable to allow farmers make decisions about the agricultural produce. Fluctuations in prizes of agricultural products have gone a long way to discourage farmers. In most cases the farmers were cheated by their potential buyers because these farmers did not know the prevailing market prices. The drop in agricultural food prices stemmed from the fall in world market price. In 1987, Cameroon witnessed an economic crisis partly caused by general fall in price of agricultural goods due to over production. Most farmers as a result abandoned their farms and plantations especially coffee farmers. The economic crises affected the Bamumland as many people turned to produced food crop. As far as perishable goods were concerned farmers were manipulated especially when they had high yields or they themselves had no choice than to sell their goods at cheaper prices because it could get bad at any time. This was the case in 2004 when farmers sold a basket of tomatoes from 1000 to 1500 Francs CFA instead of 7000 to 12000 Francs CFA as was the case in 2003 in Foubot and Magba. Many people were encouraged to cultivate tomatoes in 2004 because of the profit people made from it in 2003 but unfortunately, they instead endured losses.

Lack of good storage facilities for agricultural produce has been a setback to agriculture in the Bamumland. Crops such as maize, beans and groundnuts were often dried and stored in bans and sometimes in bags. These goods were sometimes destroyed by rats. Some of these goods were even

stolen by unknown people when kept in huts built by farmers. Okro, tomatoes and other market gardening crops have been examples of crops now easily conserved. Farmers were sometimes forced to sell these goods at a giveaway price to avoid loses.

Land conflicts were many and served as a major set-back to the Bamenda Grassfields communities in Bamum. This occurred when one family member sold or rented a piece of land to someone from North West Region. In some cases, the rest of the family members that refused went into conflict with his brother or family member because he or she sold or rented it to a stranger or reasons that he should have been the one to do so. In Foubot, Magba, Fouban and Koutaba there have been a series of land conflicts because of engagement of communities or individuals from North West Region into agriculture. In 2020 there had been a land conflict in Fouban over the land that was given to the Bamenda Grassfields population by the *fon*. The Bamums having lands around that area claimed that the Bamenda Grassfields communities have cultivated and entered into their land. All agricultural activities were stopped within that period until the issue was tactfully resolved.

Strategies to Improve Agriculture in the Bamumland:

Agriculture has been the greatest employer of labour in semi-urban and rural areas like the Bamumland. Given this important role that agriculture played in the economy, and the active participation of Bamenda Grassfields communities in this sector in the Bamumland, the government, NGOs and individuals have made enormous efforts to improve production and yields.

The first strategy involves the setting up of educational programs. The Cameroon government in order to encourage and promote agriculture created schools all over the country for the training of agricultural personnel on modern methods of agriculture so that upon graduation, they would go to the field and impart the knowledge acquired to farmers. Such schools were created in Bambili, Dschang and veterinary school in Jakiri. In the

Bamumland, *Centre National de Formation Zootechnique et Veterinaire de Fouban* was created in 1986. NGOs like CEFAN created agricultural schools. The government of Cameroon also created an Agronomic Research Institute for Development (IRAD) to carry out research on plant and animal diseases and to produce high yielding nutritive and disease resistant seeds and livestock breeds.

The second strategy was to improve farm to market roads. The government constructed and maintained many farms to market roads in the Bamumland to ease transportation of agricultural products to the market. For example, these farms to market roads have been valuable to the development of agriculture and the community at large. These roads have enabled farmers to conveniently transport their crops from farms to market. Farmers who have been carrying their goods on their heads to the markets now used motorbikes and trucks. Farming especially rice which were done manually have been modified and some farmers now use tractors, power tillers to facilitate its cultivation.

The third strategy concerns the provision of credit facilities to farmers. Capital has been a major constrain of agriculture in Bamum. To solve this problem the government stepped in by putting in place policy geared towards the internal organization of agriculture in the area. The policy has been implemented through financial incentives such as grants and loans. This took the form of interest loans or grants. The result was that the agricultural productivity and efficiency were encouraged. For instance, in 1973, *Fonds National de Developpement Rurale* (FONADER), the government created to give short- and long-term loans to farmers. This institution was later dissolved. Some farmers in Bamum have grouped themselves into groups called common initiative groups that have attracted some NGOs who come to assist farmers and meritorious students. The credits given to farmers came in the form of farm inputs, seeds, fertilizers and farm implements.

The fifth strategy was to enhance peaceful co-existence among farmers. Farmers were usually

confronted with cattle graziers whose animals often strayed and destroyed crops. Farmers were encouraged to fence their farms with barbed wire so as to avoid animals straying into their farms. Cattle graziers were also called upon to keep their cattle in fenced areas and also grow animal foods such as fodder. People keeping domestic animals were encouraged to build nabs for the keeping of these animals. To also encourage peaceful co-existence, the bororo graziers were cautioned as to when and where to carry their cattle for grazing. During the dry season, these cattle grazed down the plains but they have been advised to graze far away from residential area. The councils in the Bamumland have been doing much to establish a good relationship between farmers and cattle grazers.

Finally, through the provision of incentives to farmers. To encourage farmers, the Cameroon government has often provided inputs such as insecticides, herbicides and pesticides to farmers for free. The government has also reduced the import duties on inputs such as farm tools and fertilizer to enable farmers have them at reasonable prices. The councils in the Bamum kingdom organized agricultural shows aimed at encouraging and awarding very productive farmers. The methods of agricultural practices in the Bamum land have been improved upon. Farmers have turned to embrace modern methods of cultivation. They cultivate a piece of land over and over with the application of fertilizers virtually little fallow period. Most land was intensively cultivated in order to meet the agricultural needs of the growing population. This was the case with Maize and tomato cultivation in the Bamum land. In order to remedy the problem of deforestation, the government has sent out a team to educate the people on the disadvantages of cutting trees. More so, strict measures have been put in place to punish defaulters and to encourage afforestation. Non-government organization like AFSA, *Projet de Developpement de l'evage* (PRODEL) and Red Carpet offered fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides to some farmers to encourage them in agriculture.

Conclusion:

The overarching purpose of this research was to evaluate the contributions of the Bamenda Grassfields communities to the agricultural development of Bamumland. Natural factors such as vegetation and suitable soil, geographical proximity, public service imperatives, marriage, trade and especially the political instability in the North West Region contributed to the migration of Bamenda Grassfields communities to the Bamumland. The various agricultural activities carried out by Bamenda Grassfields communities included maize, beans, groundnut, vegetables and tuber crop cultivation, as well as livestock rearing. The Bamenda Grassfields communities in the Bamumland introduced new crops like huckleberry (*Njamanjama*), waterleaf and livestock rearing like pigs. It was discovered that North West communities render labour services on farmlands owned by the Bamums. Also, the North West communities assisted the Bamums in the providing high yielding seeds like vegetable, *okro*, maize, beans, and corn mostly championed by the IAA organization. They organised agricultural training seminars in Fouban, Magba, Koupamatapit and Foubot. More so, through the CAMGEW group North West communities provided beehives and organised workshops to boost bee farmers productivity. Also, money raised from agriculture was used by Bamenda Grassfields communities to construct, farm to market roads, installation of pipe borne water and assist in the developmental projects in the land. In addition, this engagement created an avenue for intercultural exchange and enhanced unity between Bamums and the Bamenda Grassfields communities. Despite their contributions, they faced challenges in the acquisition of land and issues emanating from land conflicts. These conflicts occurred when lands were sold or rented to strangers and later claimed by other family members, with several court cases registered. This has discouraged some Bamenda Grassfields population from purchasing lands for agricultural purposes. Supports received in the form of fertilizer, farming tools, high yielding seeds and finances from private and government

have helped the farmers to increase agricultural output.

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