

Natural Resources and Their Implications on Ethnic Group Conflict in Bafut Sub-Division from 1974 To 2011

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ABSTRACT: *The contradictory decision and natural resources, culminated with the superiority of traditional administration made ethnocentric conflict inevitable. The role of actors involved in conflict management was based on personal interest and lack of collective effort to bring lasting solution to the situation. Interviews, administrative documents, dissertations, journals, articles, text books and internet websites were consulted. The result shows that administrative units, and natural resources disposition, attempted acculturation, domination in traditional governance provoked conflict in Bafut fondom. The implication on development in the area was a mixed blessing. Finally diverse actors in conflict management were controlled by self interest.*

KEYWORDS: conflict, conflict management, ethnic group, implication, traditional institution,

INTRODUCTION

Ethnic group conflict has been on persistent increase, over the past five decades attracting regional, national and international debates amongst scholars. According to Anthony Smith an ethnic group is a group of people who share the same characteristics in terms of culture, common memories, believe, descent, and attachment to a particular territory. Ethnic group conflict is the result of political, economic, cultural and territorial differences. In recent decades, upheavals have been sparked by ethnic rivalries especially in Rwanda among the Tutsi domination of the Hutu and the then Sudan. The individual Tutsi were not easily identified. It was not only peculiar in these communities, Cameroon was no exception. The conglomeration of the different ethnic groups with divergent views in the regional and national politics has always provoked regionalism, Tribalism and ethnocentrism. The politics in Bafut fondom was equally affected with this germ. In 1974 the conflict reaches the zenith between Bafut on one hand, Bawum, and Obang on the other hand. It was largely provoked by traditional governance and natural resource. The configuration of the fondom triggered wide spread sentiment with anxiety to protect ethnicity.

Bafut sub-division is found in Mezam Division in North West Region of Cameroon. It is situated at the foot of Bambili and Njinikum Volcanic Plateau.¹ It is some 20 kilometres

¹ Abeni Neba A, "The Role of local Actors in the Socio-Economic Development of Bafut Sub-division" Masters Dissertation in Geography, University of Yaounde I, 2012, p. 3.

away from the North of North West Regional Capital of Bamenda. Bafut is bounded in the North by Menchum Division, South by Mankon and Nkwen in Mezam Division. To the West by Momo Division, East by Bambui and Kedjum-Keku in Mezam Division. Bafut Sub-division covers an area of about 425 square kilometres with an estimated population of about 900.000 inhabitants.² The population is unevenly distributed with Agyati, Mambu, Nsoh, Nsem and Bawum having the highest population densities. On the other hand, Obang, Bakari, Buwe and Ndung have low density. The average density of Bafut sub division is about 167 per sons per square kilometer.³ This study centres on Bafut, Bawum and Obang all in Bafut fondom. This essay investigates administrative and ethnic group conflict based on attempted acculturation, chieftaincy crisis, misinterpretation of customary laws, natural resources and its implication. It was on this premise that, conflict was linked to administrative disrespect of minority groups.

Backdrop Issues on the implication of natural resources in ethnic group conflicts in Bafut

It is shown that human societies have close relations with their environment. Long before the Neolithic Revolution, man has always resorted to the natural environment to ensure his survival. Thus, favorable living environments have perpetually attracted men and their degradation or restriction has led to their departure from these areas or created conflicts amongst communities. This human dynamics around the environment pushes men to develop several ways of life, management and survival when conditions become difficult.⁴ Bafut fondom was an agglomeration of diverse ethnic group which settled in three zones. To the South and North were community that originated from Widikum.⁵ At the heart of the fondom was Bafut. The Bafut dynasty claimed its cradle from the Tikar country of the upper Mbam river region in the North of Cameroon.⁶ The Fulani invasion in the North of Cameroon threatened the survival as a people which provoked many waves of migrations including that of Bafut. The first stop was in Ndobo northwest of Fouban in the West Region of Cameroon⁷. The voracious quest for power and land, further exacerbated tension as succession dispute was in the rise.⁸ The search for a sanctuary pushed Bafut to pass through Nso, Kom and Ndop to their present day location, organised by its leader Fuluh.⁹ When the people arrived Mbebili, the area was already occupied by people who in later years came to be known as aborigines.¹⁰ The leader of Mbebili accepted Fuluh and his

² Abeni Neba A.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Fidessou Sylvestre, 2018, "Crises environnementales et mutations du mode de vie des Massa de la vallée du Logone dans l'Extrême-Nord du Cameroun (1916-2013). Approche socio-historique", Ph.D thesis in History, The University of Ngaoundere, p. 3.

⁵ Ngwa Divine Fuhwi, Kah Henry Kam, "Power Politics, Land Conflicts and Controversy over Redistribution in Bafut History" 17 October 2016, p. 33.

⁶ Fanso V.G., *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges*, Macmillian Publesher Ltd, Vol. I 198, p. 37

⁷ Ngwa Divine Fuhwi, Kah Henry Kam.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Fanso V. G.

¹⁰ Joseph Mbitimeh Ngwa "Introduction to Archaeological Resaerch in Bafut North West Cameroon" University of Yaounde I September, 1987, p. 55.

people to settle with them.¹¹ Fuluh was given the position of *Nchinda* at the court of Neba Chi as legend holds. The hard work of Fuluh raised him to rank of head of *Nchindas*. The test of power motivated him to connive with the nobles to dethrone Neba Chi. He bribed the nobles with palm wine stolen from the Neba Chi. The people had admiration for him as a generous leader who could carter not only for Bafut but the whole community. The nobility seized from Neba Chi, he was furious and abdicated from Mbebili up till date no information about his disappearance. Shortly after the enthronement of Fuluh, he appointed his family members to key positions in the palace. This episode marked the concentration of power and machination over the Mbebili, Obang and Bawum. Bawum claimed its origin from Widikum first settled in Mbelife in present day Bamendakwe.¹² The movement to the South of Bafut was attributed to volcanic eruption which forced the people out. The *fon* of Bafut welcomed avalanche of people from a hill site and gave the leader the highest title of *Atancho*. Shortly after Bawum became intransigence and challenged authority of Bafut over jurisdiction. Obang like most community in Bamenda Grassfield, migrated from Widikum, triggered by chieftaincy crisis and the search for fertile land.¹³ Their first settlement was Mbuanie in Kom and later in Maghum in Wum, finally to the North of Bafut.¹⁴ The palace constructed by the aborigine was not suitable, to have absolute control of the entire fendom. The incursion of Bali-Chamba at the wake of nineteenth century in Bamenda tilts the balance of power.¹⁵ The incursion created fear in Mbebeli, Fuluh and his followers were forced to search for a new sanctuary. Different schools of thought have emerged about the present site. Some version claimed that one of the *Fon's* wives went to fetch fuel wood, found that the present site was suitable for the palace. While other version claimed Maa Lum Mochiongie went for fishing at Nkisare, the river just below the present day palace. She informed the *fon* about a flat surface and a delegation of inquiry was formed. The area was confirmed but feared for her popularity, the princes were buried alive in a place called Nsanimunwi just 300 metres from the palace. Since then, the area has been a shrine for sacrifices. The importance of this woman in Bafut history necessitated Achirimbi II to crown her successor. At the backdrop of this that nursed the seed of ethnocentrism as traditional and civil administration further decay the fendom.

The Organisation of Traditional Government in Bafut

The Bafut society was organised both at the political and social level. A system that was parallel only to the feudal setup that existed in Europe in the Middle East ages. At the helm of the traditional government was the *fon* known as *Nfor* who dwells in the central house known as palace and rules over the fendom. He was the overseer of the traditional government. He was commander in chief in times of war, supreme magistrate, presided over important Festivals. He was co-assisted by Queen mother, *Muma* (younger brother) and (elder brother) *Ndimfor*. The only institutions that shared power with the *fon* was *Kwifor* and *Takumbeng*. With the demise or abdication of the *fon*, *Kwifor* became the regent, assisted by *Takumbeng*. Though surrounded by second and third class chiefs they

¹¹ Abumbi II, Custom and Tradition of Bafut.

¹² Fanso V. G. pp. 37-38.

¹³ Neba Peter, Aged 65, Farmer, Obang 23 November, 2013.

¹⁴ Interview with Neba Peter.

¹⁵ Ngwa Divisine Fuhwi, Kah Henry Kam, p. 37.

had no political powers.¹⁶ Bafut as a large fondom comprised of twenty one chiefs and twenty-one villages with fourteen (*Tanikuru*) Quarter head to follow up the instruction of the *fon*. The sub-administration coordinated by chief, were responsible at the level of the village to execute the decision from the central administration. Bawum and Obang administration were obliged to pay tribute to the central administration headed by the *fon*. This generated conflict between the Bafut, Bawum and Obang. The aforementioned administration was an aberration to pay any tribute because they were commensurate to Bafut. The concept of answerable and hierarchy created a difficult scenario in the administrative units of Bafut fondom.¹⁷ These villages were further split into quarters and compounds. The division was purely traditional and outline in accordance with system of the local authority and traditional government in Bafut.¹⁸ At the village or quarter level were installed chiefs or quarter heads that often were related to the *fon*. They were respectable and responsible citizens with inert qualities backed by strong moral rectitude, and must manifest enthusiasm to work in the village. The choice often fell on the traditional title holder known as '*Nkum Nfor*'. As head quarters, they were called *Tabunikuru*. They paid homage and took an oath to respect the *fon*. A step lower in the political hierarchy were citizens, who were subjected to their own rights in decision making. They follow their own wishes and collective interest and organised themselves on bases of common trade like Black Smiths and farmers age groups. The concentration of power by the *fon* was typical in African fondom and kingdom. This phenomenon threatened to erase the existence of the fondom.

All the villages with chiefs owned *Kwifor* and *Takumbeng* with limited powers. The paramount *kwifor* was the main legislative body vested with full power to enthrone *fons*, made laws and challenged any authority in Bafut fondom. Members of this house were chosen from common but influential people in Bafut fondom. The members were mostly pro-supporters of the central administration. The central administration functions in such a way that did not have courtesy for the administrative units of Bawum and Obang. This scenario raised embrown about the central administration. The intransigent of the law makers need much to be desired as they made laws favourable only to the central administration at the detriment of Bawum and Obang since Bafut ethnic group constituted majority in the institution. The attitude of *Kwifor* raises serious questions about the credibility. The altitude adopted by Bafut's administration, antagonised Bawum and Obang. *Takumbeng* was another secret society in Bafut consisted only of princes. Just like *Kwifor* it existed in the entire jurisdictions under chiefs. The role was to maintain balance of power, between the governed and the citizens. It was headed by *Ndienfor*, who turned to favour the central administration at the mercy of the other ethnic groups. Hatred, injustice and corruption in *Takumbeng* triggered ethnic squabbles in Bafut fondom. However the institutions work concurrent to maintain daily administration.

Implication of Culture in the Bafut, Obang and Bawum Relation

¹⁶ Ngwa Kenneth, Aged 40, Bawum, 30 September, 2013.

¹⁷ Interview with Ngwa Kenneth.

¹⁸ Idem.

The lower Bafut or Obang as it was called is an area of multi-ethnic migration. The fertility of the area led to mass influx of population basically for cultivation. Settlers were attracted because of its rich agricultural potential. The convergence led to a baby-boom over the years as the population increase tremendously. There was urgent need to look for someone who could act as *fon*'s representative. In 1974, the paramount *fon* of Bafut decided to set up an administration headed by Nanoh I, since he was popular in Obang. Prior to his enthronement other smaller villages like Butang, Ndong, Okwala, Ncho and Ting were incorporated to enlarged Obang.¹⁹ This scenario empowered Nanoh who later challenged the authority of Bafut over the control of this jurisdiction. The irony about Obang administration was that they were fully aware of the colonial boundary of Bafut fondom. They knew they were under this jurisdiction, even go as far as showing the colonial boundary of Bafut fondom with Menchum. The attempted disengagement by Obang from Bafut provoked anger and consternation. The cacophony emanated as a result of Bafut neglect developmentally and administratively. They were not consulted administratively but were forced to implement decision from the central administration. The top law making approach was bound to weaken the peaceful coexistence. With such position taken by the two ethnic groups incited conflict.

Bawum was pulled out of Mbelife in the present day Bamendankwe by volcanic eruption. The people under the leader *Ntoh* met Mbebili under the authority of Nebachi. Power was shared between Nebachi-cum-*Ntoh* of Bawum and lived in total harmony as tradition holds.²⁰ The Bafut left Ndobo due to pressure from slave hunters.²¹ Bafut settled in 1587, about 400 years ago under the canopy of Nebachi where Filuh worked as *Nchinda*. The settlement has invoked controversy who was the first group to reach Mbebili. The argument raised by Bawum was that they lived with the aborigine without any problem before; the Tikari group invaded Mbebili and dethroned Nebachi. The location of Bawum gave doubt of the earlier settlement. It was because they did not share boundary with Mbebili but instead their neighbour was Mambu. On the other hand, the Tikari group claimed, they first arrived before Bawum, that Bawum met Bafut under the leadership of Filuh, which was well arranged politically, economically and socially. The title *Atancho*, was attributed to this arrangement. However, the self proclamation of Filuh as *fon* did not only provoked ethno favouritism but his legitimacy was put to question as conflict was inevitable.

Culture is inextricable from conflict in the Bafut fondom. When differences surface in families or communities culture is always present to shape perception and attitude. Quoting Michelle Le Baron:

“Cultures are like underground rivers that run through
Our lives and relationship, giving messages that shape
Our perceptions, attributions, judged ideas of self

¹⁹ Ngwa Samm Fuh, Aged 50, Build, Bukari, 23 November 2013.

²⁰ Ngwa Kenneth.

²¹ Ambe, Edwin Ambe.” Political Crisis between the Paramount Fon of Bafut and Sub-Chiefs From 1932 to 2006” Dipes II dissertation in History, University of Yaounde I, 2006, p. 44.

and others”²²

Culture separate people in groups based on criterion whether or not they share a common culture. According to social identity theory this division creates necessary condition for intercultural conflict.²³ He argued that culture shaped individual perception of conflict and the manner of response. It was argued that embedded within history and myths of a culture were stories to identify specific groups. Hostility was largely provoked by acculturation. The ethnic groups migrated with culture that has passed from generation to generation about thoughts, deed and experiences. The impact of a rich heritage made it possible to understand ancestral roots and culture. The attempted acculturation met stave resistance from Obang and Bawum. The gradual approach to assimilate changes, as they saw the importance to preserve and protect the culture from invaders. This coupled with the fact that Obang was linguistically different from Bafut. Majority in lower Bafut were from Obang, as such wanted to impose their culture to the minority and which ignited tension in the fondom. The acculturation was a two way traffic Bafut wanted to dominate culturally in the fondom while Obang wanted to preserve. It was the reversed in Obang as life gradually changed from being simple to become more complex. Bafut on the other hand had vehemently vowed about the infiltration of any culture in Bafut. The reason behind was that, if the ethnic groups accepted such a culture, it would delude the identity of each group.

Identification and Exploitation of Natural Resources

Men are an integral part of the nature from which they come, it is clear that they are part of a chain from which they cannot detach themselves without exposing themselves to a number of risks. Natural resources have been at the pinnacle of most conflicts around the world. Over the past sixty years, at least forty percent of global conflict has been centred on natural resources. The high value resources such as timber, diamond, gold, mineral and oil act as significant drivers to intra-state conflicts. At the local level, the upsurge of conflict especially in sub-Saharan Africa is centred on the control of scarce resources such as fertile land and water. As the global population continue to rise and the demand for resources continue to grow, the significant potential for conflicts over natural resources intensify. Demographic pressure and urbanisation, inequitable access to and shortage of land, resources depletion were widely predicted to worsen with profound effects on the stability of rural and urban setting, thereby aggravated and generated conflicts. The global picture of natural resources usage and management has often taken place in most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and Cameroon in particular with packet of conflicts resurfacing in areas with inequitable distribution and poor management of resources. The fondom was an area which was characterised by the aforementioned traits of natural resources. These resources were unevenly distributed. At the central part of the fondom where the Bafut clans actually settled, they had just parches of fertile land left for agricultural activities. The land in this area was constantly under completion for settlement and agricultural

²² Baron Le, Mechelle. Culture and Conflict Beyond Intractability. Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Information, Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. <http://www.beyondintractability.Org/essay/culture-conflict>, June, 2003.

²³ Worchel, Stephen. “Culture’s Role in Conflict and Conflict Management” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 26, Issue 6, November 2005, p. 750.

activities. This was because over the years, the area has witnessed urban sprawl and rapid population increase.²⁴ The upper part of the fondom where the Bawum settled, the available natural resource which the population depended on was land. Presently in Bawum, the land used for settlement especially with the presence of SAJOCAL in Mambu ignited the migrant of the population. In this area, little or no land was left for agriculture. Bawum have now focused their attention towards satellite fertile land for agricultural activities. In Swie, Agyeti and Nsoh area, the land was good for the cultivation of crops such as cassava, ginger, yellow yams, maize, groundnuts and cocoyams. The encroachment of the Bawum people in Swie and Nsoh in search for fertile land has always resulted in conflict. At the lower part of Bafut where the Obang settled, there existed a variety of natural resources. The resources include fertile land and water. This area has a large expanse of fertile land which favours varied agricultural activities. At the banks of the river, the population has indulged in the cultivation of swamps rice. This agricultural type occurs in the villages of Tingoh, Nchoho, Mbakong, Butang, Obang and Okwala. After the rice season, the paddies are used for the cultivation of okra in these villages. Away from rice cultivation, the land of Obang favours the cultivation of cocoyams, cassava, plantains and groundnuts. The fertility of the area made it to be termed the “agricultural power house of Bafut fondom”. In the domain of cash crops production, the lower part of the Bafut fondom has a favourable climatic condition which favoured cultivation. In Obang, most of the farmers were involved in the cultivation of cocoa, banana, palms and coffee. Naturally, the area still has virgin forest covered with trees such as Iroko Ebony, Mahogany and Sepele. The presence of a large river in the Obang has made the population to involve in Sand quarrying and fishing. Most of the sand which was used in the North West Region came from the Obang even though it was called “Wum Sand”.

In multi-cultural society, the traits, skills and capabilities of members revolved around the allocation of natural resources. The growth of the economy ought to be transmitted to individual prosperity irrespective of the allegiance or affiliation of the individuals.²⁵ When failing to guarantee and engender individual prosperity via economic growth disintegrate tendency set in. Even though endowed with these resources, the resources were not equitably distributed. Land which was used for the principal economic activities of the fondom (agriculture) has been taken up for settlement in the central and upper parts of the fondom. This aggravated the search for new fertile lands for agriculture which often resulted in conflicts. Lower part of Bafut fondom with vast natural resources do not benefit from the proceeds of their exploitation by the Bafut council. Thus, the presence of natural resources in the area acted as a spur to conflict in the Bafut fondom.

Natural Resources as Vector of conflict

The change in the demographic situation of the Bafut fondom over the years affected the use of natural resources in the area. Over the past ten decades, the population of Bafut increased in a geometric progression. This increase in population has driven the population to a search for more land for settlement and agriculture.²⁶ It led to an increase in

²⁴ Nforsi Patrick, Aged 50, Electricien, Bawum, 30 August, 2013.

²⁵ Woechel Stephan. p. 751.

²⁶ Interview with Njofor Philip.

exploitation of various natural resources by the Bafut council which was believed by the other villages to be an exploitation tool of the Bafut fondom. In order to satisfy the need of the growing population, the Bafut ethnic group wanted to have total control over the natural resources of the entire fondom.²⁷ The other villages were resented and some time led to conflicts and even the quest for new identity by those small ethnic groups under the Bafut fondom.²⁸

The attitudes of humans are determined by resources, in an area where ubiquitous resources existed, the mentality was unity.²⁹ But in an area where rich natural resources are concentrated and the other areas cannot boast of rich natural resources, it tends to be an epicentre-of-conflicts. The presence of vast fertile land in lower Bafut was very good for cultivation of cash crops and food crops. With the presence of rich resources, the Obang ethnic group thought that it was primordial to have independence. The argument was that they generated about 70 percent of the Sand that was consumed in the whole of North West Region, therefore they could envisage self-reliance.³⁰ The geometric increase of population in Bawum created a search for land for settlement. The population of Bawum had increased tremendously with no land for farming and for settlement. This made Bawum to extend its border to the area of Nsoh and Swie. The reason was that Bawum did not have farm land. Bafut was blamed for land alienation, which was believed to have changed the original boundary as disintegration tendency emerged. They de facto tried as much as possible to draw Nsoh and Swie to its orbit. Bafut ethnic group had become embroil of the conflict to what they described as outrageous. Timber and cash crops were not only consumed in Bafut fondom, but the whole of the national territory. Obang contributed its own quota in the economy of Cameroon by producing ginger, coffee and cocoa. Lower Bafut with its rich and diverse natural resources contributes about 45% of the annual budget of Bafut Council. But intern less than 15% was repatriated to Lower Bafut. This materialism attitude provoked Obang to look at the Bafut as an arch-enemy. If the Council collect taxes and repatriate the resources back to the area, the other villages would not benefit from the Council. But the Obang had all the right to fume because they were treated as minority group. They argued that all the development was concentrated in Mumelah. It was an aberration that about 900.000 inhabitants and 21 villages in Bafut were managed by one council. The government had contributed its own quota of animosity in Bafut fondom by vehemently refusing to grant a division. However, to refuse division did not give room for disintegration. Therefore, the firm stand by the belligerence on the exploitation and management of natural resources has continued to provoke conflict in the Bafut fondom.

Typology of Conflicts in Bafut Fondom

The protracted conflicts that animated from Bafut fondom manifested itself in different ways. Although it started as a crisis of natural resources, it shifted to traditional administration, as land being the focal point behind the ethnic conflict. The Bawum

²⁷ Interview with Che Ernest Numfor.

²⁸ Idem.

²⁹ Idem.

³⁰ Chief Mufersi.

historically shared boundary with Nsoh.³¹ The Bawum had encroached Nsoh and Swie land since it was a gate way from Bamenda Town. This led to sporadic attacks against each other with continuous rivalry against each segment of the population. The crisis shifted to chieftancy conflict. Muforsi the 3rd chief enthroned by the paramount fon of Bafut Achirimbi II in 1972 to managed socio-economic and political affairs in Nsoh village, his palace was put to ruins.³² In lower Bafut chief, Nanoh has constantly launched a cold war against the fon of Bafut by castigating the *fon* and declared the boundary of Obang at river Muchwine. Bafut resident in Obang who spoke different language apart from *Mbuti* were forced to embrace to Obang Culture. The conflict stretched to the Catholic Church located at Nsoh. The John Mary Viency Centre or Minor seminary located at Nsoh was in near dystopia. The Parish head located in Nsoh was removed without any prior notification; the Bawum elites were uncomfortable with this move. Based on the Prima facie evidence, they became frustrated, maneuvered and temporarily shut down the congregation. The Barons of Bawum with numerous connections up to the presidency put the House of Formation in the state of sorry. This was the case of one retired D.O Nchatu William who spear headed the decision and the temporary closure of the congregation.³³ It was temporarily closed down because the parish head quarter was transferred from Nsoh to Njiteh.³⁴ The insurmountable reason was that they cannot be under the Bafut ethnic group.

Actors Involved in the Conflict

The strong and centralised system of most African fondom, made the paramount *fon* the respectable and feared. He was the custodian of all traditional land.³⁵ With the power vested in him, he managed land for equitable distribution. This has never been the case as land was mostly in the hands of the rich with the royal family grappinfg the lion share. He made final decision in the fondom. He was the supreme judge and chairperson in the customary court. He was charged with enthronement of sub-chiefs, and *Tanikuru* in collaboration with *Kwifor* in the village.³⁶ At times, information was passed through royal decree to the village which has been a source of conflict between intellectual classes, chiefs and *fon* as he turned to abuse power.³⁷ The sub-chiefs were imposed with instructions from the paramount *fon*, which was criticized by intellectuals. Fighting for survival between the top class and subordinates class has generated to ethnocentric crisis.³⁸ The enlargement of Obang in 1972 indirectly gave Nanoh a lot power to extend the boundary to river Muchwin. This was provocative and arrogant because the area *Tieffo* belong to Bukari and host one of the biggest shrines in Bafut called *Nifuoh*. *Tieffo* was the farm land of Bukari. Bukari was therefore entangled in a conflict that was not her making.

³¹ Ngwa Silvanus, Aged 40, Tyre Repairer, Akofungubah Residen in Nsoh-Bafut, 30August, 2013.

³² Idem.

³³ Interview with Chief Mufersi.

³⁴ Idem.

³⁵ Ambe Tumngia., "The Paramount Crisis in Bafut" DIPES II dissertation in History, University of Yaounde I, June 2012, p. 56.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ambe Ngwa Adwin Ambe "The Political Crisis between the Paramount fon of Bafut and Sub chiefs from 1932-2006" DIPES II dissertation in History University of Youande I June 2007, p. 44.

³⁸ Ibid.

In 2005 the *fon* responded by attempting to pull down Nanoh II from the throne and replaced him with Ben Mfue which rose to serious protest in Obang.

The elites in Bawum hid behind the church since some of them were so influential and held important positions in the church. The elites instigated members in Nsoh Catholic Church to look at Mufersi as an “enemy in the house”. The elites criticize the third class chiefs on the grounds that some of the chiefs were impostors, and enthroned as a puppet to Bafut administration, thereby wanted a change. The proliferation of chiefs who did not respect the intellectual elites in the village nursed hatred for them. The intellectual class in Bawum wanted an independent Chiefdom. The lamentable territorial wrangling most often than not had come about through radicalization of youths by stakeholders who stand to gain from land grabbing. With the position of Bafut, Obang and Bawum, the fondom was in disarray. The virus of elitism stretched its heinous grip over Bawum and Obang as harmony, security and unity was farfetched.

Management of Conflicts in the Bafut Fondom

The conflicts were managed through reconciliatory means put in place by civil administration, traditional council, civil society organizations. Civil administration as a custodian of all traditional land has been the focal point to resolve the conflict both at the local, regional and national levels. These involves court proceedings and warnings with statutory judgment passed to avert conflict among the groups. On the 26th September to the 1st of October 1980, the Divisional Officer of Bamenda Central Enow Enow Samuel following a petition from Ntoh Nicholas of Bawum against the *fon* of Bafut titled “The fon declares war” It was to reconcile the ethnic group conflict in Bafut Fondom over the Nsoh quarter. Amongst other issues, it was agreed that Nsoh was not part of Bawum, Mufersi was confirmed to be quarter head of Nsoh and that Bawum citizen should be appointed as tax collector of the area. Not satisfied with the outcome the case was taken to High Court reference IICB/1/1985, examined the petition. The court settled on the fact that Bawum administration should not encroach in the affair of an independent Nsoh-Bafut. The matter resurfaced in Bamenda Court of Appeal. It was thoroughly examined and the judgment was passed in favour of Bafut. Still yet the Bawum were not satisfied with judgement as the High Court was castigated been corrupt and incompetent to handle the case.

Furthermore, alternative conflict resolution was exploited with institution like traditional council as a means to end the generational conflict. It was made up of two chambers; the lower house constituted by chiefs and the upper house by council of elders. When the upper and lower house met it was called the traditional council. When there was a crisis, the chairperson convened a crisis meeting to find a lasting solution. Bafut, Bawum and Obang elites in the traditional council always appear to have self interest as each group was thinking solely about his area of jurisdiction. This has weakened the whole process of conflict management. The Nsoh Bawum question was examined and settled on Nsoh as village with Mufersi as chief. Second, the council suspended Nanoh II from his duty for being recalcitrant. The conflict of ideas completely thwarted the process of conflict resolution in the fondom despite the good intentions pre-empt by the traditional council.³⁹

³⁹Interview with. Njibaghe Simon Chewi, Aged 76, Retired Teacher Swie-Bafut, 10 December, 2013.

The task of the church was to ensure that God created life in total tranquility and harmony irrespective of race, tribe, and faith. Presbyterian, catholic, Apostolic, Baptist, and Seven Days Adventist were active to find a solution to the crisis. The people of God were called to serve and not to wait to be served. The church used the moral responsibility to speak for the voiceless and denounced power that seeks justice only for themselves. They evaluated information based on justice and peace for the development of people and violation of human right. It was to foster relation amongst communities as a means to promote peace. The churches joined their voices to advocate for peace and condemned violence. The clergy preached love in churches, forgiveness, true reconciliation and pointed out the evil associated to conflicts. The aftermath changed the mind set of many people in the Bafut fondom as people of Bafut, Bawum and Obang converged in one congregation and advocated for peace.

The civil society organization is to protect human dignity and monitor crisis that affect humanity. The Peace and Justice Commission established by His Grace Paul Verdzev in 2 December 2002 intervened, when John Mary Vieney Centre, minor seminary was temporarily shutdown, the commission intervened to remedy the crisis. The educated the parties in conflict on the moral evil associated to it. They negotiated and mediated for peace and justice to reign between Bafut and Bawum citizens. They equally created ground for reconciliation. It was in this same light that National Commission for Human Right and Freedom intervened in a case in Bawum whereby a woman was asked not to worship in Mumelaah but she went contrary to the decision and she was exiled from Bawum. The Commissions organized educational talks to bring out the ramification of conflict. Their activities have gone a long way to reduce tension which could have led to a devastated situation.⁴⁰

Implication of Conflicts

The administered units and ethnic conflict in Bafut fondom had developed socio-cultural, political and economic impacts. Conflicts greatly weakened the political cohesion of the people. Based on prima facie evidence, there was fragmentation of politics as people now live in mutual suspicion and mistrust. This limited the ability of people to work for a common goal of the fondom. This area used to be a bastion for opposition unfortunately the situation change. When it was evident mayor and his deputies will come from different ethnic group they de facto turned to vote the ruling party. This was because Barons in opposition came from Bawum, they thought, they would always be at the top. To redeem the sinking fortune, the opposition party needed to bring another player on board that would challenge the status quo. In the same angle, conflict has affected the community as no illustrious sons or daughters of Bafut fondom were appointed as governors, or even ministers, though they are one of the most educated in the North West Region. It was believed that blackmail by some elites weakened community solidarity as nobody was appointed. It was alleged that, the fon vehemently repudiated Prof. Alehtum to be a minister.⁴¹ This affected Bafut fondom as one indivisible fondom but favoured village

⁴⁰ Interview with. Njibaghe Simon Chewi.

⁴¹ Interview with Ndima Raphael, Aged 66, Retired Grade Teacher Bawum, 30 October, 2013.

solidarity. Strong village solidarity developed that favoured associations like Bawum Credit Union, Nsoh Cultural Association, Obang Cultural and Development Association. These agents of development brought citizens together as working bees. They were able to construct a hall in Bawum and school, to educate children and extend pipe borne water in Bawum. This was equally the case of *Abine Mfor* that attracted sons and daughters around Cameroon and Diaspora has lost its value. Bawum and Obang often boycotted the festival in favour of their village annual traditional dances such as the *Mondale* of the Bawum village. It equally led to inter-marriage decline in the entire fondom. The suspicion characterized the aftermath, as parents do not like to bless the marriage of their sons and daughters with whom they were in conflict. This precarious attitude led to sorrow as it caused frustration in Bafut fondom.

Government Bilingual secondary School created to solve the challenges of the increased number of children who attain school in Bafut fondom. The secondary school was spearheaded by Bawum Baron and mostly attained by children from Bawum and strangers. Although Nsoh was an area with high population density yet very few children attain the school. The school was abandoned to Bawum inhabitants, as children of Bafut background moved some kilometers to attend school either in Agyeti or Mankar. The name Bawum School scared many inhabitants to send their children, because of uncertain future of the school. The school had a permanent site located in Nsoh to host its structure; since the name was Government Bilingual secondary school Nsoh-Bawum instead of Nsoh-Bafut this created a serious problem. The Bafut inhabitants castigated the name and asked for the name Nsoh-Bafut before that area could host the school. It equally scared away teachers an epitome was one Grade I teacher by name Neba Judith Manka'a who was chased away from Butang.

In terms of infrastructure, lower Bafut was under developed comparable to Mumelaah. There was no electricity in Obang, no pipe born water making the sanitary condition very deplorable while in Mumelaah, nearly all villages enjoy good drinkable water and electricity. In lower Bafut, Village Development Associations that have been working hard to develop health centers have done very little. Constant conflict scared the actors who could extend health facilities in this area. This situation affected people's health as they live basically on the mercy of nature. Road networks which link one village to another were very poor. Most of the roads that existed were foot paths, narrow and nearly impossible in the rainy season. Some villages were linked by a large stream accessible only to those who could swim. As a result, there was no envisaged plan in the near future to ameliorate the road network. It correspondingly caused migration, as it was on the rise in Obang. Conflict provoked internal displacement of citizens as they had to abandon their ancestral land. The people live under fear, mistrust and suspicions. The inability to performed socio-economic and political activities pushed the settlers out to neighboring villages like Buwe-Bukari and Nchum. The population in the place of destination was increased while the place departure loses population.

The social relation deteriorated in the respective to inter-marriage between Bafut and the other villages of the fondom. It was believed that the forefather of Obang did not encourage inter marriage with Bafut.⁴² Young men and women who attain the age were scared to take a partner from Bafut. It was exacerbated by parents who refused to blessed marriages of their children.⁴³The feared was attributed to the fact intermarriage could led to infiltration of different perspective which was not tilt towards the protection of ethnicity. The precarious attitude had led to the state of sorry and frustration as people had to travel to nearby fondoms like Nkwen, Bamendakwe, Bambui to have a partner.

Bafut economy largely depends on natural resources. The inhabitation of Bawum depends on farm land in Nsoh and Swie for subsistence agriculture. The compound gardening was abandoned, as most of land was seized by barons of Bawum for their personal use. The land tenure system was mostly in the hands of the rich that were transferred from one person to another, making the Nsoh children land beggars.⁴⁴ Furthermore, most of the land people bought in Obang and Nsoh were either abandoned or sold. Since agriculture dependent on land, there was drastic shortage of food crops in the fondom. The reason was that little farm land was left for agriculture. The fear of attacks seriously affected production as the population was unable to have access to their farmland. This situation affected the community as people were not able to raise money for their live hood. The nonpayment of Bafut Cultural and Development association dues was attributed to lack of farmland⁴⁵.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion, the finding shows that traditional governance, and natural resources were at the back group cause of conflict. The presence of natural resources, fertile land and water complicated the situation as Bafut, Obang and Bawum tussled to have absolute control. The *fon*, *Kwifor*, *Takumbeng* Quarter heads and citizens have always had divergent on views how the fondom should be governed while the Bafut thought that Obang and Bawum ethnic belong to them. The de facto raised eye brows for the intransigence and looked at Bafut ethnic group as arch-enemy. Secondly, the title held by Mufersi before the 1980s was quarter head. The argument that he was a chief enthroned by *fon* Achirimbi was a lie. Thirdly, causes of conflict were attributed to the migration and settlement of Bawum, Obang and Bafut. These communities settled in different areas, Bawum at the north, Obang at the south and Bafut at the centre. These ethnic groups had buttressed their claims over territorial boundary with Bafut. Obang declared its boundary with Bafut in river Muchwin which was a lie because it harbors one the biggest Bafut shine and was the farm land of Bukari which was of the oldest community in Bafut fondom. Obang left Widikum, with a rich cultural heritage, in the course of migration they had to pass through Kom, Maghum in Menchum. Bawum with a culture from Bamendankwe Bafut attempted acculturation generated animosity as each group tussled to avoid cultural

⁴² Interview with Kacham Leonel Che.

⁴³ Kacham Leonel Che.

⁴⁴ Interview with Ngwa Silvanus.

⁴⁵ Idem.

imperialism. However, despite the culture and power wrangling, natural resource played the main role of vector in the Bafut Fandom conflict.

The implication of conflict in the Bafut fondom has brought about a plethora of problems ranging from socio-cultural, economic and political which adversely affected the development of the fondom. It has been shown here that ethnic group conflict had Balkanized the fondom. This was evident in the Catholic Church in Nsoh where Bafut citizens repudiate to worship with Bawum citizens. Government Bilingual Secondary could not be constructed because of the name Nsoh- Bawum instead of Nsoh-Bafut. Bafut parents refused to send their children to this school. The students had to travel kilometers to attend school either in Agyeti or Manka. Ethnic solidarity emerged as different associations like Bawum Credit Union, Nsoh Cultural and development Association sprang up with the mission of development. The traditional festival of Bawum *Mandele* was revived. It provoked migration as people searched for sanctuary.

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