

# Conflict over landownership: The case of farmers and cattle graziers in the northwest region of Cameroon

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## **Abstract**

This article examines the general underlying principles of landownership in Cameroon and the northwest region in particular. It argues that the recurrent conflicts involving farmers and cattle graziers over landownership in the northwest region of Cameroon have their roots in scarcity of land, climate change and the 'poor' application of statutory laws guaranteeing landownership. Although some farmers have struggled to enjoy their right to use land, a culture of acknowledging their right to control land during land contention is yet to take hold. In some instances, the laws continue to be disregarded in favour of wealthy cattle graziers against farmers' right to own land. This study argues that there cannot be peace, tenure, security and stability in the region without some attempt at resolving this perennial phenomenon of land conflict between farmers and cattle graziers. Resolving this problem will require the institution of land reform and some proactive measures to address the region's land-related conflicts.

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## Introduction

Competition over landownership can be found in almost every country in sub-Saharan Africa. Where it occurs, power, wealth, and survival are measured by ownership and control of land as a vital resource needed for sustenance (Kaberry 1959).<sup>1</sup> Conflict between farmers and cattle graziers over landownership has been a contentious and perennial problem in the northwest region, making legal protection against conflict over landownership imperative (Fisiy 1992:1).

Landownership is often the primary cause of conflict, and, given that the survival of most Cameroonians depends on land, struggle for its control engages people at all rungs of society (Havnevik et al. 2007:33). Bearing in mind the socio-economic significance of land, it is not surprising that social or ethnic conflicts over land are occasioned by inequitable control over land (Moyo 2008:26). In the northwest region of Cameroon, such as Bui, Wum and Mezam to name a few, indigenous elites, bureaucrats, and cattle graziers use their positions and wealth to amass large tracts of land, on which they establish cattle ranches and plantations. In many cases, their activities deprive the rural population of parcels of land on which their subsistence hinges (Rhoda 1991:59).

The farmers affected by the above dynamics must often walk long distances in search of farmland or risk encroaching on grazing lands, which may lead to conflict with pastoralists. It is on this basis that this study seeks to situate the protracted farmer-grazier conflicts in the northwest region of Cameroon within a class differential analysis framework, ultimately interrogating questions of power – who benefits and whose rights are proscribed. The study will analyse a historical evolution of land conflict between farmers and the cattle graziers as well as identify some of the causes and effects of conflict over landownership between the farmers and cattle graziers in the northwest region. It will also examine if the existing laws are sources of the conflict. Finally, it will analyse the existing adaptation measures of the conflict and assess the coping strategies of such conflict.

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1 For example, land is needed for farming, home building, collateral security, leasing, and other purposes. See Logo and Bikie 2003; Sakah 2009:171.

## **A history of land conflict between farmers and cattle graziers**

The contention between farmers and cattle graziers over the control of land has resulted in perennial conflict in the northwest region. When Fulani cattle rearing was introduced in the Anglophone region in 1919 (Njeuma and Awasom 1989:459), the local chiefs immediately welcomed the Fulani nomadic graziers. They saw them as useful clients who were very willing to pay taxes in cows and cash, which was beneficial to the local economy. However, some anthropologists<sup>2</sup> who studied this phenomenon in the northwest region discovered that those who paid the toll of cattle grazing were the food crop cultivators who were largely subsistence farmers (Fisiy 1992). The farmers had to compete with graziers for the same fertile lands that had abundant pastures for the feeding of cattle.<sup>3</sup> This situation placed the farmers in a difficult situation because as they were tilling the soil and planting crops for family sustenance, the cattle were pasturing and feeding on their crops without compensation.

The potential of this situation to create conflict was immense. Farmers who could not rely on their local chiefs, who in the first place offered the land to the graziers on the basis of self-aggrandizement, were compelled to adopt confrontational tactics against the graziers. Often supported by their children and relatives, the farmers resorted to violence whenever cattle destroyed their crops. In 1951, inhabitants of Mezam, Wum and Bui Divisions who experienced serious farmer-grazier disputes (Buea Archives 1951) resulting from the above had to rely on the cattle control officers in Bamenda to pacify a crowd of angry farmers.<sup>4</sup> The cattle control clerk who was dispatched by the administration to assess the damage caused by the cattle caused an outrage when he lightly assessed the massive damage by cattle and loss of lives in the region. The attitude

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2 Here, Kaberry reported that when she visited the northwest province between the periods 1945–1948 and 1958–1959, she actually saw, felt and understood the plight that women were experiencing with the cattle graziers in the region.

3 Kaberry was not a scaremonger; she identified genuine problems suffered by women in the area, such as the financial (taxes) and economic considerations that militated against the women.

4 The women, about 200 in number, were ready to confront the cattle graziers.

of these officers must be situated, however, within a context of a civil service dominated by elites committed to the idea that farmers should not access land on equal terms with cattle graziers (Fisiy 1992:249). It was no surprise that the farmers felt that the administration was colluding with the Fulani graziers to chase them (the farmers) away from their fertile lands.

With such a negative assessment of the situation, the farmers had to devise alternative strategies to maintain control over their usufruct. Since they could not find speedy justice within state institutions, they took matters into their own hands and resorted to activism to further their control of land. Furthermore, to channel their energies into more purposeful action, the female farmers employed the Anlu,<sup>5</sup> a powerful female association in the northwest region to protect their land interests specifically in Kom. Also in 1981, women from Wum organised themselves and attacked the Fulani graziers. The Fulanis were accused of conniving with the administration to use their wealth to amass large portions of fertile indigenous land thereby depriving the indigenous population of their right to access land for farm use. The female farmers who did not want the graziers anywhere near their land resorted to serious violence involving the burning down of Fulani huts. In response to this act, the administration sent police and gendarmes to the area and they opened fire and killed a number of the indigenes (Nkwi 1985; Chilver 1989:402). In a study carried out in the Kom area, a female party leader in the area bitterly denounced the handling of farmer-grazier disputes by the administration.<sup>6</sup> The administrators were accused of discrimination and incompetence because the farmers were not satisfied with the manner in which the matters were resolved. They concluded that the cattle graziers were favoured because of their status in the society (Nkwi and Warnier 1982:474).

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5 Anlu was a women's uprising in Kom formed in 1958 to forestall new farming techniques imposed by agricultural officers. Later, it championed all women's collective grievances, including farmer-grazier problems. This group remained as an appropriate female unifying factor for handling collective social issues in the northwest region. For a more detailed analysis of the Anlu group, see Nkwain 1963.

6 The cattle graziers were noted for using their wealth to buy and register land in the area at the expense of the indigenous women who merely had usufruct right over the land as indigenes. This incident brings into play conflict between the poor and the rich on landownership. See Nkwi and Warnier 1982:474.

## **Causes of the conflict**

Conflicts between farmers and cattle graziers in Cameroon are traceable from the colonial period where colonial policies promoted mostly herding practices and cash crop production that were more revenue generating. The conquering of space by Fulani herders, uncoordinated grazing practices, and farmers' constant search for but tenuous access to fertile farmlands are increasingly putting both partners at loggerheads. Hence for over 40 years now, as farmers' agricultural productivity and livelihoods are threatened, they have continued to blame the graziers and local authorities who have been dithering over the issue (Ufon 2004). While the search for a lasting solution still looms, the past two decades have ushered in another problem: which is the potential impact of climate change on the fertility of land.

Climate change is no good news in Cameroon. Of recent, climate change has been a thorny issue in the lives of most Cameroonians. For instance, the tussle between farmers and graziers is on the increase due to the onset of climate change that has hit Cameroon and the northwest region in particular (Takam 2005). The experience in most parts of Cameroon, and particularly the northwest parts, is that there is great movement of cattle graziers and farmers in search of greener pastures to sustain the livelihood of cattle and human beings (Sumelong 2008).

The onset of climate change has motivated conflict between cattle and crop farmers in the region since farmer-grazier activities are predominant in the region. Most socio-economic activities in Cameroon hinge on farming activities. In order to sustain these socio-economic activities in the African region, there often exist encounters between the farmer-graziers and the non-graziers, in which each group emphasises the need to secure and control much land and production of crops. It is worth remarking that the agricultural sector is a critical mainstay of local livelihoods. The sector is particularly sensitive to climate, including periods of climate variability such as periods of prolonged droughts, pests, crop diseases etc (Takam 2005). This phenomenon affects the fertility of land thus causing farmers and the graziers to struggle over the parcel of fertile land left at their disposal.

In recent years, the struggle to control large portions of land is eminent because of the influence of and increased commercialisation of land, which has led to problems of land scarcity in the society. Here, the rich (cattle graziers) use their wealth to amass large and fertile land, thus depriving the poor (more especially the rural population) of their right to use or own land for agricultural activities. It is worth noting that about 40% of Cameroonians live below the poverty level defined as US\$ 2.00 a day. With a population of about 17 million, about 70% live in the rural areas, and 60% are employed in the agricultural sector (Sone 2011). The fact that Cameroon is a country that experiences a lot of dryness, accounts for about 45% of the factors causing the vulnerability of farmers, and therefore also their adaptability (Ufon 2004).

This increased commercialisation coupled with land scarcity, has increased pressure on the local leaders who have the task of protecting the communal land system. This pressure on the leaders has caused them to place greater constraints on the farmers' capacity to own land – to the advantage of the rich elites. The high economic value presently placed on land has invariably increased the attraction of the resource and the propensity of the rich to grab land (Gray and Kevane 1999). According to Gray and Kevane, the poor are increasingly being driven out of family land they acquired for farm use and family sustenance. This problem has stirred up a perennial family and community struggle over land, with devastating effect on the poor in the region.<sup>7</sup>

Land is a very strategic socio-economic asset. Competition over its acquisition is often vigorous almost everywhere in Cameroon and particularly in the northwest region (Wanyeki 2003:48). This is so because wealth and survival are measured by ownership of land (Sakah 2009:171). Since land is a resource of limited quantity and one of the most basic aspects of subsistence for the people in the region, rules regulating ownership of it are a focal point of attention as well as the basis for conflict both at individual and community levels (Sakah 2009:172). The vulnerable groups in society (farmers and the poor) contest

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7 See the case of *Ndobol v Ndobol*, HCF/11 MC/1990, where the husband constantly beat and urinated on the wife. Also in *Theresia Ngosong Alemkeng v Bezankeng Alemkeng John*, HCK/8/94/28M/1994, the husband was stopped from evicting the wife from the matrimonial home for the building of which she had contributed money.

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the rules for owning land, challenging their lopsidedness in favour of the elites. Studies carried out in this region<sup>8</sup> have shown that certain major disruptions of peace in the region have been land-related. Land is a source of survival for the indigenes and so its restriction often results in conflict, and disruption of peace, at both the family and the community levels.

The contemporary land tenure systems in Cameroon, founded as they are on customary systems of regulation (in law or administration) and statutory formal systems, are embedded in the above unequal and discriminatory power structures and procedures. These land tenure systems tend to allocate land unequally on the basis of class, gender and other forms of social hierarchy. This unequal land allocation has been experienced for the past decades and has tended to provoke land conflicts, struggles and killing in the northwest region. For instance, the fons (chiefs or kings) traditionally control land in the community on behalf of the indigenes, but often these customary guardians misuse the land laws by monopolising the communal lands and selling it for personal gains without the consent of the community members. This misappropriation of communal land was evident in Big Babanki village, in the Ngoketunja Division in the northwest region, and led to the killing of Fon Vugah of Big Babanki in 2005 by the indigenes who were deprived of their land. This study demonstrates that the farmers' right to own land has significantly become more precarious as the protections of equal landownership traditionally ensured by the communal land system have been peeled away (Tumnde 1998).<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, these landownership conflicts between the farmers and the cattle graziers are further complicated by the fact that a class of local cattle breeders has emerged. These are indigenous sons of the land who use their wealth and political positions to amass land to breed cattle and are adopting Fulani grazing practices. But unlike the Fulanis, who buy land, these indigenous sons tend to

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8 Some examples are the land conflicts in Oku/Mbessa and Bali/Bawok in 2007 in the northwest regions. Here, the communities experienced massive killing and destruction of food crops, animals and houses.

9 It was in the past possible for women to have better access to land. Yanou (2009) has noted that elders could not deny women property rights for fear of retribution from ancestral spirits who were regarded as co-owners of the land.

seize the best land tracts from the local farmers and assert their family claims on the lands, thereby further marginalising the farmers who are also family members by pushing them to the outskirts to look for farmland. Most often, the farmers are left with only arid land which hinders their food productivity and livelihood. As always, these groups' claim to the land is predicated on the belief that they are members of renowned families who have the priority to own family land. They are confident in making these claims because of a deep-rooted conviction that their elite colleagues who sit in the farmer-grazier commission will support them.

### **Effects of the conflict**

Class discrimination with regard to landownership in the northwest region is identified not only as one of the main factors responsible for land conflict but also as a main constraint resulting from such conflict. Farmers have access only to family land but lack control and ownership of the land in the community. This often prohibits them from using land as a form of collateral security to have access to other resources and this often hinders their productivity and development (Cheneval 2006). Also, the absence of ownership right restricts them from accessing land certificates which by the 1974 Land Ordinance,<sup>10</sup> is the only authentic proof of a private property. Wamai (2003) has rightly decried this state of affairs which undermines farmers and keeps them in poverty.

The importance of land for the social reproduction of peasant households (mainly female) through subsistence from land and related income generation, has led to generational implications in the region (Wamai 2003). Subsistence farmers who are the least resourced in land find it difficult to operate within the contemporary structures of political and economic power relations in the region since these relations are skewed by the status derived from the hoarding of massive tracts of land by the rich elites. The land expropriations which occurred at a large scale mainly during the colonial era further compounded these emerging contradictory property relations and struggles in the society (Wamai 2003:27).

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10 See the provision of article 2 of the 1974 Land Ordinance.

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Landownership in Cameroon is a traditionally complex and problematic issue which has in a dynamic and fluctuating manner been influenced by the quest for political power and social status. The situation of the peasant has not been static and has evolved as the country evolves socio-economically (Logo and Bikie 2003:35). Although the Cameroonian peasants have not yet acquired the same socio-economic status as the rich, they are considered as the heart of development in spite of their marginalised status in the society (Logo and Bikie 2003:35). They are considered to be the backbone of agricultural activity and family well-being in Cameroon.

In the course of making an enormous contribution to the development of the region, the farmers are engaged in activities (farming) which invariably expose them to landownership crises that stir up class animosity. Back in the 1950s, Anlu, the women peasant group in the northwest region, mounted pressure on the administration, traditional leaders and cattle graziers over deprivation of landownership rights, and encroachment and crop destruction by graziers. Subsequently, a similar conflict led to the loss of life of some indigenes in Wum in Menchum, and in Big Babanki in Ngoketunja Division where the pastoralists trespassed into farm lands owned by farmers and destroyed their crops (Fisiy 1992:250). This has led to perpetual tension and animosity in the region.

### **Theoretical frameworks on landownership**

Proceeding from the premise that the whole purpose of landownership is the protection of the dignity of the individual, this researcher reviews the critical issue of landownership to ascertain if the rules governing landownership are a cause of the persistent land conflict in the northwest region of Cameroon irrespective of the socio-economic status of the individuals.

In doing this, the study describes the framework of landownership and situates it within the parameters of issues of conflict between farmers and cattle graziers in Cameroon. Land is a vital resource and ownership of it is for this reason a source of world-wide controversy – which has made a thorough analysis of the concept of conflict over landownership very important. This study covers

the important frameworks of human rights, justice, negotiating power, and the instrumentalist model.

### **The human rights theory of libertarianism**

Although Coke, Voltaire, Locke, Aristotle and Rousseau assert that human rights are derived from natural rights, this study is limited to a review of the analyses of John Locke and Aristotle. John Locke (1680) argues that equality is a right given to all human beings by nature and that this right should be respected by all. However, Locke admits that in practice once a man enters the society, this natural right of equality is given up by man and passed over to the society. Applying this analysis to land, Locke argues that although land is a natural resource in the state of nature, its ownership is conventional in any given society.

From the Lockean theoretical perspective, society takes precedence such that human beings are treated not as nature dictates but as society prescribes because society has powers to protect the basic rights of man. Based on this, Locke argues for equal treatment of human beings by society or government because the right to equality is an inalienable right that everyone has to enjoy. It is from Locke's conception of the equality of man that the idea of human rights can rightly be said to have been taken (Locke 1680).<sup>11</sup>

The Lockean view stresses the duty of the state to defend the rights of the citizens. This duty is discharged when the state sets up laws that may safeguard the principle of equality in the society. The study also analyses Aristotle's idea that 'likes should be treated alike' in all domains of life. This means that all human beings are to be treated equally in land ownership. Hence, this study helps to determine whether the Government has instituted legal mechanisms that could safeguard equal landownership in the region.

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11 Locke (1680:4–6) stated that 'all men are naturally in a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions ... as they think fit within the bounds of the law of nature without asking leave or depending on the will of any other man'. He attributes this equality and right to possession to the rule of common reason and equity 'which is that measure God has set to the actions of men'.

## **The egalitarian theory of justice**

This research also examines the theory of egalitarianism which proceeds on the illuminating idea that all human persons are equal in fundamental worth or moral status and should be treated as equals in all circumstances (Dworkin 2000:65). Rawls argued that equal access to resources (land) should be based on the theory of distributive justice.<sup>12</sup> That is, no individual in the relevant group (be it at the level of families, community or society) should have more or less than others in that group (Rawls 1999:3; Van der Vyver 1985). To Rawls, equal opportunity, coupled with enabling conditions, should be created by the state to allow everyone to fairly have what he or she deserves. According to the egalitarian theory, the rights and status of the vulnerable (women, poor etc) should always be taken into account when enacting land legislations. Using this principle for evaluation, this study helps to determine whether the country has created an enabling environment conducive enough for rich and poor to enjoy equality of landownership in the society.

## **The negotiating power theory on ownership of land**

This theory holds that ownership of land depends on people's capability to negotiate their right to land, manipulate the existing land rules, and straddle different institutions relating to land acquisition (Izumi 1999:11). Izumi further notes that the ability to negotiate depends mostly on people's socio-economic and political power in any given society be it in the gender, class or tribal domains. According to this view, power relations between the rich and the poor help to shape the forms and terms in which negotiation over landownership can be effected (Izumi 1999:11).

Furthermore, the struggle over property in most African states is essentially related to a struggle over power relations (Lund 2001:11). In such struggles, some benefit more than others because of their status in the society; and more often than not, these are the chiefs, the men, the rich etc. These struggles usually

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12 Distributive justice was founded on equality based on things, which though subjective may be truly relevant. For instance, where there is to be a distribution of flutes, the best flute should be given to the best flute player.

involve the processes of exclusion, deepening social divisions and class formation in the society, thereby acting as a root cause for societal conflicts (Peters 2004:269). Also, power relations can be examined through the different ways in which the rich and poor are inequitably treated in terms of landownership, land use relations and the benefits derived from the productive use of land (Moyo 2008:86). Thus, this study analyses land use in order to demonstrate how it plays a role in the wider subordination of the poor in a society dominated by broader social and production relations.

### **The instrumentalist model of law on access to land**

The research also examines the issue of unequal access to land by rural women from the theoretical perspective of the instrumentalist model of law – that perceives law as a tool for development. It investigates the criticism of legal instrumentalism for creating a ‘gap problem’ (Starr and Collier 1989; Benda-Beckmann 1989:129) which arises because the outcomes of most legislative enactments are usually different from the intentions of the law maker (Nelkon 1981:35). The intention of the law maker, which is the standard by which the law is judged, is often merely imagined or assumed by the law enforcers (Nelkon 1981:35). Furthermore, the variance between the intention and the outcomes which the law produces in social interactions can only indicate whether or not the law is effective. Since establishing that the law is ineffective, without knowing why it is ineffective, does not conduce to a better knowledge of the working of the law, the research reviews the Cameroonian situation with the view to ensuring adequate knowledge of the dynamics responsible for the inequality of land holdings between the rich and the poor. This approach puts the researcher in a good position to make appropriate recommendations for the reform of Cameroon’s land model.

### **Landownership under the Cameroonian legal system**

Customary law is, in fact, the customs and practices which the indigenes have lived with for past generations. Such practices are embedded in the indigenes, and respect for the traditions is usually handed down from generation to generation (Elias 1971:16). As a result, any other law instituted alongside the

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customary law on land, for example, is considered alien and is hardly respected by the indigenes (Elias 1971:115). Customary laws on land vary from region to region in Cameroon. Among most tribes in the northwest region of Cameroon, land is considered a communally owned property (Cobbah 1987:309). Property rights are vested in the hands of heads of families who are answerable only to the chiefs, who control and own the land for the benefit of the entire community. Individuals in the community have only occupancy rights to land (Kameri-Mbote 2005). Under the customary system, land is highly valued because it is an important source of wealth and power (Moyo et al. 2000:190). As earlier noted, however, the customary rule on the control of land was not respected when the village heads took advantage of their position as leaders of the community to commercialise communal land for their personal interest (Sone 2011:207). They collaborated with the elites and bourgeoisies to amass community land, thereby depriving the local farmers of land to live on. This experience of deprivation on the one side and personal aggrandizement on the other led to perpetual tension between the local farmers and the cattle graziers (Sone 2011:231).

However, the statutory law charted a new course for customary land law even though the customary law is still influential.<sup>13</sup> With the arrival of the colonial masters,<sup>14</sup> new land laws were introduced in Cameroon and the surrounding region. They instituted land policies which favoured total penetration, control and management using western right to property principles. The colonial spirit of instituting land laws that could manage landownership in the interest of the law makers, influenced the Cameroonian law makers when instituting the statutory land laws after the colonial rule. Presently, the statutory land laws are

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13 *Zamcho Florence Lum v. Chibikom Peter Fru*, appeal no. BCA/9/90. Also, see the decisions in *Fomara Regina A. v. Fomara Henry N.*, appeal no. BCA/11CC/97, and *Kang Sume David v. Aboh Lucy*, suit no. CASWP/1/2003, in which it was ruled that upon divorce, women as well as men have a right to own and control landed property, contrary to the previous decisions by lower courts.

14 The Germans ruled from 1884 to 1916 and applied the German Crown Lands Act of 1896; the British ruled the English-speaking regions from 1916 to 1960 and they applied the Land and Native Right Ordinance of 1927; and the French ruled the French-speaking regions from 1916 to 1960 and used the 1932 Decree on Land Management. Cameroon achieved independence in 1960.

the Cameroon Constitution of 2008, the 1974 Land Ordinance and the ratified international treaties on land issues.

The current statutory laws were instituted with the intention of overturning the customary rule that denied the majority of the community the right to own land as a constitutional right. The preamble of the Cameroon Constitution for instance, prohibits discrimination in all forms, stating that, ‘the human person without distinction as to race, religion, sex or belief, possesses inalienable and sacred rights.... All persons shall have equal rights and obligations. The state shall provide all its citizens with the conditions necessary for their development’. This protection propagated by the law applies to all Cameroonians void of any forms of distinction. The preamble of the constitution defines ownership of land as ‘the right guaranteed every person by law to use, enjoy and dispose of his or her property’.<sup>15</sup> This means that with ownership, one’s security over land is guaranteed, and the authority of the owner over the land cannot be challenged.

Also, the 1974 Land Ordinance which is the main governing law on land stipulates equal landownership rights in Cameroon.<sup>16</sup> One of the primary aims of the 1974 land reform was to enhance development and self-empowerment by facilitating ownership under state protection. In theory, everyone would be able to acquire and exploit tracts in any part of the country free from local customary norms and interpersonal conflicts, thus providing for greater security of title.

The spirit of the statutory laws demands that everyone is entitled to the guarantee of ownership, but this guarantee is contradicted by what obtains in the northwest region of Cameroon, where statistics reveal that less than 10 percent of peasant farmers have access to land ownership (Awason 2006:44; Sone 2011:158). This statistic challenges the intention of the relevant statutory provisions, including the non-discriminatory laws safeguarding equal ownership of land. It is apparent that laws alone are not enough to solve the problems of unequal landownership in the region.

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15 See the preamble of the constitution of 1996. Article 65 incorporates the preamble into the constitution.

16 Cameroon Constitution, law no. 2008/001 of 14 April 2008, to amend and supplement provisions of law no. 96/6 of 18 January 1996; Ordinance No. 74–1 of 6 July 1974 on Land Tenure, Article 1.

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Section 1(1) of the 1974 Land Ordinance for example states that, 'the State guarantees to all natural persons and corporate bodies having landed property, the right to use, enjoy and dispose of such land'. This provision perpetuates, to an extent, the unequal distribution of land between the rich cattle graziers and the farmers created by socio-economic factors. Although the provision appears to be non-discriminatory, it is in practice pro-rich because the rich dominated landholding before and after the enactment of the law. Inequality, which is to all intents and purposes strongly entrenched in the land rights model in the country, is expressed in different ways. It is for this reason that this researcher argues for a revision of the 1974 Land Ordinance to introduce a specific provision allowing farmers to register in their names the farmland on which they have already enjoyed usufruct rights for long. The way in which the 1974 Ordinance is silent on the cultural setting in the region that grants the local farmers only land use rights is strongly opposed by this researcher since it offers clear support for discrimination on the basis of class status.

The foregoing analysis indicates that female farmers have been caught between cultural restrictions that do not allow women to own land and the inability to own land under the expensive and prolonged procedure stated by the 1974 Land Ordinance. This situation helps to illustrate the gap that exists between the rules of the customary and the statutory laws. There is, for instance, the gap between the restrictive customary rules on women's rights to own land and the statutory land laws that propagate equal rights to own land for all in the country (Nzalie 2011:100). It is clear that this gap encourages land conflicts in the region.

This is because the inequitable application of the law is the foundation for intermittent class conflict involving land ownership in the region. As in other areas, the institution of laws alone is not adequate to safeguard land ownership and therefore peace, justice, and sustainable development can hardly be sustainable in the region.

### **Concluding recommendations**

In conclusion, the intermittent conflict over landownership between farmers and cattle graziers has been a major issue in this region because of the prevalence

of class difference, lack of respect for the equal land rights of all human beings and the ineffective implementation of the land laws that regulate landownership in the country. These have greatly affected peace, justice and sustainable development that are needed in the region in particular and the country in general.

It is on the above basis that this researcher argues that the government of Cameroon needs to establish structures that ensure the equitable management and ownership of this vital resource, including, if necessary, further amendment of its laws. Gaps in the law and between legal institutions should be filled through reforms that will lead to the rational allocation of land. In addition, the adoption of dialogue, mediation, and conciliation by all stakeholders in landownership disputes is vital for conflict resolution, prevention, and management in the short term, and in the long term for building a culture of sustainable peace within families and the community. Education on the importance of respecting and enforcing the land laws as they ought to be by all relevant stakeholders including the traditional rulers is a vital prerequisite.

The government should also institute a land fund to assist farmers in acquiring needed land. This can be done using lands surrendered to the communities by the government. This approach is cheaper and more cost-effective than procuring land through the private market. Also, the government could encourage financial institutions such as a farmers' bank to issue loans to farmers at reduced interest rates. This would enable them to secure land on their own and reinforce their dignity and sense of empowerment. Education of farmers about land rights and sensitisation of all the stakeholders on the constitutional right to own land should also be encouraged. Such measures could ameliorate the current inequitable patterns of ownership between the rich and the poor and will help foster justice, peace, and sustainable development in their region.

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