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**Women as Leaders: A Historical Appraisal of Women Efforts in Conflict
Prevention and Resolution in the Aghem Federation of Chiefdoms,
Cameroon**

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Abstract

The federation of Aghem chiefdoms was established in ca. 1800 with control over land reserved for men who dominated political power in the setup; though women were greater exploiters of the land for crop farming. In the early 20th century, the federation witnessed an incursion of Fulani graziers who occupied vast lands for grazing; a decision that was taken by the area's leadership with no due consultation of the women who were the major land users. By the middle of the century, continuous incompatible land use strategies resulted to crop damages which provoked direct public intervention of women in land matters. This paper examined the historical bases of direct women intervention under women leadership in land related issues as provoked by the farmer-grazier conflict. It also focused on the efforts made by women in preventing the recurrence of conflicts and the challenges they face. The paper sustained that faced with inconsistency in the prevention and management of the farmer-grazier conflicts by the male dominated political hierarchy, a feminine leadership emerged to prevent and manage the farmer-grazier conflict through pacific and forceful means. It posits that the persistent pain felt by women justified direct women involvement in farmer-grazier conflict prevention and resolution under women leadership. The paper upheld that the inability of women leadership to attain greater results in the farmer-grazier conflict prevention and management is predominantly a result of male

domination and women occupation of passive positions in the different land tenure mechanisms in the area.

Key Words: conflicts, domination, leadership, farmer-grazier, authority

Introduction

Women role in conflict prevention and mediation has been a recurrent subject of gender discourse establishing different dimensions wherein women serve as instruments in peace making. Ndongo-Mbede (2003) posited that women played an important role in traditional diplomatic conflict mediation wherein in the event of conflicts between two clans or out of the desire to strengthen relations between communities, a woman could be offered in marriage as a symbol of alliance between two societies. He intimates that women were able to initiate purification rites when they realised the absence of peace in the society. Kah (2011) argued that women reaction in conflict situations exploited both demonstration and boycotts as strategies for expressing their grievances. To Awasom (2010), women played a secondary role in a situation where men were considered legitimate representatives in society; women could but exploit mass demonstration to be able to bring influence to bear on society during conflict situations these imply that the administration apparatus of every society played a determinant role in the option women took during conflict situations. Women in the event of conflict could be seen in battle front as combatants and in other instances they tried to initiate peace or meet government agents trying to initiate dialogue and establish peace during crisis (Funteh, 2015). On the heels of the foregoing, this paper investigated the role played by women as well as strategies exploited in the prevention and resolution of farmer-grazier conflicts in the Aghem federation of chiefdoms. It exploited the Aghem Federation of chiefdoms to demonstrate that in as much as women role was not given precedence in traditional administrative procedures, their desire to secure what they considered theirs could inspire them to break all odds by forcefully or peacefully intervening in solution seeking processes. The paper asserted that in an attempt to intervene in conflict prevention and resolution, women leadership did not necessarily require specific individual tact, skill and oratory; mass action was also exploited and, in these circumstances, women were led by men to pose acts that were aimed at resolving conflicts.

Background of the Study

Aghem which today is host to the Menchum Divisional Headquarter in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon are a Tikar group that migrated into Munchi in present-day Northern Nigeria where they split into two groups – one led by Buobei and the other by Nnlom Nnam Nkuh (Nyoh, 2012). The group led by Nnlom Nnam Nkuh meandered through Takum, Esimbi, Beba-Befang and Ukpwa before they arrived their present-day settlement in about 1800 where they met with the Buobei led group that had moved eastward from Munchi passing through present-day Esu fondom in Fungom Subdivision. With this reunion, the two groups accepted each other and established a traditional federation of six federated chiefdoms headed by matrilineages as follows; Kesu led by Ewobong, Tselegha led by Eyuy Chuo, Waindugho led by Eyuyfuh, Wanagwen led by Nkuh Chuo, Zonghofuh led by Selengei and Zonghokwo led by Sibuh. The federated chiefdoms were each headed by a matrilineage head known as *bahtum* and the Sibuh ruler at Zonghokwo was ordained with the responsibility of paramount ruler of Aghem (*dengkeghem*) (Nyoh, 2012). According to this organizational stratum, the powers of *dengkeghem* were

limited to his immediate chiefdom of Zonghokwo and apart from this; he was the representative of the Aghem in foreign affairs and federated chiefdoms had a high level of autonomy within the Aghem setting.

In the early 20th century, a wave of Fulani graziers entered the Bamenda Grassfields beginning with Ardo Sabga. Other successive waves entered the area thereafter and in 1940, following negotiations between the colonial District Officer and the traditional authorities of the Aghem Federation of Chiefdoms, an entry into Wum of the Fulani was agreed upon. This wave of migrants was later to be termed 'new comers' and treated inferior as they subjected themselves to the Aghem authorities for peaceful co-existence. However, their economic activity later became a pace setter for land boundary conflicts between the Fulani and the indigenous people of the area. It is within this context that farmer-grazier conflicts emerged and became the principal subject in discourses on the Fulani-indigenous relations in Aghem. This paper investigated the role women played in the settlement of farmer-grazier conflict in the Aghem federation of chiefdoms.

Understanding the Socio-political Order in the Aghem Federation of Chiefdoms

The administration of the Aghem Federation of Chiefdoms was greatly assisted by a socio-political set up with powerful institutions that guided the execution of powers by the traditional rulers. Such institutions included among others the *kwifeh*, *mbai* and *njong* (which were entirely male centered) having social as well as politico-administrative functions and the *kefah* and *foumbei* (entirely female centered) that were largely social oriented. With regards to the fact that political power was expressed through land and that traditional land tenure was communal, land management in the Aghem federation of chiefdoms was predominantly a male activity. In this regard, land administration in the Aghem federation of chiefdoms was within the jurisdiction of traditional rulers (chiefs) known in Aghem as *ba'ahum* (singular *bahtum*). The *bahtum* was by this prerogative charged with the responsibility of distributing the land within his jurisdiction for the general interest of his subjects. In the execution of this power, the *bahtum* was fully assisted by the *kwifeh* (Chilver and Kaberry, 1967). This implicitly left land management in the hands of men. According to Nyoh (2008) the land management system in the Aghem federation of Chiefdoms was such that "all except the village heads were users and not owners of land", a situation that left the women out of the land management procedure as their access to it was limited to exploitation of the parcels accorded to them for crop cultivation. However, some lands were the belongings of lineages and in this case; lineage heads had responsibility over redistribution within their kindred using a male centred approach. This apparent women exclusion in a context where women were greater land users than men played host to women frustrations on land issues as land related matters were left in the hands of those (men) who exploited it least. It was within this setting that the Fulani met the Aghem Federation and therefore their settlement was on the bases of the gender exclusive principle of land management.

Cattle Incursion: Negotiations and Implantation

The Fulani who are known to have introduced economic cattle rearing in the Aghem Federation migrated from Kano. They used diverse tracks to enter Wum but were blocked by the inhabitants of Marshi, Koshin and Esu who resented trespassing of cattle. For fear of similar recentment in Aghem,

Major Walters, Assistant Divisional Officer (ADO) of the Bamenda Division visited Wum in 1937 to make arrangements for the entry of the Fulani and their cattle into Aghem. To ensure this, J.W. Griffith, Divisional Officer (DO) of Wum had a meeting with the paramount fon of Aghem, Bahmbi I to make arrangements for a possible allocation of land for cattle breeding (Kebei 2007). His request was rejected by the fon on grounds that, he had no land to allocate for grazing. He, however, promised to discuss the issue with Chiefs; Kelly Kwalla of Kesu, Funghu-Tseng of Waindugho and Kebai Mbong of Zonghofuh (DAW, 1966). The outcome of the meeting was the allocation of Samgwa, Taimabu, Mbu-uh and Kenyere. Some extensive land was also allocated to Ardo Umaru Kanuru at Bu road - Wum. It was based on these arrangements that in 1949 the DO of Wum J.W. Griffith signed the administrative order that permitted the entry of cattle into Aghem. By this time, the chiefs who allocated land for the settlement of the Fulani had all died. As such when the Fulani came, they settled in places accorded them by the then DO of Wum, J.W. Griffith. These Fulani settlements were not distributed with regards to the desires of the indigenes and without due consultation of the chiefs (Kebei, 2007). This became the basis of what was later to become known as the farmer-grazier dispute. These arrangements, it is important to emphasise, were made with no consideration of the women folk who were the major exploiters of these lands for crop cultivation.

This attitude of the *ba'ahtum* conforms to Boserup's (1970) argument that sustains the social evolutionary school according to which; "women are often relegated to the backward sector of the economy and deprived of participating in community wide decisions by a patriarchal system" (Kah, 2009, p. 84). In the same vein, De Beauvoir (1952) argued that women play second fiddle to men. The reason advanced is that women are constrained to reproducing and sustaining life more than anything else. In this way therefore, it becomes difficult for them to perform other functions at their optimum. This contention, otherwise known as cultural dualism, emphasises the dual action of men celebrating but also denigrating women by virtue of what they think these women can and cannot do (De Beauvoir, 1952). Based on these concepts, women reaction to land matters therefore became appealing to explain how women were able to intervene to a conflict situation in which given the existing status quo, women had no concerns.

The Bases of Farmer-Grazier Disparities

As far as the physical factors were concerned, climate as well as the relief of the Bamenda Grassfields attracted Fulani settlement. The topography of the area is generally rough with steep hills separated by narrow valleys which are averagely between 2500m to 5000m wide. The soils of the slopes are very thin and highly leached. This was a problem to both farmers and graziers considering that, graziers who were known to occupy the hills descended to the lowland areas generally occupied by farmers to carry out their grazing activities (Kebei 2007). Though this is a common practice in the dry season, it resulted in the destruction of farmers' cereals such as cassava, cocoa yams, potatoes, thereby causing economic friction. During the rainy season, steep slopes were very slippery. Again, the graziers were uncomfortable with the hills as animals easily loose balance and fell off, sustaining injuries and others dying. Considering the small nature of the valleys (lowland areas) there was bound to be serious competition between cattle herders and the indigenous crop cultivators over land. This competition at

times led to violent clashes between herders and crop cultivators with the latter considering the former as alien invaders and demanding the liberation of their land.

Moreover, climatic variation was another problem posing issue in Agro-pastoral relations. The entire Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon has two main seasons; the dry and the rainy seasons. With the practice of transhumance and shifting cultivation, graziers who depended on the rains for pasture regeneration and farmers who depended on the rains for planting their crops are bound to clash over the small pieces of land in the valleys that are often punctuated by streams. This apart, the raffia palms grew around these valleys and with their fibrous roots, they drew up water from the soil which they stored and kept the nearby lands wet throughout the year. It was around these wet areas that women (particularly in Aghem) planted their vegetable for dry season consumption. When cattle came from the hill tops for water, they trampled on the crops and destroyed them. This often resulted to conflicts after inadequate compensation or none at all (Nyoh, 2012).

In terms of human and economic factors, poverty, population increase, archaic farming methods were all influential in the uncordial relations that existed between farmers and graziers (Ngwa, Ngalim, Ngwoh, 2007). In the light of this, the income levels and living standards of most of the people of the locality were low making it impossible for them to exploit security measures such as barbed wire and paddocks that could help avoid trespassing. Population increase was caused by migration of people especially the advent of the cattle Fulani which coincided with the introduction of new medical knowledge brought about by colonization that increased life span (Frantz, 1975). Also, the attitude of herdsman further aggravated the situation; they abandoned their flock of cattle, letting it stray into peoples' farms (Suliy, 1991).

Women Reaction to Farmer-Grazier Disparities

As soon as the cattle entered the Aghem federation of chiefdoms, future conflicts became eminent though there were no immediate confrontations before 1950. These was based on the fact that, upon their arrival in Aghem, the graziers did not settle on the grazing lands designated for them in 1937 by the *ba'ahum* of Zonghofuh, Waindugho and Kesu under the supervision of *denkeghem*, Bahmbi I. In spite of this, the little or even complete absence of open confrontation between graziers and the farming population in Aghem prior to 1950 was centred on the fact that indigenes of Aghem had not extended their agricultural activities to the areas occupied by graziers when they arrived. As such, the level of occupational interaction was quite minimal and therefore it was difficult to have confrontation between Fulani and indigenes. Also, the land initially occupied by graziers was either arable land or land left for fallow. In either case, as time for usage of the land turned-up, graziers became reluctant to move to areas earlier designated for grazing, thereby sewing the seed of discord.

It is important therefore to note here that the absence of confrontation did not mean that there were no crop damages recorded. Oral sources hold that crop destruction by cattle in the Aghem federation is as old as the entry of cattle in the area (Ewi, 2015). The absence of confrontation has been explained by the fact that the Fulani were quick to pay compensation for crop damages (Nkuo, 2010). In the words of Fanso (1989), "they [Fulani] submitted themselves quietly and peacefully to local rulers, and did not hesitate to pay tribute when it was demanded." This quick payment of compensation was as a result of

the fact that graziers were in search of pasture and were secured with the availability of pasturage in Aghem. It was therefore most necessary for them to recognise the superiority of the chiefs, especially considering that they had been allocated their grazing lands by these chiefs (Timbong, 2015). In the light of this, the *Ardo'en* and the chiefs found it less complex to resolve disputes.

However, with the rise of a political elite and the changes in the value of land that gradually affected the entire Bamenda Division in which the Aghem federation was part, traditional resolution of farmer-grazier conflicts became difficult. From thence, complaints against destruction of crops by cattle became recurrent and relations between the two economic and ethnically diverse groups that made up the Aghem Federation of chiefdoms further deteriorated. In the Kom area, the *Anlu* society was the first uprising provoked by encroached grazing in 1958 among other reasons.

By 1963, women led street riots were becoming common in Aghem as a result of crop destruction, yet, cattle continued to destroy crops. This was because administrative regulations such as the Cattle Control Rules of 1947 and the Farmer-Grazier Regulations of 1963 that protected the cattle rearing industry had made graziers resistant to the payment of compensation and the procedure for getting the payments made was now characterised by cumbersome administrative procedures wherein the women crop cultivators were treated as secondary. Moreover, the *ba'ahtum* had been divided on party lines and the interests of their subjects were now left at the mercy of politicians (Akwo, 2015). While this animosity grew in strength, the area's administrators remained helpless while women who were the principal cultivators of crops were abandoned to themselves by the male dominated administrative apparatus. It is alleged that this was because they [men] were often corrupted by graziers who preferred to give money and cattle to the SDO and DO instead of paying compensation for damaged crops (Epo, 2006). This seeming denial of women rights provoked them to react differently in the event of diverse happenings. As Awasom (2005) puts it, "Women in West Africa have long had the ability to act collectively in defence of their own interests and from all the evidence we have, this is a right they have often asserted". By implication therefore, Aghem women having felt their interest undefended by their male folk were forced to rise up to the task of their own defence making exploit of a feminine leadership, exploiting different strategies (such as petitioning, strike action, besiege, denial to sell foodstuffs in the market place among others) to attain varying but progressive goals in the course of their struggle.

As a result of recurrent crop damages, Aghem women in 1964 from the base of their traditional social institution, *Fuembuei*, took upon themselves to take their grievances to the 'competent' authorities in Buea (Ewi, 2012). After meeting John Ngu Foncha, the delegation returned with the promise that the problem would be resolved (Epo, 2006). Foncha effectively visited Wum in the same year and promised to have the problem permanently resolved. In 1965, the government of West Cameroon sent Ardo Umaru Kanuru on scholarship to London to study modern ranging. It was expected that upon his return, he would disseminate these methods to his subjects and kinsmen. When Ardo Umaru Kanuru returned from his training, he was provided with padlocking equipment such as barbed wire, fencing poles and money to help disseminate the techniques of modern grazing to his kin (Kebei, 2007). Ardo Umaru Kanuru rather distributed the barbed wire and gave the task of constructing the cattle proof fences to the farmers who were predominantly women. This made the women to go on a rampage. This resulted in a mass movement of Women to the palace of *dengkeghem*. Frustrated by the unsatisfactory response

of *dengkeghem*, Wallang Mbong, the women led by Mbei Mbong Echou decided to march to the SDO for Wum Division, R.S. Boma.

This peaceful demonstration by women culminated in the introduction of Cattle Committee Guides (CCG) which only went operational in Wum Division in 1970 under the coordination of the Wum Area Council in collaboration with the Veterinary Department (Nyoh, 2012). The coordination was responsible for receiving complaints from farmers and graziers, it inspected and assessed damaged farms and had to report defaulters to the central administration in Wum. The major challenge of the CCG was therefore to ease the work of the administration in resolving farmer-grazier conflicts in accordance with the Farmer-Grazier Regulations of 1963 (Nchia 2006; Suliy, 1991).

The introduction of CCG alone could not stop trespassing of cattle in farms as in 1970 alone Naikom recorded more than fifty complaints of destruction of crops by cattle (DAW, 1974). No compensation was made for the crops damaged and the women decided to organise a sit-down-strike at the palace of *dengkeghem*. It was only on the fourth day of the strike, administrative authorities intervened and a peaceful atmosphere was restored. A meeting of all Aghem women was convened in the court yard of *dengkeghem* on March 16, 1972 (DAW, 1974). At this meeting, women seriously attacked the *ba'ahum* accusing them of giving out all the land to graziers in return for gifts. The women promised a violent reaction if the chiefs failed to send the cattle far away from the farming areas (Suret Service Report, 1972). This only lasted for some time as crop destruction by cattle continued and the powers of the chiefs had been reduced to auxiliaries of the administration by the new chieftaincy law. This implies that state administrators were now in command and from time to time, they attempted resolving conflicts without taking into cognisance the customs and traditions of the parties involved and especially the relationship between land use and land ownership in Aghem. For instance, knowledge of the indigenous system of crop cultivation and the fact that graziers were Fulani who lived a nomadic life style would have eased the solution seeking process of sending graziers to the attributed grazing lands which were far from both indigenous settlements and their crop farms. The fact that women were greater land users by way of crop cultivation and therefore could better contribute to decision making on land related matters was ignored. This passive attitude given to women in the process of solving conflicts that predominantly concerned indigenous women was very unfavourable to conflict prevention or resolution procedure. This conforms to a USAID (2007) observation according to which women are usually left out of formal peace-making activities unless they exhibit remarkable determination to seat themselves at the peace table.

In 1972 the chieftaincy law was revised giving greater authority over land to the SDOs and DOs. In Aghem, this heightened collaboration between graziers and the state administrators against women who lacked the defence of the traditional male dominated administration. This administrative innovation resulted in intensified crop destruction in the entire federation with the case of Waindugho being more acute. Here, a farm containing; plantain, beans, cocoyam, coffee plants and banana belonging to one Kebai was damaged by cattle. After some investigations by farmers, it was alleged that the cattle belonged to Alhadji Baba Ahmadou Danpullo (Lucas Achuo, 2015). This coincided with a CNU rally organised by the Menchum Section to sensitise women farmers on co-existence with graziers (DAW, 1970). At this rally, women under the leadership of Mbei Mbong Ichu presented their frustration in

relation to farming activities. In reaction to women lamentation, Hon. Patrick Mua, Member of Parliament, Federal House of Assembly for Menchum Division (Wum Central Sub-division) accused these women of being ungrateful for asking the graziers not to graze around their farms. According to him, the graziers had brought wealth and civilisation to Wum and thanks to this; the farmers were now able to wear cloths bought with money made by working for graziers. He went further to announce that all the cattle in Aghem belonged to the biggest grazier, the chairman of the national party (CNU), Ahmadou Ahidjo (Nchia, 2015).

Angered by Patrick Mua's statement, Aghem women stripped naked and marched round the major streets of Aghem to express their grievance. According to Fatton (1995), the display of the nakedness of the African woman was and remains her expression of utter anger and outrage at both public injustice and private male viciousness. This incidence drew public attention and showed the level at which Aghem women were frustrated and abandoned to their fate by chiefs, the political elite and administrators. As the agitations and manifestations continued, an emergency meeting of all the stakeholders in the farmer-grazier problem was convened. These meetings helped the federation to return to peace by way of promises.

By March 1973, the promises made at the emergency meeting had not been fulfilled. Even the demarcation that had been half-heartedly accepted by women was not realised. Crops continued to be damaged. Women cultivators under Mbei Mbong Echu's leadership convened a meeting in which they decided among other things to besiege the *ba'ahum* (Beltha Nsen Nchia, 2015). This was followed by public manifestations and civil disobedience and the sale of foodstuff to the Fulani was made forbidden. The decision was widely and effectively implemented (Lucas Buh, 2015). This means that the decision went beyond an attack on the Fulani as even none Fulani residents in Wum could not afford to get foodstuff in the market. This approach to conflicts appears to be a recurrent strategy considering that in the 1950s women petty traders of British Southern Cameroon origin, boycotted the Douala market in protest against the imposition of price restrictions by the French colonial administrators (Kah, 2011). Any person caught carrying foodstuff to the market was molested. For the purpose of solidarity, the decision was also implemented by women of the neighbouring villages of Kuk, Weh, Bafmeng and Esu (Anastasia Mbong, 2015).

In reaction, the SDO for Menchum, summoned a crisis meeting in which he expressed his regret to the chiefs that women activities had paralysed the economy of the division. He appealed to the traditional rulers to convince the women to repeal the order. Senior politicians of the division like Hon. Josepha Mua, Hon. Patrick Mua and Hon. Joseph Che Kangkolo who were sent to address the women on the issue were rather attacked by the latter who accused the former of being pro-grazier. "Strangers" who had come to Wum in different portfolios were now ill-treated on because graziers had become undesirable. This was because women believed that administrative officials who were predominantly 'strangers' perpetrated corruption to the advantage of graziers. To demonstrate their mistrust in the efforts of the areas leadership to resolve the continuing crises, more than one thousand women decided to march from Wum to the governor's office in Bamenda (a distance of about 82 km) (Alfred Fung Ewi, 2015). This was intended to draw public attention and to make the governor aware of their grievances. In response, the Nseke Commission was set up to study and resolve the crisis through

farmland delimitation (Awason, 2010, 128). The establishment of the Nseke Commission was proven of women ability to exploit strike action in an effort to restore order.

By the provisions of the commission, the demarcation team was to be headed by the Chief of Zone for the North West Farmer-Grazier problem A.T. Ngalla. The team was to ensure the movement of cattle to the originally allocated grazing areas at Mbulom and Mbu'uh in the chiefdom of Kesu, Kenyere in the chiefdom of Zonghofuh and Sangwa in the chiefdom of Waindugho. These areas were to be demarcated and fenced. Farmers were to be responsible for the provision of sticks for the fencing which they effectively did (Achuo 2015). By implication, the efforts of women to bring in a superior and 'neutral' authority in a conflict situation created the opportunity for dialogue which neutralised apathy that usually surrounded the efforts of local administrators. A. T. Ngalla's team went to work in 1974 and rather allocated new grazing areas. The originally designated grazing areas cited above were not taken into consideration as requested by Governor Guillaume Nseke (Awason, 2005, p. 10). Rather, the already occupied but contested grazing areas were demarcated against the wishes of the women. Governor Guillaume Nseke left the North West Province the same year and no efforts were made by his successors to redress the situation.

The alteration made on the recommendations of Governor Guillaume Nseke had as consequence persistence in the farmer-grazier conflict. In view of this, women in 1978 organised themselves in a crowd of over six thousand and barricaded the palace of *dengkenghem* (Awason, 2005). They attacked the *ba'ahum*, accusing them of complicity with the graziers. The traditional rulers on their part, tried to calm them unsuccessfully but managed to escape. Realising that the *ba'ahum* had escaped from the palace, the women marched to the SDO's residence where they camped for four days (Mbong, 2015). Their hope was to draw the sympathy of the SDO, Joseph Mbasse Ngoh, for a lasting solution to the problem. Yet, all they received were promises.

Under these circumstances, grazing on farmland was aggravated as cattle were still entering the Aghem without willing to settle in designated grazing areas. Thus, on the morning of December 26, 1980, some Aghem women went to their farms to realise that while they enjoyed on Christmas day, cattle damaged their crops. Unable to contend their long-repressed frustrations, the women decided to face the wrath of traditional rulers and administrative officials and if possible, to settle the matter once and for all (Agather Nchuo Mbong, 2015). Coincidentally, the North West Provincial Governor, Aboum Atchouye was presiding a Menchum Development Meeting in Wum. Their 1973 experience and events thereafter compelled them to depend only on the governor to solve their problem. The women decided to take advantage of the governor's presence in Wum to express their grievances.

A delegation of women went to the SDO's residence where the governor was lodging to meet the governor and present their worries. At the SDO's residence, the women were told by the SDO Joseph Mbasse Ngoh that the governor had been called to Yaounde (Agather Nchuo Mbong, 2015). However, the women could identify the governor's car parked outside and asked the SDO to follow them and see for himself the damage that had been caused on their farms. The appeal did not receive a positive response as the SDO claimed he was very busy. Believing that the SDO had deliberately prevented them from meeting the governor, they on December 28, 1980 embarked on the destruction of the rugas that the graziers had pitched on farmlands forcing the latter to move their cattle out of the area. The

consequence was open confrontations between the Aghem women and graziers one of whom came out with his entire family holding clubs, knives, and swords and attacked the women. This confrontation inflicted serious injuries on both parties. The grazier who initiated the attack on women was arrested and detained but the following day he was released.

Infuriated by these allegations, more women rallied themselves and continued the process of dismantling Fulani rugas. On December 30, 1980, men (disguised as women) joined the women manifestations. This was an act of demonstration of men's trust in women revolutionary action as a step to bringing lasting peace in Aghem within the context of Farmer-Grazier conflict. While the mob was returning to their chiefdoms after their day's activities, they were halted at the Post Office roundabout by armed police men, the SDO Joseph Mbasse Ngoh, the DO and some chiefs, politicians including the gendarmerie company commanders of Nkambe and Wum, the public security and special branch police commissioners, Isaac Konghnsou and Bouba Sambo respectively. While the SDO was addressing the demonstrators, the company commander of the National Gendarmerie, Wum, Mohamadou Boubakari is alleged to have ordered his forces to open fire on the civilian mob resulting in open confrontation. This confrontation was very short lived but nine lives are said to have been lost on the spot. These were; Clement Buh Kum, Fung Tesih Nou, Peter Enah, Joseph Kedze Sangha, Wahkelly Kwalla, Wahfuh Chung, Wah Buh, Kedze Sih and Simon Achuo (Michael Goh Akwo (HRH), 2015). Having observed this, Aghem women returned home. Once again, they refused to sell foodstuff in the market. This was a women strategy to demonstrate the importance of food to live so that it could be used as a base for negotiating lasting peace between farmers, graziers and the administrative authorities whom Aghem women now considered accomplices to the grazing community and consequently lost trust in them. After administrative consultations with the traditional rulers, the women again, returned to the market and peace returned to Wum town. However, considering that the cattle had not been moved to the originally designated grazing lands, the grievances did not end especially as crop destruction remained recurrent.

Following this ease of tension, *dengkeghem* Bahmbi II of Aghem led a delegation of the *bahtums* of Aghem to Yaounde on January 3, 1981. This was in view of presenting the unfortunate situation to the president of the United Republic of Cameroon, Ahmadou Ahidjo. The *dengkeghem* and his delegation were received by the Head of State and they presented a five-point memorandum (Divisional Service of Lands, Wum Menchum Division, 1981/82). In this memorandum they demanded that;

1. The division as a whole had vast grazing land much of which was unoccupied. These areas could be disenclaved so that graziers could effectively occupy them and stop bringing cattle near farms.
2. The government should be encouraged in its effort to decongest Wum which was originally a native area. This would discourage graziers from establishing their ranches within the confines of the town as it was being witnessed.
3. Hopeless and ambitious politicians be discouraged from misleading the population into believing that Aghem land was individual and not communal property.

4. The authorities should prevail to take prompt action and necessary measures to ensure that compensation paid for farmer's crops should effectively be handed over to the farmers concerned.
5. Officers in Wum charged with the farmer-grazier problems should be ordered to act more responsibly and desist from creating the impression that they are in camp with the graziers against the farmers. They should be made to work in close collaboration with traditional rulers as it is the case in other parts of the province (Kebei 2006).

To this effect, a CNU delegation visited Wum to carry out an enquiry into the farmer-grazier Conflict in Aghem. After their findings, the delegation recommended that: the recommendations of the Nseke Commission should be implemented, victims of the January riots be compensated and that agreed grazing areas be disenclaved.

To attain their objectives, the delegation resolved that fifty million (50 000 000) FCFA, a tipper, a bulldozer and a four-wheel TOYOTA pick-up with tons of barbed wire be allocated (Kebei 2006). The ability of women to mount pressure and a male dominated hierarchy through different media was able to attract the national leader's attraction and reaction geared towards giving a lasting conflict. However, like was the case with the recommendations of the Guillaume Nseke Commission, the recommendations of the CNU delegation ended on paper as they were not implemented probably as a result of the sudden resignation of H.E. Ahmadou Ahidjo, in November 1982.

Throughout the planting season of the year 1984 in effect, Aghem women organised peaceful marches to the different palaces during which they pleaded with the chiefs to come to a common understanding for a definite resolution of the farmer-grazier conflict. One of such visits was planned for the SDO for Menchum and Ardo Umaru Kanuru for the period preceding the first harvest. This was because the Aghem women desired to carry along some fresh foodstuffs to them (Agather Nchuo Mbong, 2015). It was so made to draw the sympathy of the two authorities who were believed to be behind the non-application of the recommendations of the Nseke Commission.

Prior to this visit, the Governor of the North West Province, Mutanga Ngomba Alexander on August 30, 1984; in a correspondence to the SDO for Menchum demanded the implementation of the recommendations of Governor Guillaume Nseke (DAW, 1996). Informed of this through the *dengkeghem*, Aghem women gagged hope and called off their visit to Ardo Umaru Kanuru and the SDO. In fact, this was another unnecessary jubilation as nothing was done in accordance with the demands of Governor Mutanga Ngomba Alexander. Crop destruction continued to be recurrent in Aghem and during the harvest season of 1985, serious damages at Ngouh and Atwe resulted in a protest march to the SDO's office. This time, the women chanted songs in which they demanded that they (women) be given at least the kind of treatment cows received if they (the farmers) were not qualified to be treated as human beings. At the SDO's office, some of the graziers were immediately summoned. The following day, an inspection team from the SDO's office visited the affected areas and the graziers were made to pay some randomly established compensation to some of the farmers. Others were not compensated on grounds that they cultivated on grazing areas.

Again in 1986, particularly during the wet season when indigenes were doing planting, farms were invaded by cattle. The women marched to the SDO's residence. The SDO, Fai Yengo Francis, convinced them with promise of compensation. When the compensation was not forthcoming, the women decided to take responsibility by forcing the Fulani to pay compensation as promised. Because the Fulani were resisting payment of compensation, the women took some of the cattle hostage (Alhadji Macki Idirisu, 2015). *Dengkeghem* Bahmbi II and Ardo Umaru Kanuru intervened to reconcile the farmers and the graziers. They asked the graziers to pay compensation. From then the two leaders continued to meet regularly and exchanged visits which were aimed at managing the farmer-grazier dispute. The four years that followed witnessed some calm until the death of Ardo Umaru Kanuru in 1990, which ended the entente that had prevailed between the two leaders.

Added to the death of Ardo Umaru Kanuru was the rebirth of multi-party politics in 1990 that further complicated the farmer-grazier situation in Aghem. This democratic wind of change followed by the doctrine of freedom of expression opened a new page in the history of agro-pastoral conflicts in Menchum as a whole and the Aghem Federation in particular. Once again, conflict management and/or resolution were done along party lines. Those who sided with the winning party were treated with some favour by the politicians of the party who at this time used their powers to attract militants to their political camp. Most of the Aghem crop cultivators militated with the opposition and were branded by the politicians of the ruling party as enemies of the government. The *ba'ahum* got entangled in this confusion and gradually became divided along party lines. The administrators regarded the graziers especially the Fulani as a cohesive group that were loyal to the authorities; thus, consciously setting the graziers as a camp against the farmers instead of encouraging cooperation among them (Nchia, 2006). In this way, the traditional methods of conflict resolution initiated by Ardo Umaru Kanuru and *dengkeghem* Bahmbi II were waved aside in favour of political methods characterised by interest and power tussling. Hence, farmer-grazier conflicts were considered as political conflicts and handled as such with the politicians using the situation as a "fattening ground" as they refused to look for lasting solutions. This attitude embittered women who were later consoled by civil societies and the opposition parties that were able to empower them with new tact needed to resolve or at least fight the conflict.

The consequence was that most communal farming areas (*ebegha*) were occupied by cattle alleged to have been authorised by *ba'ahum* or administrative officials (Chrisantus Chu Kum, 2015). Unscrupulous politicians demanded and collected money from graziers with which they financed their political activities. To this effect, graziers who supported the party in power were seriously protected by local senior politicians. On the basis of this protection, one Fulani grazier is alleged to have said; "*I de for big party, I fia no man, i toucham cawo for me I go killi you i pay money for DO*" (Kebei 2006). (I belong to the ruling party, I fear no man, if any one touches my cow, I will kill him and pay money to the DO). This situation increased the frustration of Aghem women and they were bound to abandon their farm lands for fear of victimisation. In neighbouring communities such as Kuk, Bafmeng and Bu the women organisation, *kelu* known in Kom as the *anlu* society emerged with the hope of forcefully sending the Fulani graziers out of their respective villages.

By the year 2000, women nursed hopes that the SDF party could guarantee equality among citizens, empower the masses and ensure balance development. Unfortunately, this was not the case because

farmers by their own interpretation of the SDF slogan “power to the people” violated grazing boundaries. They farmed in areas reserved for graziers and at times even within grazing rugas (Joseph Che Kangkolo, 2015). The result of such action was rampant crop damages. Situations of this nature naturally made it difficult for the administrative officials to compel the graziers to pay compensation for damages. Under these circumstances, women in April, 2000 invaded mainly grazier settlements in Waindugho and Kesu. The nomads armed with swords, clubs and knives attempted a self-defence which resulted in open confrontations between farmers and graziers. The result was loss of lives. In fact, five Fulani namely; Hassan Jawara Goma, Goma Fadima Hawaa, Shedei Ali Hassan and Mahmoud Moussa were murdered by the protesting farmers (Nchia, 2006). Notified of the ongoing situation, the forces of law and order came to the site and Meh Ndum and Jacob Enah Zongsih were arrested and jailed (Elizabeth Ewi, 2015). Male insistent involvement in women led action was prove of failure of male efforts and hope that the women of Aghem could ensure the most needed peace. In 2003, crop destruction resulted in outbreak of another traumatising farmer-grazier skirmish in Aghem. This time women who were now benefiting from civil society and politically inspired leadership demanded the immediate evacuation of cattle from within Aghem borders. An attempt by the *ba'ahtum* to express neutrality resulted in them being besieged at the court yard of the *dengkeghem* (BBC, 2011). At the palace, the women vowed not to leave until the graziers had moved their cattle. This act received the support of some youths who compounded cattle in an attempt to force them out of the federation. As tension continued to mount, the Governor of the then North West Province, Koumpa Issa reached Wum to resolve the situation.

During this visit, the women were reassured that the situation will be given adequate consideration and a commission of enquiry was set up to investigate into the farmer-grazier situation and propose possible solutions based on its findings. Before this commission could round up with its investigation, the farmers once again, angered by crop destruction, attacked the Fulani. Though no human injuries were recorded, there was severe maiming of cattle. The authorities of the municipality failed to give any solution to the plight of the graziers leaving the two economic powers (farmers and graziers) at daggers drawn. In reaction, graziers in a solemn visit to the WRC decided not to attend the Wum Cattle Market until a definite solution was given to their problem. By this decision, they began taking their cattle from Aghem to cattle markets in the Zhoa Council Area in Fungom subdivision (Idirisu, 2015). Though this did not imply a definite resolution of the conflict, women efforts were able to bring such pressure that graziers could use to impose on the administrative authorities on the necessity of durable peace. This emanates from the fact that refusal to attend the Wum Central Cattle market graziers meant loss of resources on the part of the Wum Central municipal council.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the efforts of women in conflict prevention and resolution within the context of the Aghem Federation of Chiefdoms wherein women played second fiddle in traditional administration and especially in land management. Exploiting women involvement in the prevention and resolution of land conflicts, a natural resource which though most exploited by women in the case of Aghem is a male owned commodity, the paper has demonstrated that in spite of male domination of the women on land matters, women are were able to carve out strategies to confront situations that

plagued their wellbeing irrespective of male seeming inability and/or willingness to redress situations. It posits that through strike action, petitioning, denial of sex to their male folk and boycotting the market, women of Aghem were able to attract attention from different level of stake holders to their plight. Though these different levels of pressure brought to bear on society by women did not effectively resolve women's problems, they were able to create an alert which helped to ease tensions temporally. In this regard, women leadership in conflict prevention and resolution stands out as not necessarily individualistic but collaborative considering that more often than not the actions and achievements of women were impromptu.

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