

An Assessment of the Evolution of Land Tenure System in Cameroon and its Effects on Women's Land Rights and Food Security

Lotsmart Fonjong^a, Irene Sama-Lang^b and Fombe Lawrence Fon^c

a) Faculty of Social and Management Sciences,

Department of Women and Gender Studies, University of Buea

110 FSMS Building, University of Buea. PO Box 63, Buea, Cameroon

E-mail: lotsmart@yahoo.com

b) Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Department of Law, University of Buea

c) Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Department of Geography,
University of Buea

Abstract

Cameroon land tenure policy has since pre-colonial times diverged with each passing administration. This change in land policies has effects on women's rights to land and the ability of the country to feed itself and its neighbors. Women constitute the vast majority of small farmers who are mostly involved in the food production sector. They work on small parcels of land that are either leased to them or have been acquired through family bonds or purchase. Today, with increasing and competing demand for land from urbanization, urban services and infrastructural development, the contribution of rural women to food security hangs in the balance. The situation is further complicated by the current change in land ownership that de-emphasised communal land ownership in favor of private ownership. In the present context, food production is threatened, as land and women's labor respectively, opt for other opportunities that offer higher rents and wages.

This article explores the evolution of land tenure system in the context of women's rights to land and their role in ensuring food security in Cameroon. It examines the emerging phenomenon of private land titles and farmer/grazier conflicts, which affect women's farming activities and output in the face of land scarcity. We advocate for land policies and reforms that mainstream gender in an effort to affirm women's rights and sustain women's productive activities and food security in Cameroon.

Keywords

changing land tenure policy, women's land rights, food security, farmer-grazer conflicts

Introduction

There is an outstanding mutation in the land tenure system in Cameroon and this situation has had serious implications on women's right to land, food security and sustainable development. This is particularly the case in the rural areas where land is the basis of livelihood for over 80% of the rural population. As a result, how it is owned, managed and exploited becomes an important development question in these communities. Rural communities are made up of men and women with different gender needs and different access and rights to resources. It pre-supposes that agrarian reforms should be designed and implemented in such a way that they are able to address the specific needs of each group.

Unfortunately, the agrarian reforms implemented from the 1950s through the 1970s, just like those of the colonial era in Africa, were gender blind. These reforms were based on the assumption that assets allocated to the typical male-headed households will be equitably distributed and beneficial to all household members (Razavi 2005). Even recent reforms on land titling that subscribe to the position that private property rights are essential for a dynamic agricultural sector has not improved the situation of women. Moreover, government and institutional weaknesses (Razavi 2003: 1) have failed to address the gender inequality problem, vis-à-vis ownership and use, as women tend to be unfamiliar with the legal processes of acquiring land titles or encounter difficulties in trying to do so. Despite all these constraining factors, global research points to the key role of women as food producers, food providers, and contributors to household nutrition security in Sub-Saharan Africa (Quisumbing et al. 1995: V).

The issue of women's rights to land is not an end in itself, but hinges on community and national survival. Land is important for agriculture and particularly for food production. It is therefore a vital resource in Cameroon whose economy is predominantly agricultural; accounting for three-fourths of employment and 50% of GDP (CIA Fact Book 2004). Increasing agricultural innovations or subsidizing the agricultural sector is not enough in the absence of a veritable land-distribution policy that takes into concern the real actors involved in food production (Fonjong 2004). Food security is thus also a question of space, as well as, of actors.

Context of the Study

Cameroon is one of the West African countries whose population of over 16 million inhabitants is characterized by great linguistic and ethnic diversity.

It gained independence from the joint Anglo-French colonial rule in 1961 and 1960 respectively. Like many African nations, Cameroon evolved rather quickly after independence into a one-party state until 1991 when multiparty democracy was instituted (Fonjong and Markham 2008). Its social structure is marked by strong loyalties to ethnic heritage and local villages (Gwan 1982). Despite numerous formal legal provisions to the contrary, Cameroon remains a male-dominated society in which men are privileged by custom, and, occasionally, even by law in terms of land ownership, inheritance of land and property, access to credit, the right to grow cash crops, the right to determine who can use family lands, family planning, the right to enter areas where women are excluded by taboo, and the right to take multiple wives (Guya 1984; Fonjong 2001; Endeley and Sikod 2007; Fonjong and Markham 2008). The economy is predominantly agricultural, with a heavy emphasis on production of food carried out by women for family consumption or for sale in local or regional markets. Agriculture accounts for about three-quarters of employment and almost half of GDP (CIA Fact Book 2008).

The data used in this study have been extracted from data collected by the authors for a wider study on land tenure practices and women's land rights sponsored by International Development Research Centre based in Canada under its Women's Rights and Citizenship program. The data were collected and assembled between October 2008 and April 2009. The primary data have been collected through interviews conducted by the authors among traditional rulers, administrators, politicians and elites mostly in the Anglophone part of the country. This primary data has been complemented by secondary information received from important legal text, reports and relevant academic literature.

Women's Land Rights During the Pre-colonial Era

Before colonization, there were basic tenets embodied in the way of life of indigenous communities in Cameroon that used to regulate the ownership and use of land. These tenets were usually connected to the manner in which land was first acquired by the community. Land to the natives was not regarded in terms of economic value. Just like water, air, and fire it was not seen as an object capable of individual ownership (Henry 1983; Rayner 1898; White-man's Report 1921). It was, and still is, a source of socio-cultural well-being of a people, a deity and a spiritual link between a people and their god. Land provided for the basic needs of sustenance and was not regarded in terms of the economic value it commands. As an ancestral gift, there was a kind of trust created by the present members of these customary communities to protect and pass on the land to the next generation (West African Land Commission

1912: 183). That is why land could not be alienated through sales for fear of depleting the family or village patrimony.

This land which was acquired through conquest or first settlement belonged to a community as a village or a family just like a corporate entity. The traditional authority or family head personified these entities in the sense that he controlled the land for and on behalf of the village or family and not in his private name. Any member in need of this land for farming or cultivation went to him for allocation in perpetuity of an aliquot, which became his for generations to come. The individual, however, had no rights to alienate this land without the consent of the traditional or family council (village or family elders), chief or family head as the case may be (Rayner 1898; Mabogunje 1981). According to the *Fon* of Kom of North West Cameroon, allocation of land as described was mainly to men and not to women, who could only come onto the land through their male matrikins or patrikins. Such allocations could not be made to women because they did not have the customary legal capacity to perform customary symbolic ownership rights, which in the main was the pouring of libation. It therefore follows that pre-colonial Cameroonian woman did not have as much rights to land like their male counterparts. This did not pose a development problem to them because land was in abundance and communally owned.

Colonial Era

Cameroon had two main colonial experiences—the German colonial rule from 1884 to 1914 and the joint Anglo-French administration from 1918 until independence. It is during this era that individual ownership introduced by the European colonizers (see for example, Viscount Haldane in *Amodu Tijani v Secretary of Southern Nigeria*) of Cameroon awakened the natives to the commercial value of land.

The Period of German Rule (1884-1914)

The German rule in *Kamerun* was ushered in when Nachtigal ratified the Treaty of Annexation signed by King Akwa on behalf of Kings and chiefs of Douala, Cameroon and Adolf Woerman on behalf of German firms. The traditional chiefs by this Treaty agreed to abandon all theirs relating to sovereignty, legislation and administration of the territory to the Germans. In return, the Germans were to respect the customary laws of the natives.

The Germans pursued a policy of land appropriation from the natives with little or no considerations (Ardener 1968) for plantation agriculture.

Subsequently, the German Imperial Government enacted the German Kronland Act of July 15, 1896. It provided that all lands which were not effectively occupied by the natives were *herrenloss* land (*terra nullius*) and so assimilated as part of German overseas dominions and as such the property of the German Imperial Government. They failed to take into account the fact that even though the natives were not effectively using the land, at no time was such lands not claimed by them (*Mabo v. Queensland*). This is true because such land could be land on fallow, hunting ground or allocated for community reserves. Since at that time the lands which the natives could effectively occupy were very insignificant as compared to that which was unoccupied, all native land consequently went into the hands of the German imperialists except those 'effectively occupied' by the chiefs and the customary communities or those which the Germans had been given freehold interests.

German land policy was based solely on their economic interest rather than the general interest of their host communities. For example, at the foot of Mount Cameroon where the land is very fertile and suitable for plantation agriculture, the natives were carted into *reservaats* (reserves) around Protestant and Catholic missions (Clarence-Smith 1989; Fissiy 1992: 28; Njoh 2000: 246). Von Puttkamer, the then governor of the colonial state, decided that the natives be granted no more than 1.5 hectares for residential purpose (Njoh 1998: 409). This land policy was to restrict the amount of available farm land to the natives in a bid to convert them to wage labor. This policy fostered the land appropriation and shifted the power base over land from the local chiefs to the German colonizers.

Land concessions were granted to the South Cameroon Company and North West German Company, so that by 1896, these two companies controlled one-fifth of land in Kamerun. Woerman and Jantsen and Thormahlen (all German companies) owned all lands in the Bakweri and coastal Mboko (Mbuagbaw 68). Most of these lands were taken by force, tricks or insignificant payments (5 marks per hectare) from the natives. In the same vein, the Germans further went against the annexation treaty by taking over land control from the *fons* and traditional chiefs. This act enabled the Germans to redistribute or re-allocate land for agriculture and to convert the indigenes into wage laborers after depriving them of access to their ancestral land. The Germans went further to introduce land register (*Grundbuch*) for land registration against a fee, thereby guaranteeing the title of German companies and individuals who had bought appropriated land at the expense of the natives.

Summarily, the German colonial rule was marked by a complete dismantling of the native collective system of land control and asserting their supremacy

over the country's lands. With German established supremacy over land, fertile land hitherto used for food production would be converted into plantation land for the cultivation of cash crop destined for colonial markets. As a result, the number of German plantation farmers in Cameroon rapidly increased from 7 in 1891, to 182 in 1913 (Rudin 1938) and the total land owned and occupied by the Germans and German companies uniquely for plantation rose to 264,000 acres in the coastal region of the South West alone (Njoh 2002). A system like this, which was out to cater for German interest, could in no way put women's interest at the fore front. Women seem to have been better off in the traditional set-up than when the colonialists arrived since the least pressure on access or ownership rights gravely affected their rights as users.

The Anglo-French Colonial Era (1914-1961)

With the defeat of the Germans in the First World War and the end of the war, the British and the French formally took over Cameroon after the Anglo-French Declaration of July 10, 1919 as Mandate territory of the League of Nations and subsequently as a trust Territory of the United Nations in the ratio 1:4 respectively. The British ruled one-fourth of the territory of Cameroon as an integral part of Western Nigeria until independence in 1961, while French Cameroon was ruled as a separate French colony. During the period up until 1947, the British and the French took over the German plantations (Acworth et al. 2001). And just like the Germans, the French declared all unoccupied lands as '*terres vacantes et sans maître*' or 'vacant land without landlord', which gave them rights to exploit the land and landed resources without resorting to native approval.

The principal land tenure law (Ordinance No. 1 927) provided that all lands except the estates registered and recognized by the British were native lands put under the control and disposition of the Prime Minister who was to hold and administer the land for the natives. In other words, no use of native land was valid without the Prime Minister's consent. By this Ordinance therefore, the indigene's rights of ownership over ancestral land were converted into customary rights of occupancy as per Article 2. It meant that they were simply accorded mere use and occupation while non-natives who had acquired land in disrespect of the 1927 Ordinance and Mandate Agreement were given certificates of occupancy over the lands they acquired illegally. Even though this document was a lease of 99 years during which the holder paid rents to the government, it was regarded by economic operators who were mostly colonialists as documents of title.

The German and Anglo-French colonial land policies disposed the natives of their rights to ancestral land. It went against both the annexation treaty and the trusteeship agreement by marginalizing these natives in land matters, particularly women who needed land for food crop cultivation. The post-colonial period did not seem to bring along with it much hope as it was simply a continuation of colonial land policy by the new Cameroonian administration. Both the colonial and post-colonial administration helped to destroy the notion of communal land rights and made land a commercial asset. The new notion of viewing land as an individual or commercial property in some places like Wum had to wait until 1967; with the coming of Wum Area Development Authority that land became commercialized. Land registration introduced by the Germans after the 1896 Act with the registration of land titles in the *Grundbuch* was fostered by the British who granted to the natives only rights of occupancy (usufruct rights) while the non-natives were given certificates of occupancy, which gave them some security of tenure over the land they possessed.

The Post-Colonial Era

At independence, the two Cameroons inherited two separate legal and administrative cultures from the French and British. As federated states of the unified Cameroon, each territory was allowed some autonomy in land administration until 1974 when there was an attempt to harmonize the many land laws through the 1974 Land Ordinances. These ordinances were also efforts to curb haphazard dealings that underpinned land transaction, promote maximal use of land through a more rational system of allocation, and wipe away the customary notion of inalienability of land in order to assure proper land administration, which would lead to growth. The intention was also to ensure by way of legal enactment a system of land registration which provided security of tenure to customary land owners. This was prompted by the fact that the economic agenda of this agrarian economy was to convert customary farmers into bourgeois planters with secured tenures, one of the principal missions of 'Operation Green Revolution' launched in 1973 by President Ahmadou Ahidjo.

Section 1(2) of Ordinance No. 74-1 of July 6, 1974 provides that the state is the guardian of all lands in Cameroon and it may in this capacity intervene to ensure rational use of land, or in the imperative interest of defense, or economic policies of the nation. To render this provision operational, it nationalized all land irrespective of effective occupation except private lands with valid

registration documents and state lands as per Sections 14 and 15 of Ordinance No. 74-1 of July 6, 1974. Natives who had effectively been on the land before August 5, 1974, but without any registered title, were given 10 and 15 years in urban and rural areas respectively, to obtain land certificates. After this period, their lands would efflux into national land according to Section 4 (1) (new) of Ordinance No. 77-1 of January 10, 1977. The same principle applied to holders of miscellaneous deeds and final court judgment according lands to them. The management of the national land was thus placed under the management of national Land Consultative Boards as per Section 16 of the Ordinance No. 74-1 of July 6, 1974, which is under the control of the local administrative officers of their jurisdiction. The chiefs or traditional rulers who were the customary custodians of such lands were reduced to just members of this board. The situation was rendered more complicated for women by Decree No. 77/245 of July 15, 1977, which categorized these chiefs into 1st, 2nd, and 3rd class chiefs and reduced them to mere adjunct of administration, thereby demystifying the sacred nature of customary royalty. In a bid to have better categorization, these chiefs worked with the administration to cart away indigenous lands, which reduced the land available to women, whose mainstay was agriculture (Fissiy 1992).

What is clear is the fact that the provision of the 1974 Land Ordinance made it extremely difficult for women to exert any rights to land in Cameroon since most of the customary land which comprise over 80% of all land in Cameroon was in the hands of men. Given that women were on the land at the whim and caprices of the patrikins or matrikins, they could not register the lands which they did not own even though they might have been on the land before April 5, 1974. In fact, with the rise in the economic value of land and changing conception of ownership of land within the customary set up, ownership of land by women is only likely where they purchase or inherit the land, otherwise their rights over land is still precarious. Cameroon had long signed and ratified the Convention for the Elimination of Discriminations against Women (CEDAW) and the protection of human rights is enshrined in its constitution. All these and the existence of land tenure laws, which though guarantee rights to own and dispose of real property irrespective of sex notwithstanding, the co-existence of gender neutral laws alongside customary laws have continued to violate women's rights to and ownership of land.

From all indications, the above gender neutral laws and constitutional provisions that guarantee women's rights to land seem to be mere declarations. They are neither effectively enforced nor do they carry any serious sanctions. Even the creation of the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF) to ensure the furtherance of women's rights, has so far not

produced spectacular results. One of the fundamental missions of MIN-PROFF is to initiate and draft laws that favor the promotion of women's rights in conformity with international conventions and to follow up its implementation (Article 47 of the organizational chart of Ministry of Social and Women's Affairs). Because of the gap between policy and their implementation, and the continuous existence of backward and gender discriminatory cultural practices, issues of land tenure continue to linger on, making it almost impossible for customary women to own land even when they understand that it is a basic right.

The land certificate as per section 1 of Decree No. 76/165 of April 27, 1976 is the only official certification of land ownership. Since women exercise only usufruct rights, they could not take advantage of the laws to register their titles though they had access and occupation of the land long before August 5, 1974; the coming into force of the Ordinance on land tenure, on the registration of titles as per section 9 of Decree No. 76/165 of April 1976. Since they do not have security of tenure, there is a disincentive to conserve and protect the land (Njoh 1998: 414). If their land titles were registered, the number of land disputes, which are perennial problems interfering with women land rights especially in the North West Region of Cameroon, will be reduced (Barrow and Roth 1990).

Rapid urbanization and rural poverty, which has been partly triggered by confiscation and registration of customary land bureaucrats and elites in their names (Kofele-Kale 1987: 156). have pushed some rural women into cities in search of alternatives to agriculture. Unfortunately, with little or no skills these new arrivals cannot fit themselves into any job. Consequently, they resort to do market gardening on any land they find usually at the edge of plantations (especially around CDC plantations in the South West region) or on any non-built land in urban areas to sustain their family and for cash. Recent research (Cross and Hornby 2002; Ikdahl 2005: 68) shows that such 'feminization' of land demand, which is a growing phenomenon, needs to be regulated.

A number of cultural practices that discriminates against women is the practice of bride wealth. No matter the solemnization of marriage by civil or religious authorities in some customary Cameroonian societies, a marriage is only considered valid in the eye of indigenous law upon the completion of the bride wealth. Such payments, which are usually in the form of gifts services or cash, have far-reaching impact on women's ownership rights. These payments are sometimes interpreted as a 'purchase' of the wife by the husband and, as such, she becomes his chattel. Being a chattel herself, she cannot beget land which is a chattel—*Achu v Achu*. A woman is thus seen, at best, as an occupier of land, a factor of production for the husband's farm, which she has

to continue to work in order to ensure access to her husband's land, but never as an equal who can own land in her own rights (see for example Ekema J in *Kumbongsi v Kumbongsi*).

Customary law does not consider the contribution of the wife to the acquisition of the property as the wife's right to property as seen in the case of *Teneng Lucas v. Nchang Irene*. Reinforcing this argument, the *Fon* of Ndu in the North West Region asserts that for women to have access to their husbands' land is a privilege and not a right. This situation has pushed some financially-viable women to purchase land secretly without the knowledge of their husbands. But, unfortunately, this land is not registered in their name but in the name of a male relative or that of their son. Although some educated women acquire land in their names, a lot still continue to adhere to tradition. A situation that may also be explained is the fact that women's ownership rights are also hinged unto the type of marriage that they contract. In certain circumstances even where the marriage is monogamous in the strict sense of the word, these women who may not have ownership problems during the lifetime of their husbands may eventually run into problems when the husbands are no longer alive.

There have been many scenarios in which in-laws will want to assert ownership rights over property women and their husbands acquired. Where these in-laws have met with resistance from the widow, the woman suffered from ostracism. This is the case of one Mary who was married to one of the princes in North Western Cameroon and succeeded to challenge and refused the in-laws from inheriting her husband's property. Although she eventually gained possession of the said property, she was ostracized for defying cultural norms and has since moved to the United States with her children. However, the dictum of Ngassa J in *David Tchakokam v. Keou Magdalene* dismissing the plaintiff's claim over his late brother's property and widow is a welcome relief.

Customary laws rarely countenance inheritance of land by women as daughters or wives as was seen in the Case of *Zamcho Florence Lum v. Chibikom Peter Fru & others*, where the Court Of Appeal in Bamenda held that:

It is common ground that the respondent at all times material to these proceedings was, and still is, a married woman. She belongs to a family different from the one in which she was born. She cannot inherit from her father in accordance with the customary law, and *a fortiori* she cannot be her father's next of kin...

This decision was annulled by the Supreme Court on grounds of violation of the preamble of the 1996 constitution and that it was repugnant to natural justice good conscience and equity. This case comes with far reaching repercussions

on women's land tenure rights (Walker 2004: 3) and ought not to be limited to instances of inheritance. In this light, it should be popularized to reach rural women because it will only improve on women's land tenure rights depending on how well the information is disseminated. But research in South Africa shows that, even where such good decisions are taken they are often unknown to the persons most affected to the extent that the discriminatory customary practices linger on (Walker 2004: 59).

Women's Land Rights and Food Security in Cameroon

Globalization has to an extent undermined the viability of small-holder agriculture evidenced by falls in production and increasing food insecurity, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (Fortin 2005). The risk of poverty, food insecurity, and the physical well-being of the woman and her children depend on whether she has direct control over land and productive resources, not just access mediated through male family members. The understanding of food security and well-being outcomes is particularly crucial as in most rural societies of Asia and Africa, with rising populations and growing pressure on land. Until the 1980s, the issue of food security was exclusively linked with food production. Starvation can result from a fall in endowments (such as land alienation) amongst other factors (Rao 2006).

Three fundamental ingredients of food security are adequate food production, economic access to available food, and nutritional security. Economic access and nutritional security very much depend on food production. In Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in SE Asia and Latin America, women are the central actors involved, providing 90%, 50% and 25% of the work of food processing respectively (Quisumbing et al. 1995: 1-2). Even where women and men work on separate plots, women's farms are used for food production (FAO 1985). This huge input of women to food production notwithstanding, they are constrained by a number of factors among which is the question of their right to land. Although women's rights to land may be regulated differently in different parts of the world, the general concord from research and from the literature is that the various instruments (be they cultural, religious or civil) militate against women's rights to land.

Women in Sub-Saharan Africa are generally limited to usufruct or users' rights to land; a situation that makes their holding to land insecure and renders them unwilling to invest resources to ensure a sustainable exploitation of the land. Quisumbing, et al. (1995) argue rightfully that because women cannot generally own land in their own right in Sub-Saharan Africa, they tend to have small farm plots or be allocated poor-quality land which easily deterioro-

rates with intensified cultivation. This partly explains why many studies have shown that women's farm plots have lower yields than those controlled by men (Undry 1994). As key players in food production therefore, strengthening women's land rights is vital in all efforts towards food security. Rugadya (2000) holds that in Uganda, for example, household output could be increased by 10 to 20% by reallocating currently-used agricultural inputs, of which land is core, more evenly between men and women (p. 2). In Burkina Faso, an analysis of household panel data suggests that farm output could be increased 6-20% through a more equitable allocation of productive resources between male and female farmers (Rao 2006, quoting from World Bank 2001: 118-119).

Women in Sub-Saharan Africa are responsible for 80% of food production and 60% cash crop production thereby necessitating a further development of their potentials in the land sector. They do not only need land, but power over the land they work on. Chen (1996) found that in the case of China, women's decision-making power in agriculture increased with a greater role in farm management caused by the absence of men, who had moved to the non-farm sector (in Rao 2006: 184). However, focusing all resources on women, and legitimizing this on grounds of food security, can end up both alienating men from contributing anything to the household as well as intensifying work burdens for women (Fonjong 2002). Women may gain autonomy, but rarely does this increase their food security (Pottier 1994; Rao 2002). What it means is that granting land rights to women, especially in a context of the declining importance of agriculture to household incomes, may lead to greater gender equity in inheritance patterns, but may not necessarily achieve household food security or gender equality (Chowdhry 1993, in Rao 2006: 190). With increasing land scarcity, combined with diversified livelihood systems, as well as the broader understanding of food security, land alone cannot give women work and income, or improve their status. Public policy should opt for other opportunities that can strengthen a range of entitlements, as well as conscious attempts to shift gendered valuations of work and worth.

Farmer-Grazer Conflicts

Where there are competing uses for a resource like land that can be put into different productive uses, conflict is imminent. Farmer-grazer conflicts in rural areas of West Africa leads to the breakdown in law and order as well as disruption in economic activities (Aredo 2005; Davidheiser et al. 2008). Davidheiser et al. (2008) note that such conflicts have evolved historically from the pre-colonial, colonial to the post-colonial periods. They point to the fact that changes in the ownership of land from communal to private systems, the

southward migration of Fulbes due to drier weather around the desert as in Mali and Niger, and the nationalization of land, have created frictions between farmers and grazers.

The seasonal movements of pastoralists and their flocks destroy farmlands and lead to serious clashes, especially in areas with high cattle and human populations, ecological changes and climate (Gefu 2002; Aredo 2005; Davidheiser et al. 2008). This is exactly the saga we find in most of northwestern Cameroon, particularly around Mechum and Donga Mantung administrative areas. Aredo (2005) further indicates that in appropriating pastoralist land for the promotion of commercial farms, West African governments further created fertile grounds for tension between grazers, most of whom are men, and farmers who are mostly women. Most often, the sedentarisation of herders by government creates friction with settled stationary groups as in Cameroon and Cote D'Ivoire and is because of the absence of fair compensation framework when crops were damaged by herds (Davidheiser et al. 2008).

Faced with unpredictable and scattered rains as in Ethiopia (Aredo 2005: 3), and with no land rights for women food farmers, grazers are obliged not only to move with their livestock, but to also try to displace these women. To check the scourge by cattle, farmers block cattle routes/corridors/water points leading to conflicts. Farmers on the other hand encroach onto cattle routes and sometimes on watering points thereby exposing their crops to cattle destruction. The greatest conflicts are thus recorded in the dry season (November to March) due to scarcity of fodder and rains. As noted by Gefu et al. (2002), just as in most of north and northwestern Cameroon, there needs to be some collaboration between farmers and grazers in Nigeria where farm residues are needed by the latter for their flocks in the dry season, thus encouraging dry-season grazing in the farms whose crops have been harvested.

From the forgone, there is mutual interest for farmers and herdsmen to co-exist amicably in a given zone. But the issue may be that of power relations between herdsmen and the farmer. The latter have no powers to influence administrative decisions to their favor as do herdsmen with financial power. The resolution of conflicts between the two groups no matter the scale and magnitude of destruction sometimes becomes difficult and drags on for long periods of time because of the chauvinistic attitude and economic power of the herdsmen. Manyong (2005) notes that resolution of conflicts moves from compensation in an amicable manner to court action and involves mediators at different administrative and community levels. Locally, the village head and head of the herdsmen (Ardos) handle more serious cases; above this level is the police or courts. At this level, women become disadvantaged because they neither have the time nor the financial power of the herdsmen to follow up with long legal procedures.

Administrative conflict resolution, which in principle is less costly and ought to provide equal justice to women food producers and herdsmen, is unfortunately marred by bribery and corruption of the justice process. Bassett (1988) and Kum (1983) in Davidheiser et al. cite “failure of the Farmer/Grazier Commission for mediating in such disputes in Cameroon. Field experiences confirms Manyong’s (2005) accounts of how in Wum in Cameroon, the local administrators mediate in favor of the herdsmen because of bribery and corruption. The intervention of the local government is noticed only when the conflict threatens law and order (Gefu et al. 2002: 10) and intervene late or delay cases because of corruption (Kum 1983; Harshbarger 1995).

Most authors fail to explain the sustainable measures undertaken by the belligerents. This entails how the pastoralists and farmers have reacted with respect to their farming and cattle rearing. There is limited information on the reduction of herds by herdsmen and fencing by herdsmen or farmers. Our field experiences suggest that a situation arises where there is a clear-cut distinction between land for pastoral grazing and food crop. It can be noted that western-style land tenure policies have increased environmental degradation and contributed to farmer-Fulbe goal incompatibility. There is a need to search for a sustainable relationship between both groups. The top-down retributive and adjudicative approaches in managing conflict have been ineffective in Cameroon (Davidheiser et al. 2008: 99). The sustained nature of farmer-grazer conflicts undermines the women’s ability to ensure household food security as she is the pivot of sustainable livelihood in most homes of Third World rural communities.

Conclusion

The sustained nature of farmer-grazer conflicts undermines women’s ability to ensure household food security as she is the pivot of sustainable livelihood in most homes of Third World rural communities. The land tenure regime in Cameroon and most of the Central African sub-region has been very dynamic given the historical path of states in the sub-region. This condition has impacted agricultural productivity and lifestyle of the population. The understanding of food security and well-being outcomes is particularly crucial with rising populations and growing pressure on land. In the context of ‘feminization of food production’, the absence of property rights by women has also led to a range of practical difficulties in production. There have also been conflicts between farmers, who in the majority are women, and grazers in zones where cattle rearing prevails, rendering the issue of food security more intricate.

It has been revealed that where land reform has been accompanied by individually-registered title, women have often lost their customary claims to land while men's claims have been strengthened. Granting land rights to women, especially in a context of the declining importance of agriculture to household incomes, may lead to greater gender equity in inheritance patterns, yet cannot be a magic bullet either for achieving household food security or indeed for gender equality, for land alone cannot give women enough work and income, or improve their status.

Constitutional and legal reforms to protect the rights of the woman notwithstanding, wide-scale illiteracy and culture are factors to be taken into consideration. To overcome this, public policy should search for other opportunities that can strengthen a range of entitlements, as well as conscious attempts to shift gendered valuations of work and worth. There should be a genuine policy of gender mainstreaming in land reforms, progressive sensitization and education of women on their rights as regards land ownership, titling, and use for there to be a veritable progress that can ensure more secured tenure matched by greater agricultural productivity and food security.

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