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Agropastoral Conflicts in the North West Province of Cameroon

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Abstract

Conflicts between sedentary farmers and transhumant pastoralists are common in sub-Saharan Africa. In recent years these have often been large scale, the most notable involving large migrations from Nigeria into Adamouwa Province in Cameroon in January 2002. Such conflicts regularly involve the use of guns and machetes as weapons, killing of cattle, and the intentional destruction of farmers' property (fields, plantations, granaries). In May 2005, a serious agropastoral conflict occurred in Wum, North West Province of Cameroon. The climax vegetation of Wum is forest - savannah transition; however most of the forest has been already converted to agriculture. The economy of Wum depends on crop and livestock production. The Wum population comprises two distinct ethnicities: the autochthonous sedentary Aghem ethnicity, who are the majority, and the Fulbe pastoralists, who herd cattle. The Aghem cultivate predominantly maize, cocoyams, sweet potatoes, cassava, beans, cowpea and groundnuts. In Wum, the Fulbe have diversified their traditional pastoralist lifestyle to include farming. Their main crops include: maize, cocoyams and chili pepper and on average now have more than three times more crop land per household than the Aghem (9.5 ha compared with 2.5 ha), which was obtained in previous negotiations with village chiefs. While the root of the conflict might be that the Fulbe now compete directly with the Aghem in crop production, the trigger for the conflict was the claim by the latter that the Fulbe do not control and prevent their cattle from destroying Aghem crops so the Aghem retaliated and impounded the Fulbe cattle and asked for large ransoms for the cattle to be released. The local council suffered the effects of no slaughter houses and no cattle market since the council derived most of its revenues from the grazers. The council decided to levy a tax on all cattle that had to pass through Wum to the neighbouring villages. The conflict has still not been resolved. The implications of this conflict on food security and land use in Wum are discussed.

Keywords: Agropastoral conflicts, Cameroon, food and cattle production