



Agropastoral Conflicts in the North West Province of Cameroon

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Introduction

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 one involving large migrations from Nigeria into Adamouwa Province in Cameroon in January 2002. Such conflicts regularly involve the use of weapons (guns and machetes), killing of cattle, and the intentional destruction of farmers' properties (fields, plantations, granaries).

Socioeconomic structure

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 converted to agricultural land. The economy of Wum depends on crop and livestock production. The Wum population comprises two distinct ethnicities: the autochthonous sedentary Aghem, 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 they now have more than three times more crop land per household than the Aghem (9.5 ha compared with 2.5 ha), which had been obtained in previous negotiations with village chiefs.

The Conflict

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. Consequently, the Aghem retaliated by forcing the Fulbe to move their cattle to neighboring villages. The Aghem youths impounded the cattle of those Fulbe that resisted, and they asked for large ransoms for the cattle to be released.

The Effects

The Fulbe closed down their slaughter houses and the cattle market, affecting the local council which derived most of its revenues from the graziers. The council decided to levy a tax on all cattle that had to pass through Wum to the neighboring villages.

The conflict has still not been resolved. Its implications in Wum are under discussion but it is likely that a reduction of land use by the Fulbe will affect crop production in the region, and thus food security, both directly (lesser crop production) and indirectly (increased weed pressure in the region due to ceased weed control by the Fulbe and their livestock).

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A Fulbe in his maize farm



An Aghem
maize farm



Aghem youths
impounding Fulbe cattle