

Land Grabbing and Conflict in the North West Region of Cameroon

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*An Endemic Situation,
1958-2017*

By

René Ngek Monteh

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To

All peace advocates in Cameroon in general
and in the North-West Region in particular.

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René Ngek Monteh
April 2022

PREFACE

William Zartman holds unequivocally that conflicts help the community to make valuable and sustainable choices. This assertion is grossly true in situations where there are clashes or overwhelming interests over power and other intangible resources to make informed choices and to determine commitment. However, when there is a focus on land-related cases among homogeneous or heterogeneous societies of the Cameroon Grassfields, the impact of such conflicts greatly negates meaningful efforts towards development and peace. This is the case with land-related conflicts within the local communities of the North-West Region of the Republic of Cameroon. This area is a hub not only of distinctive natural interest but also of high political and social sensitivity where there is a high concentration of a harmony of differences, consciously and unconsciously journeying together amidst the storms and gales of time.

As an assortment of mixes between traditions and ethnic affiliates that have and are still struggling to understand the dynamics of state authority and essence, this niche has been rife with manifold conflicts, some with clearly identified causations and others borne out of a litany of both mismanaged situations and misconceptions of policies that have come along with change. Change in all its forms may imply a compendium of issues which can hardly be exhaustively comprehended even under the most refined social scholarship, but change in the Cameroon North-West Region, roughly corresponding to the Bamenda Grassland or Grassfield, can and should be seen as any form of social, economic, and political developments that have consciously or otherwise brought disruptions, reform, and contradictory appeals to known facts, phenomena, structures, and institutions. One key area that has exerted pressure on the communities through engineering conflicts of a kind apart from this study niche is land grabbing. The value attached to land by North-West folks moves in consonance with that of other African folks, which sums up to say that land constitutes far more than just physical ownership or direct economic value. To these people, land ownership or administration represents power and an eternal connection with cosmic spirits best understood within the context of African religion or mythology. Aside from the need to preserve land for progeny and other unspecified future projects, North-West residents simply

revere land holdings and would rather preserve the cultural prestige that came and went with them than sell them out.

The statist-modern policies/ordinances on land during the historical growth of this region ignited a legion of problems for the local folks, not only because state cooperation and other multi-nationals deprived locals of the widely held concept that land is a gift of nature to all its owners, but more on account that these policies clearly removed chieftains from complete claims of absolute land ownership and placed these rights within the hands of the state and its agencies. The ignorance of such reforms is combined with an unwillingness to respect the new land laws, along with the complications of understanding and applying the native land laws in honour of tradition and state laws. By no small measure, this established the first layer of land-related conflicts in the North-West Region. While state agents like administrative officers and other personalities within the hierarchy of the Cameroon governing norms grappled with these conflicts within the margins of sustainable resolutions, a new phenomenon over land incidentally emerged to compound the situation. This new situation is land grapping by individuals, state and non-state institutions, and multinational cooperation. The emergence of such new pressures on a precious or treasured factor of production like land has enriched the debate of scholarship with all the quintessential elements sought.

Prof. Monteh's treatise is one such worthy contribution to the understanding of not only land-related conflict but the whole morphology of conflicts in Cameroon in particular and Africa at large. Like all studies in the realm of social sciences, this document is far from being exhaustive and the author does not make that claim anywhere. It thus heals the wound of exposing the true colours of conflicts within the ecological niche known as the Bamenda Grassfields by a broader scholarship. The study is pieced together in more than 400 pages of refined stuff consisting mainly of a thorough description of general and specific causations of conflicts, case by case analyses of conflicts of discourses on the state agents' and agencies' tact and lapses in handling the conflicts of indigenous contributions to the conflicts and of the challenges and problems faced by intervening parties in the resolution of conflicts within this niche. The ideas and discourses sustained by this conflict companion are telling and charming. The ideas are graphically illustrated, referenced, and demonstrated, which strengthens the understanding of the fundamental theme.

Issues relating to conflicts are not only lodged within a single discipline like history, sociology, or political science alone. Conflicts straddle a broad range of scholarship, and so any meaningful attempt to offer scholarship submissions on any aspect of conflicts must make equitable

recourse to cross-disciplinary data and analysis. This study has made effective use of all the conflict-related and sensitive disciplines to offer its submissions, which all have the merit of conveying a broad range of unbiased readership. In a special way, this book offers new insights into the understanding of conflicts and why they have grown endemic within the North-West ecological niche. Its submissions provide a complementary scholarship to those involved with policy definition and application, students of conflict and polemical studies, state and non-state institutions operating here, as well as all the social and even exact scientists both within this niche and beyond. Owing to the fact that understanding conflicts informs the mind both for curative and preemptive actions, I make no hesitation to wholesomely offer that this book is like a scholarship bank where any reader will find his/her curious account adequately balanced. On this score, I offer it as a companion and a must-read to all and sundry.

Prof. Confidence Ngam Chia

Associate Professor, History
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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
Alhaji	Title given to a Muslim male who had undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>Ardo</i>	Head of a Muslim Community
CAMSU	Cameroon Muslim Student Union
CCC	Cattle Control Committee
CNU	Cameroon National Union
CPDM	Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DA	District Administrator
DAB	Divisional Archives Bamenda
DAW	Divisional Archives Wum
DO	Divisional Officer
EMPED	Ecumenical Mission for Peace and Development Foundation
ERC	Elak Rural Council
EYPIC	Ecumenical Youth Peace Initiative
F/G	Farmer / Grazier
FIACAT	Federation of Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture
GTZ	<i>Gesellschaft Technische Zusammenarbeit</i> (German Technical Co-operation)
HELVETAS	Swiss Association for Development and Co-operation
Hon	Honourable
JPC	Justice and Peace Foundation
LA	Local Authority
LMA	Land Management Agency
MBOSCUA	Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association
MEDINO	North West Development Authority
NA	Native Authority
NAA	Native Authority Area
NAB	National Archives Buea
NC	Native Court

NCHRF	National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms
NDECA	Ngoketunjia Development and Cultural Association
NEF	North-East Federation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NOWECA	North West Crafts Association
NOWEBA	North West Bee-Farming Association
NOWEFCO	North West <i>Fons</i> ' Conference
NOWEFU	North West <i>Fons</i> ' Union
NVCR	Non-Violent Conflict Resolution
NWF	North-West Federation
PAB	Provincial Archives Bamenda
SDF	Social Democratic Front
SDO	Senior Divisional Officer
SEF	South East Federation
<i>SeP</i>	<i>Service Œcuménique pour la Paix</i> (Ecumenical Service for Peace)
SIRDEP	Society for Initiative in Rural Development and Environmental Protection
<i>SODELCO</i>	<i>Société Commerciale pour le Développement de l'élevage du Cameroun</i>
UNVDA	Upper Noun Valley Development Authority
WADA	Wum Area Development Authority
WRC	Wum Rural Council

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This study addresses land grabbing and conflict in the North-West Region of Cameroon, also known as the Bamenda Grassfields, from 1958 to 2017. As the world's leading theatre of conflicts, Africa is experiencing an increase in the scope and intensity of conflicts underlined by internecine ethnic rivalries. Many of such conflicts, which involve land and boundary problems, have antecedents in historical legacy. The history and oral tradition of most African societies, therefore, contain elements of conflict, including land conflict situations, which largely result from ethnic plurality. Conflict situations have increased rapidly across Africa during the post-colonial era as a result of competition involving two or more people or groups over limited resources such as water and land. History has demonstrated that the scramble and quest for natural resources have always led to serious clashes in communities. The quest for more land and property during and in the aftermath of the European invasion of Africa undoubtedly caused great conflicts in traditional African societies. Indeed, the manner in which land demarcation was carried out during the pre-colonial period was given little or no consideration during the effective occupation of Africa by the European powers. Then, conflicts of great magnitude took place when private or communal land was tampered with by the colonial administration. For instance, the indigenous inhabitants of Kenya were disgruntled at the way communal land was expropriated by traditional rulers of the region to offer to white settlers referred to as 'strangers' in the 1950s. In the same way, the invasion of Cameroon by European colonial powers and the seizure of land by the colonial and post-colonial administrations of the country triggered land and boundary conflicts that exist today in the North-West Region of Cameroon.

The Berlin Conference, which aimed at partitioning the African continent for effective European occupation, administration and optimal exploitation of its natural resources, was the most predominant act of contemporary land demarcation and delimitation in Africa. This partition created major land and boundary disputes in Africa in general, and in the North-West Region of Cameroon in particular. Conflict subsequently arose between the indigenous populations and the colonialists in places that witnessed greater socio-economic changes due to the expropriation of farm land, grazing land, fishing grounds and hunting land amongst others. Worse

still, population expansion in Africa, and in the North-West Region of Cameroon in particular, led to more attention over the value of land. This situation thus limited the action and control of local chiefs, who were, till then, thought to be the owners or supreme controllers of all lands within their localities. Demographic factors, especially during the post-colonial period, further contributed substantially to the frequent land claims in the study locale.

Cameroon, like many other African countries, has witnessed conflicts resulting from increased antagonism between diverse ethnic groups. In this kind of configuration, therefore, ethnic antagonisms and land conflicts become difficult to resolve. Conflicts erupt and escalate due to group struggles, and are underpinned by complicated alliances in which ethnic identity and affiliations are key variables. In some traditionally stable societies, land and boundary conflicts are becoming increasingly common. In fact, in many countries in Africa, indigenous people have been dispossessed of their land, or are at risk of being dispossessed of their rights and authority to own land. To be more precise, these rights are currently being invalidated by the State through the issuance of land laws that (most of the time) run counter to the indigenous conceptions. From the above discussion, intrinsic causes of land and boundary conflicts and their effects on social cohesion are endemic in the North-West Region of Cameroon, hence the justification of writing a book on this topic.

Life in the African continent, like elsewhere in the world, is indirectly linked to land. On the account of its importance in defining power and geostrategic positioning, land is seen not only as wealth, but also as “steam centre” on which any decision emanates, grows and takes shape. In the North-West Region where life revolves around agricultural activities and the population increases exponentially, the value of land and the problems linked to it continue to shape policies, define identities and bring out the contours of multi-dimensional relations and cohabitations. Land problems are certainly not new, but these problems mostly have their roots in the inappropriate manner in which the colonialists attempted to carve out ethnic boundaries. The inability of both colonial and postcolonial authorities in charge of arbitrating on land matters in a manner acceptable to all, as well as the expansionist policies of some traditional ethnic formations continue to make the already bad situation worse. In addition to those two factors, land and boundary problems have often been fuelled and fanned by political elites to distract their constituents from the failure to meet their campaign promises.

In the North-West Region, traditional authorities (namely chiefs, *Fons and Ardos*), on whose ambits were bestowed ancestral claims over

land, exploit the ignorance and blind loyalty of their subjects to engage in illicit practises. For example, they sell land to the central government, causing landlessness among their own people. They are equally involved directly or indirectly in land conflicts resulting from multiple sales and double allocation of land titles that have been made possible by legal pluralism, or undocumented customary tenure between competing state agencies all legitimized to do so. The presence of the traditional leaders, elites, state personals like Divisional Officers and Lawyers dubious' standards over land has been that conflicts of all dimensions have been in a meteoric rise.

The most violent conflicts over land, however, are those involving two different ethnic groups fighting over and claiming ownership over a piece of land. In the North-West Region, what is often reported as an ethnic conflict is usually a conflict over (arable or pasture) land. It has been noticed that many of the land and boundary conflicts are due to the effects of climate change, environmental degradation, demographic and economic transition on the local populations. Scarcity of land due to environmental degradation and population growth often leaves hardly any choice to people but to fight for land which might or might not be theirs. All land conflicts, no matter how peaceful or violent they may be, produce negative consequences for individual people as well as for entire communities. For example, several people and communities across the North-West Region have seen their homes destroyed. Others have experienced the sale of their property by someone else claiming sole ownership. Farmers have lost their production base. Moreover, where they are frequent, land and boundary conflicts have undermined trust and increased fear and suspicion often between formerly close people such as neighbouring communities and family members. Also, violent land conflicts and the fear of becoming a victim of them proved to have had a traumatising effect on some of the communities at risk.

These conflicts have become so protracted that solutionary efforts are often far-fetched. Even when solutions are advanced, complying with them remains another serious problem. This work, then, seeks to answer the following questions: What are the general and specific causes of land problems in the North-West Region? How have these conflicts manifested themselves? How have these conflicts been conceived and managed by state and non-state actors? What theoretical and practical mechanics have been deployed to curb land conflict and with what measure of success or failure? How best can land conflicts in North-West Region and Cameroon be resolved and what are the lessons to be drawn from them?

This research work is limited to the North-West Region of the Republic of Cameroon, otherwise known as the Bamenda Grassfields. It is focused on four land and boundary conflicts, namely Bambili versus Babanki-Tungo, Balikumbat versus Bafanji, the Mbororos graziers versus the Aghem farmers, and Oku versus Mbesa. These conflicts cover five out of the seven Divisions of the North-West Region of Cameroon: Mezam, Ngoketunjia, Menchum, Bui and Boyo.

These four cases were selected because they each have different historical perspectives on land and boundary conflict in the region. The first case, Bambili versus Babanki-Tungo, was chosen not only for various land disputes, but also for its geographical and strategic location in Tubah Sub-division of Mezam Division. The second case, the Balikumbat/Bafanji territorial conflict, is related to the long lasting unresolved boundary dispute between these two communities from different ethnic origins (Chamba and Tikar respectively), though both groups are found in the same Sub-division in Ngoketunjia Division. The third case, known as the farmers-graziers conflict of Wum Central (Bui Division), is a typical example of the impact of bigotry and ethnicity in land settlement disputes. Also, the efforts of the various peace advocates in the disputed area had been a point of great attraction. The last case opposing Oku to Mbesa is related to land and boundary matters, considering the fact that throughout history, these two communities have lived together as brothers until recent time, when the State of Cameroon decided to administer Oku became as a Sub-division in Bui Division, and Mbesa as a village in Belo Sub-division in Boyo Division.

Each of the cases mentioned above has involved different historical moments related to land conflicts worthy of interest to researchers willing to evaluate the attempts at restoring peace in the selected cases. From the above point of view, personal and scientific reasons motivated our choice of the four cases, which have been sufficiently characterized by current and recurrent conflicts over land and boundary issues.

The study covers the period 1958 to 2017. The year 1958 has been chosen as a starting date because of the agreement by the British colonial authority and the people of Bambili and Babanki-Tungo over A.B. Westmacott's (Resident) Review of May 1958 on land and boundary problems. In the area, the Westmacott decision has been referred by the various authorities as the only legal document which demarcated the area under dispute. It should be noted that the Westmacott decision was the last colonial peace attempt to land and boundary disputes settlement in this part of the country. The study ends in 2017. This year was chosen because of the relative peace that reigned in this area due to State, NGOs', and dispute parties' efforts. Note is also taken from the last demarcation exercise

conducted in July 2008 and the subsequent diplomatic peace attempt recorded by both communities in March 2017.

The book is structured into six chapters excluding a general introduction and general conclusion. Chapter one provides the background information about the study area and how it could be relevant in the understanding of the various conflicts in the North-West Region. To this effect, the first part opens with the geographical and ethnographical survey of the area. It focuses on the land, human, traditional and socio-political setting in which the contestants find themselves. The second part treats the general causes of land and boundary conflicts in the North-West Region. Chapter two examines the Bambili and Babanki-Tungo land dispute in Tubah Sub-division, found in Mezam Division of the North-West Region. This conflict started in the colonial period but in 1958 during the last years of British rule, the last significant efforts were made available by the British colonial masters through the Wesmacott decision on the Buea High over the disputed area at Ntah. Chapter three is our second case study. It deals with the evolution of the Balikumbat versus Bafanji land dispute in Ngoketunja Division. Here, issues of ethnicity and the direct and pervasive involvement of traditional and government authorities have further exacerbated tensions, while an attempt at a final resolution of the conflict is still pending. Chapter four focuses on the land conflict opposing the Mbororo graziers to the Aghem indigenous farmers in Wum Central of Menchum Division. This chapter highlights the evolution of territorial conflicts in Wum Central among the above-mentioned contestants. In this connection, care has been taken to examine the advent and organization of the Mbororos in Wum, Menchum Division, the main causes, evolution and impact of the conflicts involving this community. Chapter five, our last case study, is the most recent devastating land conflict in terms of damage and casualties in the North-West Region. The conflict opposes the people of Oku and Mbesa, who live respectively in Oku Sub-division (Bui Division) and Belo Sub-division (Boyo Division). In this chapter, we assess the degree of lineage of the two communities, and discuss the various wars they fought against each other from 1982 to 2017 and the devastating effects of the conflict on the two communities. Chapter six is in relation to the various attempts made by different peace advocates and the problems they faced in providing a lasting solution to the land and boundary conflicts in the North-West Region. However, this chapter ends with some proposed solutions to the various parties or peace advocates in an attempt to prevent or resolve conflicts of similar magnitude not only in the North-West Region, but in Cameroon in general. The general conclusion begins with the summary of the main issues discussed in the various parts of the work. This part of the book equally

highlights the theoretical link of this work in relation to the existing ones on land and boundary conflicts between communities. Finally, it discusses the lessons learned from these conflicts.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND STUDY AND CAUSES OF LAND AND BOUNDARY CONFLICTS IN THE NORTH-WEST REGION

Conflicts between communities in the North-West Region cannot be analysed adequately without an in-depth understanding of the area's geography and history. Under geography, the location, relief, vegetation, climate, soil and drainage of the areas under study are hereby analysed. Elements of history including migration, settlement and traditional or indigenous institutions are discussed in depth, alongside causes of land and boundary conflicts in the North-West Region.

A- The Geographical Environment

Owing to its unique features, notably the topographical relief and vegetation, the North-West Region of Cameroon caught the eye of various colonial explorers who came to the area, especially the Germans. The latter then referred to this part of the country as the Grassfields or Grasslands.

a. Location, Relief and Vegetation

Shaped liked a rough diamond,¹ the North-West Region of Cameroon lies between longitudes 9°45' and 11°10' and 7°30' north of the Equator (see map 1). It is flanked to the north by the Adamawa and the Taraba State of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to the west and south west by the Manyu Division of the South West Region, to the south and south west by the Bamboutous and Noun Divisions of the West Region, and to the east by the Mayo Banyo Division of the Adamawa Region of Cameroon. The region possesses seven Administrative Divisions, namely Boyo, Bui, Donga-

¹ National archives Buea (NAB), W.E. Hunt, 1921, Report on the Bamenda Division of the Cameroon Province for the League of Nations for the Year Ended, 31th December, p.2.

Mantung, Menchum, Mezam, Momo and Ngoketunjia, (see map 2) which all derive their names from some prominent geographical features of the region.² The region is made up of 31 Sub-divisions and 31 rural and 2 urban areas.

According to the 1987 population census, the North-West Region had an estimated population of more than 1,238,348 inhabitants, which increased to about 1,884,200 inhabitants in 2001.³ According to Suh Neba, the North-West Region is the fifth most populous region of Cameroon after the Far North, Littoral, Centre and Western Region.⁴ The North-West Region covers an area of about 17,510 square kilometres.

The dominant physiographical structure of the region is the Bamenda plateau that extends almost horizontally across the Bamenda Grassfields, forming splendid natural divisional and regional boundaries. There are some mountainous chains on this plateau extending southwards and northwards into the West and Adamawa Regions. Some of these mountains include Mounts Lefo (2,550 meters), Fungom (1,804 meters) and Oku (3,011 meters) above sea level. This means that Mount Oku, the second highest point in Cameroon after Mount Fako, is found in our area of study. The Bamenda town, the headquarters of the region, lies on an altitude of above 1,600 meters.

However, there are plains and valleys that spread between these high peaks of the plateau within the region. Outstanding among the major plains and valleys are the Ndop and Mbaw plains in the Ngoketunjia and Donga-Mantung Divisions respectively, as well as the Yemgeh valley in Menchum Division.⁵ By and large, the entire region consists of hills broken by valleys at varying breaths with numerous streams, lakes and rivers.⁶

² North West Provincial Delegation MINAT, 2001, p.5.

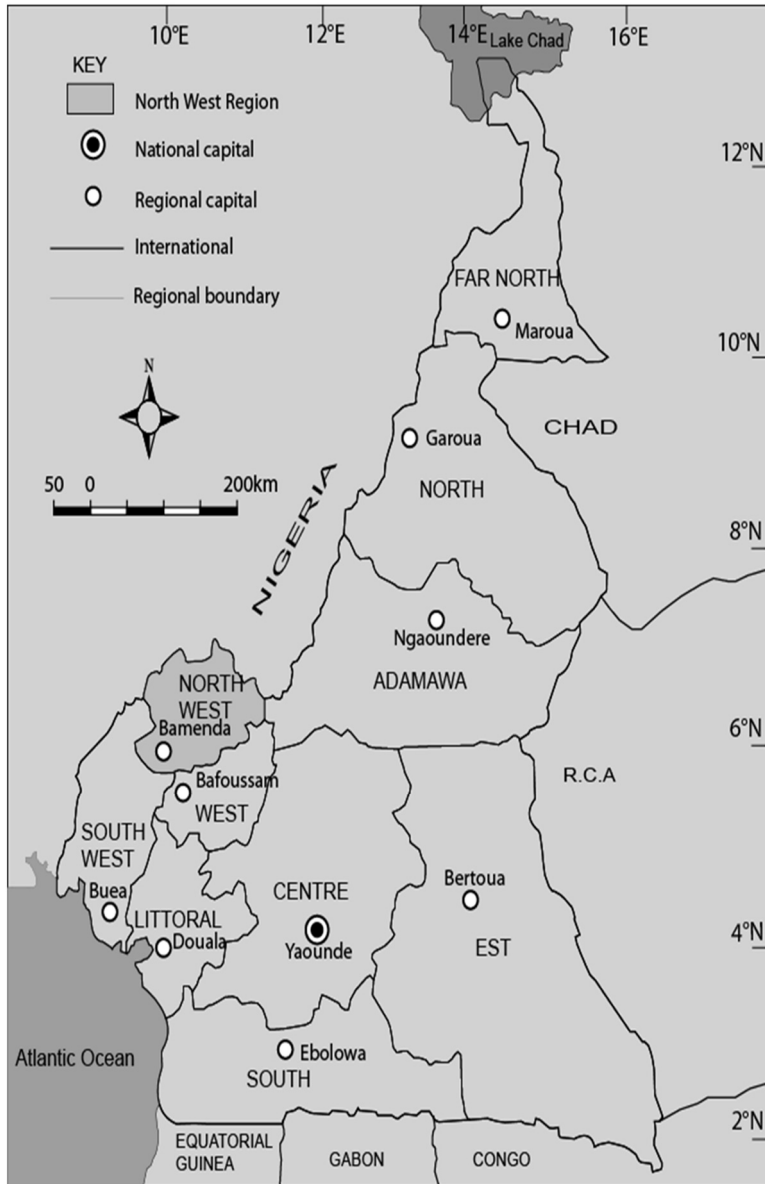
³ North-West Regional Master Plan for Sustainable Development Report, April 2001, p.7.

⁴ T. Brinkhoff, 2007, "Institut National de la Statistique Cameroun", in <http://www.citypopulation.de>, consulted on 3 April 2009.

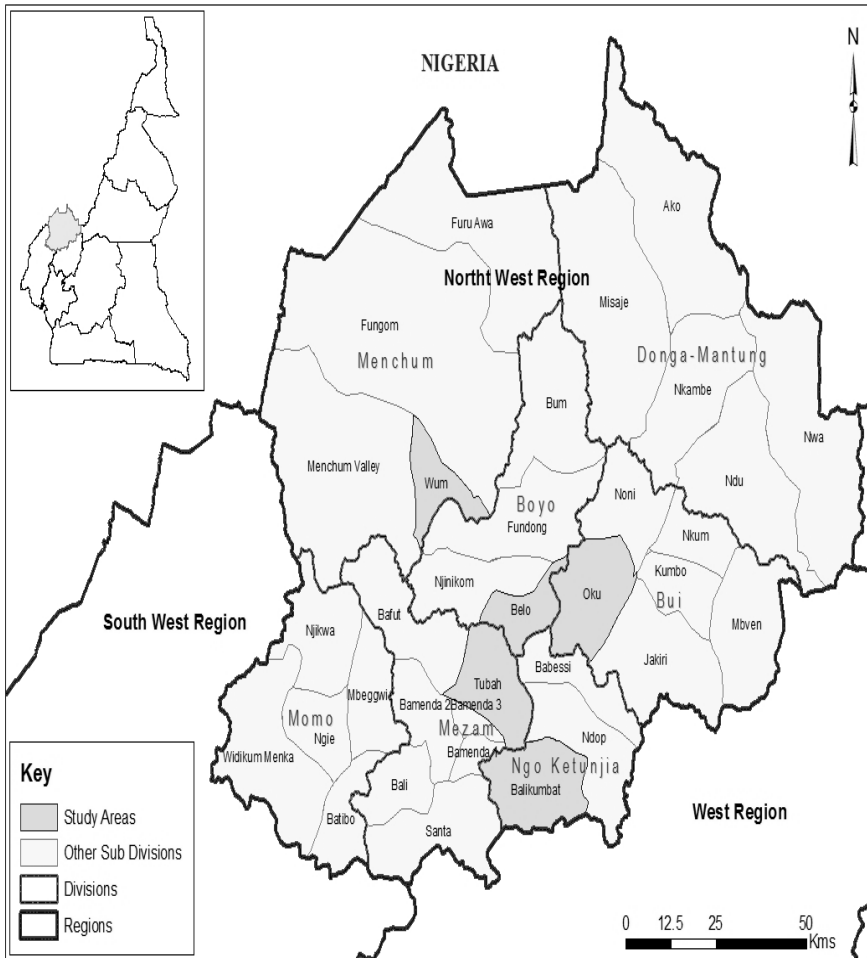
⁵ A. Suh Neba, 1987, *Modern Geography of Cameroon*, Canidian, Neba Publishers, p.166.

⁶ G. Ladaviere (ed.), 1980, *Atlas of the United Republic of Cameroon*, Paris, Editions Jeune Afrique, p.7.

Map 1: Location of the North-West Region in Cameroon



Source: Adapted by the author from the (1992) administrative map of Cameroon, INC, Yaoundé, drawn by Enchaw G.B, (2011).

Map 2: Location of the study Areas in the North-West Region of Cameroon

Source: Adapted by the author from the (1992) administrative map of Cameroon, INC, Yaoundé, drawn by Enchaw G.B, (2011).

Many streams and water sources are found on the slopes of the numerous hills. The main rivers of the region are the Donga, Bui, Momo, Mezam, Menchum, Katsina and Kimbi, after which some of the divisions of the region are named. It should be noted that most of these rivers flow west into the Benue River in Nigeria, while the Momo flows into the

tributaries of the Cross River in Manyu Division. However, these rivers are not navigable within the region due to numerous rocks, rapids and waterfalls. Prominent lakes within the region include: Lake Oku, Wum, Nyos, Bambili, Benakuma, Kuk and Awing. These are crater lakes resulting from volcanic activities that occurred centuries ago.⁷

Given the latitude, prevailing rainfall and general climatic conditions, the vegetation of the North-West Region can be classified under the savannah (Guinea Savanna), which lies immediately adjacent to the Equatorial rainforest. Patches of deciduous and motane forest gallery are found along streams, river valleys and fertile mountain slopes. Dense forests, for instance, are found on the slopes of Mount Kilum and Mount Ijim, and valleys of rivers such as the Menchum, Katsina and Donga. The patches of forest on the Menchum River Valley begin from Bafut and extend to the Isimbo area up to border with Nigeria. Dense forests are also found around the Mbengwi area of the Mekaf chiefdom, and down to the villages of Nser, Kepp, Badji, Sambari and Furu-Awa. They are equally present along the valley of the Katsina Ala River, which makes up the Fungom Forest Reserve, and, finally, along the valley of Menchum and in parts of Donga-Mantung Division.⁸

On higher elevations as well as heavily grazed areas, shorter grass of 1.5 metre or more grow luxuriantly in the rainy season, and wither during the dry season, giving a brownish appearance and presentation of the landscape. This grass cover is a biotic climax. Patches of rain forest, characterised by scattered trees with twisted stems and corky heat persisting backs give rise to occasional gallery forests. Such geographical features are common in the valleys of the steep hills where the top soils which washed down by rain are deposited. Examples are found in Upper Fungom. These features have made the people of this area to be in a constant search for the most permeable parts of land for farming, with the result that farming land has become scarce, leading to conflicts between neighbouring villages. Map 1 illustrates selected cases of conflict discussed in this work.

However, it should be noted that a greater part of the grasslands is formed from destructive human activities such as deforestation (for human settlement and farming), burning of the bush and more recently, over-grazing.

⁷ Ladaviere, 1980.p.8.

⁸ The World Bank, 1993, *Ecological Sensitive Sites in Africa, Vol-1, Occidental and Central Africa*, Washington DC, The World Bank, pp.5-6.

b. Climate, Soils and Drainage

The North-West Region has a sub-tropical climate. Like in most tropical areas, the winds which influence the climate of the North-West Region are the North-East Trade winds that blow from the Sahara and the South-West monsoons from across the Atlantic Ocean that bring about rainfall. Straddled over Longitude 10° East, the North-West Region is a capsule replica of most of the climate and vegetation experienced in the Region. The region enjoys a sub-tropical climate with cold frosty mornings, and hot dry afternoons especially during the dry periods. The monthly average temperature ranges between 20.18°C minimum to 29.40°C maximum.⁹ This implies that the temperature is much more stable and regular. As a result of proximity, to the flood plains of rivers and Lakes, some areas in the region are likely to register very low temperatures especially at night and early mornings due to evaporation and cooling of the vapour.

Areas such as the Ndop plain, part of Lower Fungom, Munka and Gayama experience high temperatures as a result of the proximity with Ngaoundere. These low areas lie among hills, such that air is trapped within them. Consequently, these places are warm but not as the areas found in the coastal regions. These villages have a climate good for the cultivation of cash crops such as oil palm, banana, cocoa and a host of others.¹⁰

Two main seasons are experienced in the region, namely the wet and dry seasons. The former lasts from early March to mid-November, with the highest rainfall usually registered in August. This is a season of lower temperatures, and heavier and more regular rainfalls. Smaller daily ranges of temperatures are characteristics of the wet season. This culminates into an annual average rainfall of about 2000mm. Daily temperatures are sometimes as low as 13°C and the atmosphere is sometimes foggy or cloudy during day and night. There is a short, but well-marked dry season which does not last more than four months. The dry season often begins from late November to early March and is characterized by cold and sometimes frosty mornings and evenings, hot afternoons with temperatures averaging 28°C, a misty atmosphere during the day and a clear sky at night. The dry season is a season of higher temperatures and a large diurnal range of temperatures. As observed earlier, the mornings are relatively cold and chilly, while the atmosphere is generally dusty. The harmattan is greatly felt through dry winds during this

⁹ North West Provincial Delegation for Agriculture Archives, Annual Report 1988/89, p.6.

¹⁰ A. Neba, 1987, *Modern geography of the republic of Cameroon*, 3rd edition, Bamenda, Neba Publishers, p.269.

period. On the average, the region has a mild climate which is very conducive for hard work.¹¹

The North-West Region equally consists of three main soil types: volcanic, hydromorphic and ferralitic. Volcanic soils, which are rich and black, are the result of weathering over the years of volcanic rocks. Hydromorphic soils are organic and have a low drainage capacity which frequently suffers from seasonal flooding. A good example is the flood plains of River Menchum. Also, ferralitic soils are found in varying qualities throughout the region.¹² The most common type of soil found here is volcanic, it is generally littered with basalt stones, dark and rich in humus of good structure and texture. However, the hilly regions are often deprived of plant nutrients due to rains, seasonal wild fire and deforestation, which leave the surface exposed to both water and wind erosion. However, in most areas, high temperature and rainfall conditions have encouraged dense vegetation that is immediately decomposed into humus once the vegetation is withered off by bacteria. This humus content is released into plants but the soil soon becomes deteriorated as the heavy rains easily leach away the nutrients. The soils consequently become unfertile and the farm is abandoned for a virgin piece of land. The use of fertilizers, therefore, becomes imperative.

Nevertheless, the soils are sometimes rich for agriculture, especially the black volcanic soils of Nduh, Oku, Buwum (in Bafut), Befang, Ndu and Wum which have always been as pull factors to the various communities. Other areas with fertile soils include the encroached crater lakes of Befang, the Santa environment, the hilly site of Kom, just to name a few. Rice and yams do well in the flood plains of Ndop, while maize, cassava, cocoyams, plantains, groundnuts, beans and many other food crops are commonly cultivated in the other areas of the region. It is, however, noteworthy that this limitation in soil fertility had witnessed a serious population pressure, especially during the wet season, thus resulting to land conflict. The drainage of the region has also played a greater role in fuelling land conflict in this area.¹³

Although the topography of the North-West Region is very uneven, it is well watered in most places by rivers and streams which flow

¹¹ P. Hawkins and M. Brunt, 1965, *The soils and ecology of West Cameroon (with special reference to the Bamenda Area)*, Rome, FAO, p.56.

¹² S.V. Zonn, 1986, *Tropical and Sub-Tropical Soil Science*, Moscow, Mir Publishers, pp.6-8.

¹³ C.A. Nkwemoh, 1999, "The impact of agro-Pastoral activities on the physical environment of the Mezam-Ngoketunjia area", Doctorate Thesis, University of Yaounde I, p.282.

down the mountain sides into the valleys where they meander. Most of the streams and rivers run fast during the rainy season. Rivers Bui and Menchum, from which the divisions of the same names derive their denominations, have their sources in Rivers Noun and Bamboutos respectively. These rivers range and flow through Bui, Mezam, Momo, Beba-Befang and Esimbi regions to Nigeria.¹⁴ Rivers Kimbi and Mer rise from the Oku Mountains and flow through the Bum and Fungom areas to Nigeria. Both tributaries meet a little after the border line with Nigeria and eventually flow into River Katsina Ala and virtually join the Benue River, some kilometers from Makurdi.¹⁵ There are many other smaller rivers and streams which favour soil fertility and the production of specific crops required by the people of the area. Crops commonly cultivated in this region include plantains, Irish potatoes, yams, vegetables and beans. In the dry season, these rivers, rich in fish, and most of the streams in the region dry up. This has, of course, serious negative economic consequences for the people.

Rivers of the North-West region of Cameroon, like many other streams in Africa, are characterized by numerous waterfalls and rapids. This partly explains why these rivers are navigable over very short distances. The waterfalls and cascades are the result of powerful erosion, followed by relatively slower upstream recession. Almost all the rivers and their tributaries have great pools, rapids and falls on their courses.¹⁶ Another common feature along the rivers' courses is the wide river valleys and the flood plains, especially around the plain belt of Ndop, Beba-Befang, Mbam and the Esimbi palm belt area. Rice and yams are cultivated along the flood plains, which become potential areas of land conflict as the limited cultivable spaces are incommensurate with the growing population. However, lakes, waterfalls and rapids constitute great tourist sites in the region, like the Menchum Falls,¹⁷ Lake Wum, Lake Oku, Lake Bambili and Lake Nyos. In fact, the shortage of these favorable geographical features (fertile lands for that matter) has always generated conflicts as everyone living in the region would prefer to settle on favorable farming areas.

¹⁴ Provincial Archives Bamenda (PAB), NW/Sa/d.2002/4/BK, Akum Joseph N., Population growth and Land use: An Assessment of the relationship between farmers and Graziers in Wum North-West Province of Cameroon, 2002, p.35.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ J. Neba Chungong, 1977, "Le Pourvoir traditionnel et le pourvoir d'Etat: Cas de la Province du Nord-Ouest du Cameroun", Thèse de Doctorat de 3eme cycle, Université de Nice, p.56.

¹⁷ N. Akum, 2002, p.36.