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Traditional Land Conflict Resolution Strategies in the Banyang Country, Cameroon from Pre-colonial Time to Present

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Abstract: In traditional Banyang society, regulatory societies had authority over the use of land and ensured that it was communally beneficial and also managed all forms of land related conflicts. In this light, the communities viewed these regulatory societies and their decisions as divine and anyone who disrespected them was severely punished and in some cases, victims faced ostracism. Even when the situation changed as government regulatory institutions assumed authority over land issues, regulatory societies retained their functions of land conflict resolution. With the use of primary and authoritative secondary sources, the study examines that land conflicts in the Banyang Country and argues that conflicts were more effectively managed by the Banyang traditional land conflict resolution regime. This was because the 1974 land Ordinances enacted with the intent to effectively contain land conflicts in Cameroon, created more land related conflicts thereby rendering the Banyang regulatory societies continuously relevant in land conflict management. This study which employs the inter-disciplinary and analytical approaches in data presentation reveals that, the Banyang traditional land conflicts resolution strategies have remained relevant in spite of the putting in place of government regulatory institutions. So advocates albeit from the Banyang perspective, that the respite out of Cameroon's land conflicts lies in her traditional backyard.

Keywords: Banyang Country, Land, Land Conflict And Conflict Resolution.

INTRODUCTION

In recent past, land conflicts have been a recurrent phenomenon across the world, Africa, Cameroon and the Banyang Country in particular. Many conflicts that have posed as threats to human existence have resulted from issues bordering on land. Resolving land conflicts has been as complex as the sources of such conflicts. Given the extent of such conflicts, its resolution has been both urgent, necessary and consequently, different nations and communities have adopted varied measures aimed at resolving the land conflicts. The peculiarity of land conflict resolution in Africa and Cameroon in particular has been the comprehension of both modern governance institutions and traditional approaches. While the former were meant to put an end to land conflicts and serve as a veritable replacement to the latter, its application has rather fuelled more land conflicts rather than contain them. This apparently has forced several communities especially in the Banyang Country of Cameroon to revert to traditional land conflict resolution strategies. From this premise therefore, this paper launches an inquest into the interaction between modern governance institutions and traditional land conflict resolution strategies in the Banyang Country.

It should be noted that, modern governance institutions which were meant to contain land conflicts in the Banyang Country paradoxically fuelled more land conflicts thereby reasserting the relevance of Banyang regulatory societies in resolving these land conflicts. In order to regulate these numerous land conflicts, the World Bank reports on land policies for growth and poverty reduction lay emphasis on the fact that much more attention should be paid to the legality of existing institutional arrangements such as traditional regulatory societies, as a solution to land conflicts in Africa (Armitage, 2018). In the Banyang Country, the management of land conflicts was handled by powerful Banyang traditional regulatory societies such as *Etok*, *Ekpe* and *Mfam*. This paper therefore addresses the causes of land conflicts in the Banyang Country, the Banyang form of land conflict resolution and the impact of land conflicts in the Banyang Country.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

In this write-up, some key concepts were highlighted for clarification: Banyang Country, land, land conflict and conflict resolution. The Banyang Country¹ is found in the former Ossindinge, Mamfe Division of present day Manyu Division, in the South West Region of Cameroon. It is located in the South West portion of the Cameroon Equatorial Rainforest, precisely in the Cross-River Basin along the Cameroon Nigerian Border.² It occupies an area of approximately 1025 square miles and lies between latitude 5^o 27 and 9^o 56 North and longitude 9^o 11 and 9^o 51 East of the Equator.³ It shares common boundaries with Bamenda and the Fontem Clans in the East, Mbo and Obang Clans in the South-East, Ejagham Clans in the South, Boki and Anyang Clans on the West and the Menka Clan in the North.⁴ The longest length to cross the Banyang Country is from Eyangnchang in the West, to Sabes in the East, a distance of approximately 61 miles or 64.5km by road (Ojong *et al.*, 2010), long enough for land grabbing and land conflicts.

To understand the conception of land in the Banyang Country, the question one is tempted to ask is “what is land, and what has made land a key feature in conflicts?” To Ofori, “land is something that relates to the soil and its biological content, rocks, soil formation and other elements in the ecosystem” (Ofori, 1971). Sobseh holds that “land is a scarce factor of production that is unique, valuable, immobile and inexhaustible and includes the soil, minerals, forest products, and water” (Sobseh, 2015). Bruce and Holt maintain that; “land is a valuable resource, with economic and strategic value, political and cultural significance” (2011). Since land is a unique and valuable natural resource, its significant value to economic operation and the unending quest by countries, communities and individuals often resulted to conflicts amongst its users. So in the Banyang Country land is a valuable commodity and has orchestrated a plethora of conflicts because of its utility to society, individuals and institutions.

According to Thompson, the term ‘conflict’ implies tension and danger of violence but not the presence of violence (Thompson, 2010) while land conflict according to Wehrmann (2002), is a social fact in which at least two parties are involved in disagreement over the legality of a piece of land. Deininger (2003), on his part insist that land conflict is a social fact in which at least two parties are involved, the roots of which are different interests over the property rights to land; the right to use the land, to manage the land, to generate an income from the land, to exclude others from the land, to transfer it and the right to get compensation from it after exploitation (See also Conrad, 1991). Land conflict to Bruce and Holt is the competing claims to land, often to large areas of land, typically by groups, which reflect broader and deeper competing interests than those involved in most land disputes and which are not easily resolved through negotiation or adjudication within the existing legal framework (Bruce & Holt, 2011). The above authors have contributed greatly in conceptualising land conflict, but our studies align with what Wehrmann and Deininger says land conflict is all about.

The focal point in any conflict is the mode of resolution; thus conflict resolution according to Udezo is a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through the constructive solving of problems, distinct from management or transformation of conflicts (Udezo, 2020). Mitchell and Banks also define conflict resolution as an outcome in which the issues in an existing conflict are satisfactorily dealt with through a solution that is mutually acceptable to the parties, self-sustaining in the long run and productive of a new, positive relationship between parties that were previously hostile (Burton, 1990). In line with what Mitchell and Banks have written, our study aptly supports Best, who views conflict resolution as, “the process of reducing the negative and destructive capacity through a number of measures and by working with and through the parties involved in that conflict” (Shriver, 1995). In summary, Mail and House concludes that; “...in principle, conflict resolution connotes a sense of finality, where the parties to a conflict are mutually satisfied with the outcome of a settlement and the conflict is resolved in a true sense of it” (Maill & House, 2001). Given significance of land, access and rights to land are crucial issues underlying causes of land-related conflicts.

The Causes of Land Conflicts in the Banyang Country

The causes of land conflicts in the Banyang Country are placed under natural and man-made causes. The natural causes included the eradication of traditional methods of land allocation, floods and erosion and rapid population increase. Man-made causes included; inefficiency and confusion in the country’s land registry, profit maximisation, increase in land pricing and the bureaucratic court system.

Natural Causes of Land Conflicts in the Banyang Country

¹A particular geographical region of indefinite boundary (usually serving some special purpose or distinguished by its people or culture or geography).

²NAB File No. 63/29, A Preliminary Assessment Report on the Banyang clan area, H.C. Anderson, Resident Officer Buea, 1929.

³NAB File No. Af 19, Assessment report on the Banyang clan, Mamfe Division, Cameroons Province, M.E.A Gorges, Assistant District Officer, 1930, 5-9.

⁴Ibid.

The eradication of traditional methods of land allocation in the Banyang Country gave impetus to land conflicts. The migration and settlement of communities in the Banyang Country made these communities to carve out natural boundaries for settlement (Turner, 1969). Each community or family knew boundary demarcation with neighbours which in effect limited the amount of land conflicts in the communities. The coming of the colonialists' style of boundary demarcation altered the existing indigenous boundary style and norms. This was problematic as ancestral lands were taken away from the owners and new boundaries instituted, resulting to conflicts. A case in point was the land conflict between Eyanchang and Emetetegk and the Bachuo-Ntai and Okoyong Banya where due to poor boundary demarcations, these communities went into conflict with each other (Turner, 1969).

Floods and erosion also contributed to the numerous land conflicts in the Banyang Country. It should be noted that, one of the oldest methods of determining land boundaries in the Banyang Country was the use of physical and natural features such as; rivers, valleys, streams, lakes, springs and mountains. But majority of such land conflicts were caused by the deviation of water channels that served as boundaries between individuals and communities thus causing parties on opposite sides of the boundary to engage in conflicts. During the raining season, there was usually an increase in the volume of water in water bodies which in effect created new channels and eventually new boundaries (Turner, 1969). In such situations, some parties unscrupulously refused to respect the original boundary claiming the new channel as the authentic boundary. This situation usually led to conflicts as was the case between Oben Donca and Mengot Shinshong over a plot of land in the Bachuo-Ntai community.

Another natural cause of land conflicts in the Banyang Country was the rapid increase in population. According to the World Bank Report of 2002, some forty or fifty years ago, the amount of unoccupied forest was larger than what obtained since the wake of the new millennium in the year 2000 (World Bank, 1996). The reason for this was the rapid increase in population growth rate in the communities. This population increase therefore orchestrated the scramble for more land either for cultivation or for habitation in communities such as Nchang, Eshobi, Eyangnchang and Ntenako. This inevitably led to conflicts, as the growing population fought over the same limited quantity of land for habitation, grazing and farming purposes. This factor contributed mostly to the many inter-community land conflicts in the Banyang Country as communities and individuals conflicted with one another over boundary demarcations. Cases of such conflicts were that between Okoyong Banya and the Bachuo-Ntai community and the Tali and Tinto land conflicts (Tencha, 2018).

Man-Made Causes of Land Conflicts in the Banyang Country

The inefficiency and confusion in country's land registries caused land conflicts. In Cameroon, the government had put in place some procedures to obtain land documents with numerous bottlenecks. This generated a situation where unscrupulous dealers tended to issue a single land certificate to many people over the same piece of land while others sold the same piece of land to more than one buyer. It was very frustrating to verify land ownership and transfer of land from one person to another and as a result, there was a need to streamline operations in the Ministry of State Property and Land Tenure to ensure that land registration and general processing took the shortest time possible (Cormaroff & Roberts, 1981; Crosby, 1976). Due to these bottlenecks, it has discouraged many people from going in for land titles and certificates. The absence of these documents by land owners was one reason for the many land conflicts in the Banyang communities.

Profit maximisation was another cause of land conflicts in the Banyang Country. This was often manifested by unjust grabbing of land or by excluding disadvantaged sections of the population from the legal use of land. Theoretically, these actors included all social gatekeepers such as politicians, government administrators and influential elites like chiefs and businessmen who because of their job, position and function manipulated the land market and other mechanisms for land allocation to their advantage. However, the decisive factor for these irregularities was the "normality of misbehaviour". This means that nepotism, corruption and disregard for regulations were considered normal by the population as social and religious values were of little relevance to everyday life, and self-interest was paramount to public interest. A case in point was the James Agbor versus Michael Enow misunderstanding in the community of Nchemba. James Agbor who had sold his plot of land to Michael Enow later came back demanding for his land or additional money when Enow refused saying the deal could not be revisited and conflict ensued between the two parties (Enow, 2018).

Again, the increase in the sale of land which was a general phenomenon in many parts of Banyang Country also swelled the propensity of land conflicts. This was because the increasing value of land as the most important factor of production made land an economic commodity for buyers. In effect therefore, many large merchants, politicians, influential chiefs and clientele offered large sums of money for the purchase of lands. This led to an increase in prices due to the limited supply. When the land owners saw the monetary value of land, they resorted to double sale which eventually led to land conflicts (Crosby, 1976). At the Okoyong Banya community, one Stephen John sold a piece of land to two persons. It all began when Michael Chussi bought this land from Stephen John at the sum of 100000 FCFA

but when a certain Nnamdi Okoro, an Igbo man resident in Mamfe came looking for land, the same piece of land was re-sold to him at 250000 FCFA. According to Stephen, he sold the land to Okoro in order to refund Michael's money but he refused to accept the deal and the three parties resorted to conflict over the land (Chussi, 2018).

The bureaucratic court system also contributed to land conflicts in the Banyang Country. It should be noted that, the courts depended on Police investigations to try cases of land and land conflicts. If the investigations were inadequate, there was only so little that the courts could do. Courts took too long to dispose of cases especially land cases as many lawyers had land cases that stretched for over five years, for and others, over a decade. Judicial officers were transferred without finalizing cases and then those newly posted have to study files all over again thereby frustrating the litigants. The conflict between Augustin Ayuk and the Bachuo-Ntai community over a piece of land located around the old market was motivated by this administrative lapse. The bureaucracy involved often pushed the conflicting parties to take initiatives on their own to handle the matter and sometimes violent measures were often the way out hence conflicts. Despite government efforts to regulate and stop land conflicts in Cameroon, yet land conflicts are recurrent situations in most communities in the Banyang Country either between individuals or between communities. The functional role of Banyang traditional regulatory societies to resolve these conflicts is the focus of this monograph.

Traditional Methods of land Conflict Resolution in the Banyang Country

Indigenous regulatory societies played a great role in toning down the occurrences of land conflicts in the Banyang Country. These societies were highly instrumental and respected in the prevention, control and resolution of land related conflicts. Though the paradigm almost changed with the introduction of the colonial and post-colonial methods of land conflict resolution, the Banyang traditional methods stood the test of time. Prominent stakeholder institutions amongst Banyang in land conflict resolution were the *Etok*⁵, *Ekpe* and *Mfam* societies.

The *Etok* Society

In the Banyang Country, the *Etok* or the traditional council is an instrumental body in the resolution of land conflicts. Since the Banyang people have a strong belief in this nuclear family called *Etok*. It has a comprehensive duty to manage all affairs in the local community including the prevention and resolution of all forms of conflicts especially conflicts over land. The *Etok* is feared and respected by every individual in the Banyang Country because one could face ostracism if its orders are not respected or if defaulters go against its restrictions. As a matter of procedure, whenever land conflicts emerged, this body advice the parties to stay resolute to the assistance of local traditional methods of land conflict resolution. The body sends out a team of local land experts to diagnose the cause of the conflict and to report back to them (Ayuk, 1989). After the feasibility studies on the site was done, members of the community land committee, alongside the quarter heads of the two parties and other interested members, go to the site for a thorough investigation. The other members that accompany the land committee to the contested land were the four neighbours whose land shared boundary with the contested land. These individuals had a big role to play in determining the new boundary and whatever decision they arrive at remained final and was entered in the *Ekati-Etok* (a book to record all land cases and other matters in the community) (Mbi, 2019).

A few days after, the *Etok* appointed some persons headed by the land committee chairman and sent them to the site to plant new local boundary pillars call *Etosenge*. After that, both parties were warned to respect the new boundary. The *Ekpe* and *Mfam* societies took charge of implementing the decisions of the land committee as the parties were forced to swear to respect the new boundaries. In case the conflict was not resolved by the *Etok*, then other regulatory arms in charge of conflict resolution got involved.

The land conflict between Fainchang and Mbinjong which lasted from 1904 to 1922 was a workable example. The people of Fainchang were displaced by Alfred Manfeld the then German local administrative authority.⁶ The Fainchang people were asked to resettle at their present site but majority of them agitated on grounds that they were not ready to leave their ancestral land for any reason. In the course of all these controversies, the *Etok* of Fainchang asked the people to remain calm and to follow only the instructions of Tanyi Ashu, their traditional leader. Tanyi Ashu was advised by the *Etok* to take the new site on grounds that it was more fertile and endowed with more natural resources

⁵A group of houses, a settlement or place of common residence, it is a residential community. In the Banyang Country, the *Etok* is a very strong body in the prevention, control and resolution of land conflicts. Since the Banyang people have a strong believe in the nuclear family called *Etok*, it has a comprehensive duty to manage all the affairs in the community including the prevention of land conflicts. In a case of conflict over land, this body sends a team of local land experts to diagnose the cause of the conflict and to report back to them.

⁶M.E.A Gorges, NAB File No. Af 19, Assessment report on the Banyang clan, Mamfe Division, Cameroons Province, Assistant District Officer, 1930, 22.

like water for fishing and forest for hunting (Agbor, n.d.). Judging from the above analysis, the land conflict would have escalated into war but for the timely intervention of the *Etok* from the two communities.

Furthermore, land conflict between Bachuo-Ntai and Okoyong Banya in 1996 was well managed by the *Etok*. Some youths from the Bachuo-Ntai community had attacked and destroyed crops and houses belonging to Okoyong Banya farmers claiming that their occupation of their ancestral land was illegal. Due to constant quarrels between the two communities, the *Etok* of Bachuo-Ntai decided to ask the new occupants to pay a yearly income for illegal occupation while members of Okoyong Banya yielded to the resolution approach and till date the conflict has not resurfaced again (Okon, 2018).

The *Ekpe* Society

The *Ekpe*⁷ society was the main and most renowned regulatory body in the traditional Banyang Country. Stephen Eyong, an ardent believer and follower of the *Ekpe* society holds that “*Ekpe* regulated life in the political, economic and social spheres within the Banyang Country and acted as the community police even better than today’s conventional police” (Eyong, 2019). *Ekpe* in its literal translation is referred to as “the leopard”, an animal conceived by traditional Africans throughout the forest belt as a symbol of “strength, tenacity, agility and vitality”. *Ekpe* was dreaded because defaulters or non-adherents of its orders could be visited and killed by the leopard. These virtues of *Ekpe* were considered necessary for any well-organised society that aspire for order, peace and stability (Agbor, n.d.).

Rosenthaler (2006: 76) holds that “the origin of *Ekpe* remains obscure over centuries of its existence”, while Miller avers that the *Ekpe* society was an invention of communities that inhabited the forest region of West and Central Africa. This made the *Ekpe* society a true multi-ethnic institution with seductive dance styles, dressing code and dreaded mascot (Rosenthaler, 2011; Miller, 2005; Leib & Renee, 1984).

Ekpe acted as the executive and judicial body of the Banyang communities, helped in the spread of religion and settled credit matters between trading communities and individuals (Leib & Renee, 1984; Kah, 2008). *Ekpe* also regulated the extraction of forest resources (Ardener, 2002; Jimoh *et al.*, 2012; & Fenton, 2012) and as a community police, the institution resolved quarrels amongst trading communities, individuals and “njangi” groups (Leib & Renee, 1984; Kah, 2008; Nwokeji, 2010; & Fenton, 2012). *Ekpe* was the supreme judicial body that collected debts; stopped fights between individuals, disciplined slaves and could place an offending individual or community on interdiction, boycott or ostracism (Agbor, n.d.). In fact, *Ekpe* remained the final court of appeal and as a ‘Clan institution’, its laws were unique and valid in the entire Banyang Country (Hale, 2015).

A case that witnessed the *Ekpe* society’s intervention was the land conflicts between Remy Bechem Remy and Rose Enow in the Bachuo-Ntai community. Remy Bechem was the grandson of Tardo, an important personality (holding the title of a Sesseko) in the *Ekpe* community while, Rose Enow was a house wife and traditional midwife in the same community. The two were not only neighbours in the community but were also neighbours in the farm, a situation which led to conflict between them (Bechem, 2019). The conflict came to the fore in 2008 when Enow was accused of encroaching into Bechem’s farmland. According to Bechem, Enow began encroaching from the forest section of his cocoa farm long ago without his knowledge. Bechem states that that he noticed the encroachment one day when he went to his farm and saw from a distance that a section of the forest and palm trees was cleared. He curiously sought the attention of his closest neighbour, who told him she was responsible because the land belonged to her (Enow, 2019).

After long and heated quarrels and exchanges of death threats, the matter was reported to the competent authorities in charge of land conflict resolution. The slow administrative procedures to arrest the matter made both parties to seek the attention of *Ekpe* society which the natives believed its verdicts were delivered faster. Immediately the matter was reported to the *Ekpe* house, in its usual no-nonsense attitude, it placed an injunction restricting anybody from entering the farmland until investigation were over (Enow, 2019). A sum of 3700frs each and two jars of palm wine was demanded from both parties as registration and investigation charges. *Ekpe* in his traditional manner demanded that both parties cook a basin of porished plantain with plenty of *Njangsa*⁸, *Egusie*⁹, enough red oil and “bush meat”. The food was then prepared and eaten on a certain Friday reserved for hearing of all land cases. The next day, a

⁷A male dominated cult (traditional police force) that regulates all socio-political as well as economic activities in the entire Banyang Country. *Ekpe* in its literal translation is referred to as “the leopard”, an animal conceived by traditional Africans throughout the forest belt as a symbol of “strength, tenacity, agility and vitality”.

⁸*Njangsa* known by its scientific name as *Ricinededron heudolotto* is a food crop prepared in a traditional stew and eaten by people in the Banyang communities. It is mostly prepared during festive periods and other important occasions.

⁹*Egusie* is a local food crop eaten by people in the Banyang communities. It was often used to prepare soup and important traditional meals especially traditional dignitaries are involved.

Saturday, *Ekpe* sent her land experts to the site alongside some persons who shared boundary with the contested piece of land (Enow, 2019). At the end of the investigations, new boundaries were stationed and both parties were warned never to encroach on either side of the boundaries again and the judgement marked the end of the conflict and both parties were advised to withdraw the court case which they did (Enow, 2019).

The *Mfam* Society

Another powerful regulatory society in the Banyang Country that animated the scene of land conflict resolution was the *Mfam*¹⁰ society. This regulatory society was believed to have migrated from the Ejagham-Efik communities and entered the Banyang Country through trade routes. To Talbot, the spiritual exploits, and the quick results of *Mfam* society attracted several indigenous people to its activities and some easily bought and owned the *Mfam* society as their personal juju. *Mfam* had supernatural powers, and operating under the manipulation of a priest, could bring untold punishment and suffering on defaulters.¹¹ The use of *Mfam* in the Banyang Country came both as a third-party mediation tool and an indigenous resolution mechanism. According to the rational-choice theory; “parties in conflict will use all resources easily accessible to them to protect their interests and make gains” (World Bank, 1996). In the course of it, parties in conflict swore an oath in the presence of all the eyewitnesses claiming ownership of the land. When swearing to the *Mfam*, the individual carried it up at chest level and says;

As I swear this oath, let its effects follow me and my entire generation if this land does not belong to me and I want to claim it by force. But if this land is my land, then whoever steps his feet on this land or want to take it from me by force, *Mfam*..., do justice to that person (Achuo, 2019).

This exercise was repeated by the other party after which both parties went home believing that *Mfam* the god of justice will fight for their course. As was often the case, the guilty party often took ill within weeks, month or years and sometimes the curse follows the next generation of the guilty party depending on the *Neyor Njoh* (the statement made in the course of swearing the juju).

The *Mfam* was also invoked on those who had stolen peoples’ property like land or those who refused to respect land conflict verdicts. In the Banyang Country, a man afflicted by *Mfam* usually became anaemic until the orders of the *Mfam* were respected. If he did not confess his crime to be ritually cleansed, his stomach and limbs would become swollen.¹² Even though the society was detested by the Germans and later the British colonial administrations, they occasionally used the *Mfam* in court to settle disputes between individuals and communities in the early decades of their respective colonial administrations as parties in conflict were forced to swear by it over claims on contested property.

As a regulatory society in the Banyang Country, *Mfam* played remarkable functions in the management of conflicts. In the Mbangapongo and Ebuensok communities in the Banyang Country, *Mfam* played a great role in the political and economic stabilisation of the communities and regulated slave trade activities, and slave riots against their masters. In the course of such, slaves were forced to swear by the *Mfam* never to disobey their masters (Ayuketta, 2018) and instead sought appropriate ways of responsible protest against maltreatment without disturbing public peace. Swearing to the *Mfam* prevented people from telling lies or nurturing evil intentions against their neighbours (Rosenthaler, 2011). The *Mfam* also checked activities of witchcraft, punish misdeeds and mercilessly pursued malevolent people, making them ill, and could kill them if they failed to confess (Kah, 2008). The consequences of defaulting were that the victim would have swollen legs and could die within few days if he failed to confess.

One respondent, Lucy Mpey from the community of Ekpaw explained that she used *Mfam* and secured her land rights from her brother-in-law after the demise of her husband. To her, going to court was a waste of time since the in-law was more influential and could buy the verdict of the case in his favour. The cause of the land conflict was that her brother-in-law sized her farm land which was the only property her husband left behind for her. Knowing she could not physically and financially pursue a lawsuit, she sought the attention of the *Mfam* priest who responded and buried the *Mfam* on the contested land. Just weeks after, the Joshua Tanyi the illegal occupant of the land developed a swollen leg and later confessed to have carried the poison because he encroached on the land which was not his. He later pleaded for forgiveness and in the course was healed by the *Mfam* priest and warned never to step foot on the land again (Ayuketta, 2018). He however had to appease the *Mfam* priest abundantly for his redemption.

¹⁰A Banyang local voodoo with supernatural powers which when manipulated by its priest, could bring untold punishment and suffering on defaulters. The medicine consists mainly of various herbs and ingredients such as remains of dead animals and rotten herbs.

¹¹NAB, File 2652/1923, Aa6, *Nfam* Juju, extract from Annual Report in Mamfe Division Cameroon province from 1st January to 31st December 1923.

¹²NAB, File 115/1927 Mr. J.W.C. Rutherford D.O and Mr. H.O Anderson. ADO Assessment Report on the Keaka Tribal Area in Mamfe Division.

The *Mfam* was also used in the adjudication of cases over the death of individuals in doubtful circumstances (Kah, 2008). Suspects swore by herbs and other traditional medicine presented by *Mfam* priests to either prove their innocence or guilt. Some of these medicines included *Ntinen*,¹³ *Mojior*,¹⁴ *Ekponon*¹⁵ and their judgement was felt within 7 days interval for anyone who swore to it and was guilty (Eyong, 2019). This system was trusted by the indigenous people because its main focus is on instant justice and they believed that the deities were impartial, as they “give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar” (Abdulai, 2016) compared to government conventional methods of land conflict resolution mechanisms whose verdicts were sometimes thwarted and influenced by emotions and wealth.

The Negative Impact of Land Conflicts in the Banyang Country

Land conflicts just like any other conflict in the world have negative impact on individuals, households as well as on the nation’s economy. They increase costs, slow down investment, can result in the loss of property for a conflict party and reduce tax income for the state or community. Land conflicts also have a negative impact on the poor and the natural environment. They either decreased quality of life for some people in society or, if addressed and ameliorated, contribute to additional state expenditures (FAO, 2007). A good example was the land conflict between Bachuo-Ntai and Okoyong Banya where the people of Bachuo-Ntai reduced the cultivable land of the Okoyong Banya people thus leaving the community with a small arable land for cultivation and this increased life stresses of the people in the community. Also the destruction that was carried out on the fauna and flora contributed to the destruction of the ecosystem of the area (Okon, 2018).

Land conflicts have also increased the social and political instability in the Banyang Country. Wherever multiple sales of land, evictions and land grabbing gained steam, people lose confidence in the State and develop mistrust for some individuals. Social and political stability suffered even more when land conflicts were accompanied by violence. Dealing with land conflicts therefore also meant re-establishing trust and confidence in public as well as private institutions (FAO, 2007). A case in point was land conflict between Martin Ashu and Obi Ndip in the Eyang community where the two constantly quarrelled in 2015. This was due to deep-seated steaming from the fact that the piece of land that belonged to Obi Ndip was fraudulently handed to Martin Ashu by a government land conflict regulatory agency (Ashu, 2019). Also according to systematic surveys, out of about 37 land conflict cases in the Eshobi and Ashum communities in 2008 and 2015 respectively, 30% were accompanied by violence leading to murder, personal injury and damage to property. In the Bessongabang community, 7 out of the 10 land conflicts resulted in violence characterised by disputes, hatred, assaults, mistrust, disagreements, lack of patience and intimidations (Deininger, 2003).

Furthermore, land conflicts had a great negative impact on women and orphans in the Banyang Country. In Tali for example, majority of women who lost their husbands also lost their lands to some unscrupulous members of the late husband’s family. In communities of Bachuo Akagbe and Bachuo-Ntai, children who lost their parents at tender ages also lost their lands to some members of their families. A situation which resulted to more conflicts when the children grew up and wanted to reclaim what their parents left behind for them. This situation according to Deininger forced the women to devise new sources of income such as hawking, farming on rented land and doing domestic help to cope with the change (Deininger, 2003).

CONCLUSION

Land conflicts seldom result directly from any absence of rules or an overlap of regulations, but rather from the egoistic exploitation and intentional continuation of institutional gaps and the disregard of informal or formal institutions. In the Banyang Country, land conflicts were recurrent not because there were no laws or regulatory measures to resolve these conflicts, but because the government laws are relaxed with many bottlenecks. Also due to the fact that the local traditional methods have not been fully integrated in the land conflict resolution mechanisms. Therefore, the issue of land conflicts in the Banyang Country could not be resolved instantly but gradually and by using a range of different measures and approaches including the traditional approaches of land conflict resolution. Because of the increasing cases of land conflicts in the Banyang Country, we have examined the causes of land conflicts and estimated the Banyang traditional approach to land conflict resolution was appropriate. The results indicate that, land conflicts in the Banyang Country just like other land conflicts in the world were also motivated by both natural and man-made motives. Another finding from this study was on the fact that one central element of land conflict resolution, prevention and control in the Banyang Country is the use of Banyang traditional regulatory agencies. This is because these traditional arms have proven to be better in resolving land conflict in particular. The many tools presented in this study can help in establishing responsible land governance and functioning land conflict resolution mechanisms.

¹³Epilepsy.

¹⁴Paleness accompany with yellowish eyes and swollen stomach.

¹⁵Untold misfortunes.

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