

# Contentious politics over authority and control of the Cameroon development corporation's surrendered land in Fako division-Cameroon

## Abstract

Land embodies power, wealth, and meaning, especially in Africa. Thus, analysing the dynamics of land access and their effects thereof requires an examination of how land is accessed, the actors and institutions that mediate access and the strategies used by different groups to gain access and control. This paper is guided by the interactionist approach entwined around the theories of 'Power' and that of 'Access'. We explore how power relations and the institutional/regulatory frameworks enabled or constrained practices by which people gain access to land in Cameroon's administrative division of Fako. The paper reveals that the fragmented and overlapping mosaics mechanisms of land governance and territorial control, have a direct impact on local people (Bakweri)'s realities including their agency to respond to changes in the politico-legal and social framework. These are not just arenas of negotiation but also of social disputes and conflicts. We agree in our analysis with several authors who have observed that access to land is often contested and conflictual as political and economic forces constantly transform land relations. In fact, in Cameroon, politico-legal institutions continue to exist in parallel with customary institutions. However, the issue arises when local actors try to secure their rights to natural resources by having their customary access claims recognized as legitimate property by politico-legal institutions.

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## Introduction

Africa's long history of appropriation of customary lands produced highly unequal patterns of access to land and ownership creating a trail of land rights contestations. Such is the case of the progressive restitution of Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) leasehold lands to Bakweri natives in Cameroon, which has resulted in the transfer of over three thousand and fourteen hectares (3,014.7300ha) of land to local communities, public and private institutions.<sup>1</sup> Since the 90's governments in many African countries have enacted different types of land restitution and land redistribution policies to address facilitate access to land for customary communities. Land problems are also structurally embedded in historical processes and perpetrated by the Eurocentric land tenure systems which de facto nationalized all lands including those under customary regimes during the precolonial and colonial era.<sup>2</sup> Some scholars of tenure governance in the global South have argued that land grabbing is increasingly fostered by the existing socio-political dynamics between actors at the local levels, with bureaucratic influence becoming a key determinant of dispossession and appropriation of land.<sup>3,4</sup>

This is evident in the case of the Bakweri land problem. The Bakweri are the native people of the present-day Fako Division of the Southwest region of Cameroon where post-colonial land reforms empowered government officials with the management of their native lands. Njoh,<sup>5</sup> notes that "successive governments in Cameroon have reinforced the state's power over land, typically in legislation masquerading as land reform initiatives". This disenfranchised local communities where land was customarily owned by the natives and managed through customary tenure systems paving the way for conflicts over land control and land grabbing by public officials. Contestations over land rights are equally exacerbated by the inherent diversity of the population and the normative and institutional pluralism of land tenure systems and the politics surrounding land institutions. The pluralist nature of institutions and actors' results

in multiple processes of land commoditization, embedded in socio-political relations of power and subordination. Regrettably, the centralist approach often used to address these issues is inadequate in treating the complex, overlapping and ambiguous local relationships and practices inherent in land control and access.<sup>6</sup>

Wolford et al., notes that though the state is invoked as key player, there is need to unbundle the state because states never operate in one voice. They emphasize the need to "see the government and governance as processes, people, and relationships [...]. Understanding the dynamic nature of these relationships is critical to understanding the highly variable form and content of land deals. Several authors have also argued that this analysis should examine both legal mechanisms and the formal and informal 'bundles of rights' exercised by different actors.<sup>7</sup> The situation in Cameroon as in most countries with a history of large scale land transfers has been compounded by weak tenure security of the rural poor, an inadequate legislative framework, and a land governance system in flux where decisions are influenced by clientelist networks outside the formal decision-making structures. The ongoing land reforms in Cameroon hope to address these issues, promote inclusive land governance and protect the land rights of local people. However, land policy reforms are not enough to address the inherent issues of control and access to land. As the operationalization of the law may result in different outcomes consistent with existing power relations. To address challenges affecting land governance, it is relevant to consider the local context, acknowledge the role of local politics and power relations in land governance and carve a pathway for inclusive dialogue and policies that reduce inequalities.

Similarly, the progressive restitution of CDC leasehold lands to Bakweri villages in Fako, which has resulted in the transfer of over three thousand and fourteen hectares (3,014.7300ha) of land to local communities, public and private institutions is facing multiple challenges. The land surrender has failed to address the land crisis and resolve the Bakweri land problem. Till date, contestations over

land rights in Fako persist and subsequent socio-political tensions continue to make news headlines and remain a major governance challenge. The land restitution process in Fako has given rise to new forms of land grabbing, elite capture and disputes over legitimate land rights characterized by struggles for power and access by different social actors competing for land access. Regarding the influence of power and privilege, Barrister Ikomi Ngongi writes “[...] *the Fako land crisis did not begin today. It began 130 years ago. It is not a one-aspect issue that only concerns the illegal dispossession of Fako citizens' lands occupied by CDC since January 1947, and which are being grabbed, stolen, by so-called agents (e.g., Administrators such as SDO's and DO's and some others in privileged government and private positions) of the government in connivance with some sons and daughters of the soil. It is multi-faceted, simple and complex at the same time*”.<sup>8</sup>

### Problem statement

In response to the over 60 years of enduring pressure from Bakweri natives, the government initiated the progressive restitution of portions of the CDC leasehold lands to the Bakweri natives in Fako. This initiative which was strongly condemned by the Bakweri Land Claims Committee (BLCC) from its onset as it provided non-Bakweri natives freehold at the expense of native population. Almost two decades after the entry into force of Ministerial Decision No 0000797/2.5/MINUHD200 the land restitution policy is yet to resolve the Bakweri land problem. The land restitution process in Fako has been characterized by allegations of capture, rent seeking and corruption by elites and state authorities. In response to these challenges, the Prime Minister in 2014 issued Circular No 00008/MINDCAF/A14 of 8 August 2014, to bear on specific provisions on procedures to address the malfunctioning plaguing the land surrender process – long processing time frames, financial exploitation of communities, land speculation, land grabbing and re-alienation of natives.

Despite these policy and procedural measures to address the challenges in land restitution process, a plethora of corruption scandals, land disputes, allegations capture and land grabbing by administrative officials and chiefs who are big beneficiaries of the process and end up owning vast expanse of the ceded land to the detriment of the population. As a result, on 22 September 2020, the Minister of State, Secretary General at the presidency issued an urgent correspondence (31/21/SG/PRC) to the Minister of State Property and Land Tenure ordering the immediate suspension of restitution of CDC lands and all land transactions in the Fako Division. This decision was proceeded by the cancellation of 14 MINDCAF orders authorizing the surrender of over 328ha of land on 16 parcels of CDC leasehold land without the approval of the CDC Board of Directors.

The array of multifaceted unanticipated challenges of the land restitution process in the last two decades has resulted in new forms of contestations over land rights and access in Fako. These tensions have socio-political implications as they involve issues of control over scarce resources and the distribution of power in society. Different actors (administrative authorities, traditional authorities, elites, and economic operators) use different strategies to produce and assert authority, enable, or constrain the voices of vulnerable groups to determine access and control over land in Fako. In connivance with elites and notables to benefit from the CDC land surrender, local administrative authorities have created dozens of new villages in Fako, several abandoned villages have emerged with new leaders requesting land surrender. Some of these villages are overlapping with other villages or land rights.

How does power relations determine the outcome of land restitution in affected communities in Fako? The goal of the study is to explore how and why the actions of stakeholders (administrative officials, traditional authorities, local population etc.), negotiation/consultation processes (including who gets voice in the process) and communication patterns within the CDC land restitution process in Fako are filtered by power and domestic class inequality.

### Theoretical framework

As earlier illustrated, property rights are about relationships involving different kinds of social actors, individuals as well as groups, who are linked to each other in social.<sup>9</sup> These land relations are multifunctional and cannot easily be captured in one-dimensional political, economic, or legal models. Claimants of land rights often enjoy a certain degree of social power and evoke socially acknowledged and supported claims or rights – whether that acknowledgement is by law, custom, or convention. Therefore, access is understood in a much broader sense than property.<sup>7,9</sup> This article is thus anchored on Ribot and Peluso's Access and Gaventa's power theories which supports the assertion that Ribot and Peluso defines access as “*the ability to derive benefits from things [including material objects, persons, institutions, and symbols]. By focusing on ability, rather than rights [...], this formulation brings attention to a wider range of social relationships that can constrain or enable people to benefit from resources without focusing on property relations alone*”.<sup>7</sup> Given that access to land is not only about rights, but also about all forms of obtaining access, formalized or customary rights to land are just forms of property and means of accessing land. Access to land can be gained through other mechanisms. They put forward three processes of access to land: ‘*gaining access* - process by which access is established’; ‘*controlling access* - the ability to mediate others' access’; and ‘*maintaining access* - requiring the expending of resources or powers to keep a particular sort of resource access open’.<sup>7</sup> States often play a central role in all three levels of land access negotiations, in exchange for direct or potential economic advantages<sup>10,11</sup>

Access Theory emphasizes that accessing land is more than just a bundle of rights (property) but involves a web of powers that enables actors to gain, control, and maintain access to land where they have or perceive a stake and derive benefits from them. Thus, property is not only about rights, but also about all different forms of obtaining access, including patron-client relationships and other means of holding power, which may be irregular or illegal in relation to some other laws. In the context of this research, access to land relates to instances where powerful individuals can assert their authority and control over land thereby restricting the ability of natives to derive benefits from the land severely restricted. Ribot and Peluso see access as constituted of material, cultural, political, and economic strands within “bundles” and “webs” of powers. They argue property and access are about relations among people concerning benefits or values - their appropriation, accumulation, transfer, and distribution. Therefore, access is framed within dynamic political and economic relations that help identify the circumstances by which some people can benefit from resources while others are not.

Gaventa's theory can help our understanding of how power can either facilitate or stifle participation, prevent, or give voice and influence people's opinion and perception during negotiations for land access.<sup>12</sup> *Gaventa's theory of power* highlights how power dynamics can produce compliance and suggests that considerations of social justice may draw red lines that could entice people to want to challenge power relationships. Before delving on Gaventa's three faces of power, it is important to review the foundations on

which modern thinking about power including Gaventa's are based on. However, a situation of silent agreement or the apparent lack of conflicts is not an expression of a desire not to participate, but evidence of a mute compliance with the situation is both a sign and a consequence of deliberate use of power mechanisms. Understanding acquiescence, appreciation, and loyalty toward the oppressors in the face of blatant inequality and severe exploitation was at the core of John Gaventa's work and a longstanding concern within the field of agrarian politics.<sup>13,14</sup> Given that only a small fraction of the local population affected by transfer of land rights openly protest and voice opposition, it is important to explore reasons for placid compliance by the local population.

Gaventa rejected the notion that quiescence of the rural poor comes down to a lack of education, low income, status and/or to traditional cultures that stifle democratic participation. *"If these are enough components of explanation, how are variations in behaviour among such groups to be explained? In situations of inequality, the political response of the deprived may be a function of power relationships. Power works to develop and maintain the quiescence of the powerless."*<sup>12,13</sup> Understanding the effects of power should therefore move beyond explaining protests, to explaining the lack of rebellion in the face of injustices and the process by which a rebellion may occur.

In the first dimension, described as the overt expression of power is obvious in conflict in decision making arenas by looking at the social actor whose bargaining power prevails over others during negotiations and resolution of key issues. It is based on the fundamental pluralist notion that all social actors, have equal opportunities to express grievances or dissent and affect decisions. The proponents of the pluralist approach assume that *"grievances are recognized and acted upon; [...] participation occur within decision-making arenas open any organized group; [...] leaders are representative spokesmen for a mass."*<sup>13</sup> Pluralism blames the victim for nonparticipation or inaction which proponents argue is not a political problem as such but rather an indication of apathy, cynicism or alienation, or satisfaction with the status-quo.<sup>13</sup> By blaming nonparticipation on the oppressed, pluralism ignores the many ways in which power, and "power holders" use influence to maintain quiescence or false consensus.

The second dimension developed by Bachrach and Baratz<sup>15</sup> is power exercised through 'mobilization of bias', wielded upon decision making in political arenas and sustained primarily through 'non decision' – *"a means by which demands for change in the community can be suffocated before they are voiced; kept covert or killed before they gain access to the relevant decision-making arena; or destroyed in the decision-implementing stage of the policy process; to the values or interests of the decision maker"*.<sup>15</sup> This is achieved using force, threat of sanctions (intimidation or co-optation), strengthening existing biases of the political system (norm, precedent, or procedure), manipulation or by the "rule of anticipation" in which a person or group, whether holding power resources or not, is perceived as powerful.<sup>13,15</sup> Though the authors insist that the study of power must include *"considerations of the barriers to act upon grievances"*, this approach also falls short of considering the different ways by which power may affect the conceptions of grievances and intervene in the issue raising process. According to Gaventa,<sup>13</sup> this phenomenon is a political reality, as the perception of power discourages another person or group from challenging it.

Gaventa<sup>13</sup> maintained that power and powerlessness were explained only partially by the first and second dimensions of power. He observed that when power mechanisms of Dimension 2 were

removed, the quiescent coal miners did not revolt as he expected. On the contrary, they continued to consider themselves powerless and worthless and accepted the legitimacy of authority. Any responses the coal miners exhibited were weak, misguided, confused, and short-lived. Because of his observation, Gaventa proposed a third face of power in line with Luke's ideological hegemony approach. Gaventa<sup>13</sup> explains three ways in which this dimension of power is exhibited – 'psychological adaptation, interrelationship between class consciousness and participation and multiple consciousness'.

First, is a *psychological adaptation* to the state of powerlessness ensuing from recurrent defeat maintained not by the fear of power of the elites but by a sense of powerlessness. Adaptation progresses to the extent that the powerless internalize the values, beliefs, and rules of the powerful and assume, eventually, a sense of guilt and worthlessness. Secondly, *nonparticipation*, resulting from the individual or groups inability to engage actively with others to determine their own affairs fail to develop political consciousness of their situation and broader socio-political inequalities.

The consequence of nonparticipation, Gaventa suggested, is dependency, inaction, loss of group consciousness, inability to articulate interests and a state of moral and political passivity. The powerless are thus socialized into compliance and definitions of reality as defined by dominant actors. Thirdly, power is evident through the phenomenon of the 'multiple consciousness' in which the dominated, lacking a secure sense of consciousness, demonstrate inconsistent patterns of belief which are manipulated easily by external circumstances. By employing mechanisms of power, the powerful may be able to ensure that certain beliefs and actions emerge in one context while apparently contradictory grievances may be expressed in others'.<sup>13</sup>

The conceptualization of power from the early writings to Luke's and Gaventa's three faces of power reveals that power does not emanate from a unique source but from an infinite series of practices. Neither is power a quality or a resource of people, or a position in the social structure, but rather a social factor created, exercised, and influenced by people, and limits their actions. As such, Gaventa's framework supports the exhaustive exploration of the power pressures that can impinge on responses to land deal negotiations in varying articulations across geography and social groups. Thus, in order to offer a holistic account of decision making, a framework is required which is sensitive to power in all of its forms, incorporating the struggles which emerge within the decision-making arena (the first face of power), actions and inactions which shape the agenda-setting process (the second face of power), and the actions and inactions which shape the perceptions and preferences of actors (the third face of power).

Gaventa's three dimensions of power was therefore chosen for its thorough coverage of the different mechanisms of power as well as for the open research approach that it supported. Unlike thick and thin versions of hegemony, it does not rule out the possibility that the dominated may believe another social order is possible. Based on Foucault assumption that power and knowledge are inextricably linked hence the need for understand how people gain access to knowledge and who sets the agenda.

### **Determinants of land restitution outcome: power imbalance and social differentiation**

As established in the preceding sections, the traditional authorities (Chiefs, Traditional council, and notables) double as custodians of customs and traditions and representatives of the people acting

as interlocutors for them in their encounter with the state and other external actors. With regards to local land management, lineage, and family heads own family land while the chief is the de facto owner of all the land in the village by Pemunta & Fonmboh. This privilege position gives traditional authorities power to define 'mechanisms of access'. According to the 'theory of access' power may enable actors to gain access to resources for themselves or to mediate access for others by exercising 'access control' and propose several broad 'mechanisms of access' which give actors access to resources.<sup>8</sup>

However, the malleability of these mechanisms, means that the social fields are neither comprehensive, nor fixed and could be influenced by other factors including affiliation to clientelist networks where power is wielded. Given that power relations influence participation and voice of the population in decision making arenas. The study interrogated the patterns and inconsistencies of consultation across the villages. We were particularly interested in understanding whether authorized voices within communities felt they were free to voice their opinions or obliged to respond in accordance with the position of authority. We also examine the effects of knowledge gap on powerlessness and acquiescence. This subsection explores how power and social differentiation affects 'voice' of local population during public consultation in the land restitution process and subsequent outcomes of land restitution.

### Voice and Community participation in the land surrender process

We interrogated the extend of local participation, voice, and mechanisms of engagement between community representatives (chief, traditional council members etc.) and population in the restitution process. With regards to local participation in the land restitution processes, the findings of the study indicates that, 68.2% of the respondents said the population were involved in local consultation and decision-making processes with regards to the land surrender. However, 27.2% of the interviewees (most of whom were members of the traditional council) noted that the population were mostly only invited to the initial meetings to seek local support and legitimacy for the land surrender application or to request financial contributions from the population, the chief and some select traditional council members were running the entire process.

The findings that emerged from fieldwork helped to both make sense of and qualify accounts that consultation processes were both constrained and selective. However hasty and pressured, some consultation had been held. Some members of the community who had a chance to express their voices concealed the little say they had because of fear of repression. Upon closer scrutiny these dynamics highlighted that some people may have been less excluded than others and that narratives of the consultation are also processes of internal negotiations. Couldry notes that the irreducible part of human agency is their capacity to voice their concerns, but 'voice' is only relevant if those for whom it is intended listens. "*A mere claim by particular individuals or groups to 'voice' without any practice of listening, is contradictory, or at best incomplete [...]. The value of voice is embodied in the process of mutually recognizing our claims on each other as reflexive human agents each with an account [...] that needs to be registered and heard*".

According to the results in the table below, 37.6% of the respondents said the population were included in the village level consultation because the land in question is native land and the community is the beneficiary of the surrendered land. Other factors motivating the involvement of the population was to share information, raise awareness and seek ideas from others. Other respondents noted that

the population were only summoned to meetings when the traditional leaders were seeking for financial contributions from the population to support the process. However, some of the respondents regretted that the Chief and some traditional council members, side-lined most influential people and elites due to corruption and selfish interests. While others noted the local population were not engaged in the process because the traditional leaders attended all meetings and managed the entire process on behalf of the community.

With regards to the mechanisms of community engagement, the results in the pie chart above indicates that community meetings (68.2%) were main method of engaging the local population. However, only 7.1% of the respondents noted that the chief and notables who represent the population during meetings with the government regularly consulted and shared available information with the village. Moreover, some of the respondents also explained that not every member of the community was engaged in the process. The selection of community members who participate in land restitution process was based on some predefined criteria and leadership roles in the village including the chief, members of traditional council, quarter/family heads and members of the land committee etc. These are the people who participated in meetings, identification, and demarcation of the land with the administration etc. the study also revealed that youths, women, non-natives, and political elites were seldom involved in the process.

Regardless of the extent of community involvement in the land surrender process, the impact of participation largely depends on whether the participants can voice their opinion. As Gaventa indeed notes, mobilizations are no guarantee of success. 'For a relatively powerless group, the combination of articulating grievances and organizing action upon them does not necessarily mean that the grievances will merit response-or even entry to the decision-making arenas', pointing to 'the capacity of power to repel, neutralize and even remain aloof from protest'. Looking at freedom of expression during community meetings and consultation processes will point to correlations between processes of voice formulation and influence.

Though most of the respondents noted that they had participated in one form of consultation or another we sought to understand if they had the freedom to voice their concerns during community meetings and meetings with other stakeholders including during the sideboard commissions. According to the results 67% of respondents noted that during meetings the population were free to speak as opposed to 20% of who noted that not everyone was giving voice during consultations. The result in the table below presents the categories of community members whose voices were heard or silenced during community meetings.

The results presented in the table illustrates that people with opinions contrary to the chiefs, community representatives and/or administrative officials were prevented from giving their opinions during meetings. This inability of some population segments to gain voice during meetings is aligned with the 'first dimension' of power. Gaventa<sup>13</sup> describes this as the overt expression of power in decision making arenas whereby the bargaining power of a social actor prevails over others during negotiations and resolution of key issues. The first dimension of power is based on the notion that all social actors, have equal opportunities to express grievances or dissent and affect decisions. This pluralist approach assumes that "*grievances are recognized and acted upon; [and] participation occurs within decision-making arenas open to any organized group*".<sup>13</sup>

The results of the study also reveal that vulnerable people in the communities such as poor people, youths and nonnatives were

voiceless during meetings. These groups are often blamed for their nonparticipation or inaction which is seen as an indication of apathy, cynicism, or alienation, thereby obscuring the political dimension. Gaventa<sup>13</sup> argues that blaming nonparticipation on the oppressed, ignores the many ways in which power, and “power holders” use influence to maintain quiescence or false consensus. This is also an insufficient description of power and powerlessness as it fails to fully explain confrontation between elites and non-elites which prevents access into the arena for some and suppresses options and alternatives that reflect the needs of nonparticipants. Schattschneider notes “it is not necessarily true that people with the greatest needs participate most actively [...] who ever decides what the game is about also decides who gets in the game”. It was on this basis that the two-dimensional approach of power was developed.

Bachrach and Baratz<sup>15</sup> note that power is also exercised through mobilization of bias, wielded upon decision making in political arenas and sustained primarily through non decision, the use of force, threat of sanctions (intimidation or co-optation), strengthening existing biases of the political system (norm, precedent or procedure), manipulation or by the “rule of anticipation” in which a person or group, whether holding power resources or not, is perceived as powerful.<sup>15</sup> These are ways through which power is operationalized, preventing people to act upon grievances. Gaventa<sup>13</sup> argues that power affects conceptions of grievances and intervene in issue raising process in different political arenas and the perception of power discourages a person or group from challenging the status quo. This could explain why some participants did not speak in public meetings.

Moreover, the results show that persons who are afraid to speak in public did not voice their opinion during community meetings. Refraining to voice one’s concerns in public can be influenced by pressure to conform, fear of isolation and rejection. Noelle-Neumann explains that the fear of isolation may cause people to speak out or fall silent in public during controversial debates or when they perceive that speaking up would attract enraged objections, laughter, scorn, or similar threats of isolation. On the other hand, persons whose opinions meet public approval speaks openly and fearlessly thereby enhancing the threat of isolation directed at the supporters of the opposing position and thus the tendency to conceal their opinion in public. However, an opinion can dominate in public and give rise to the pressure of isolation even if most of the population holds the opposing view. Such psychological adaptation of the powerless is further explained by Gaventa’s third face of power. This manifestation of powerlessness constitutes the analysis of the next sub section.

### Powerlessness and acquiescence

As established in the preceding sections, the apparent power and powerlessness of the different actors has an influence on the outcome of the CDC land surrender process in Fako. Power relations also affects manifestations of (dis)satisfaction by the local population. With regards to local satisfaction with the outcome of the process, 61.2% of respondents said they were not satisfied while 36.5% of the respondent said they were happy with the outcome of the land restitution process. The table below highlights some of the reasons why some of the respondents expressed satisfaction or dissatisfaction: Non respect of law and laid down procedures and Long process due to many administrative bottlenecks (11.8%); Corruption and financial exploitation of natives by administration/chief and Mismanagement of funds (12.9%); Poor redistribution mechanism and lack of information and communication with the people (9.4) Women are not involved because its only traditional council benefiting and sharing land to friends (8.2%).

Despite the dissatisfaction of most of the interviewees with the outcome of the land restitution process, 64.7% of interviewees regrets that the communities mostly complied with the decision of the administration and the traditional leaders. Only 16.5% of the interviewees noted that there was some degree of resistance and opposition to the decisions. 23.5% of respondents noted that the local population complied with outcome because they felt powerless to challenge the administration and/or traditional authorities. This psychological conditioning of powerlessness.

Gaventa<sup>13</sup> argues that such passive reaction of people stems from the individual or groups inability to actively engage with others to determine their own affairs. Hence, they fail to develop political consciousness of address their situation and broader socio-political inequalities. The consequence of nonparticipation, Gaventa suggested, is dependency, inaction, loss of group consciousness, inability to articulate interests and a state of moral and political passivity. The powerless are thus socialized into compliance and definitions of reality as defined by dominant actors. The table below presents other socio-economic and political considerations that influenced acquiescence by the local population.

In the cases where dissatisfaction and opposition over the outcome of the land restitution the study sought to understand the motivations of the local population in opposing the outcome of the land restitution despite the apparent powerlessness. The results revealed that most cases of resistance were driven by the violation of community redistribution criteria by chiefs and notables (23.5%). Some of the respondents (9.4%) noted that community’s knowledge of their rights and laws which they can use to challenge abuse of authority. Other factors that created opposition to the outcome of the land restitution include chieftaincy conflicts and double allocation of land resulting in land use conflicts.

The communities and other members of the local population employed different ways to express to overtly expressed their dissatisfaction with the outcome of the land restitution process. According to the results in the bar chart below, the most common method used by local communities to express discontent was petition letters (41.2%) to different administrative and judiciary authorities at local and national level. There were also several court cases brought against different stakeholders involved in the last restitution process and some protest demonstrations organized by the population often led by dissatisfied youths.

To understand why people consider themselves powerless and accept the legitimacy of authority Gaventa proposed a third face of power in line with Luke’s ideological hegemony approach exhibited through ‘psychological adaptation, interrelationship between class consciousness and participation and multiple consciousness’. According to Gaventa, psychological adaptation to the state of powerlessness ensues from recurrent defeat maintained not by the fear of power of the elites but by a sense of powerlessness. In the process of adaptation, the powerless internalize the values, beliefs, and rules of the powerful and eventually assume a sense of guilt and worthlessness.<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, nonparticipation, stems from the individual or groups inability to actively engage with others to determine their own affairs. Hence, they fail to develop political consciousness of address their situation and broader socio-political inequalities. The consequence of nonparticipation, Gaventa suggested, is dependency, inaction, loss of group consciousness, inability to articulate interests and a state of moral and political passivity. The powerless are thus socialized into compliance and definitions of reality as defined by dominant actors.

Thirdly, power is evident through the phenomenon of the 'multiple consciousness' in which the dominated, demonstrate inconsistent patterns of belief which are easily manipulated by external circumstances due to a lack a secure sense of consciousness.<sup>13</sup>

This third dimension of power 'multiple consciousness' which is a major determinant of powerlessness and acquiescence of an oppressed population can also be explained by the knowledge gap hypothesis theory.<sup>16</sup> They argue that "as the infusion of mass media information into a social system increases higher socioeconomic status segments tend to acquire this information faster than lower socioeconomic status so that the gap in knowledge between the two tends to increase rather than decrease".<sup>16</sup> This is because the access to mass media increases persons in higher socio-economic strata inevitable gain information faster and hence the wide gap increases with the lower economic status of the population.

The knowledge gap hypothesis identified five reasons to justify the knowledge gap: communication skills - People of high socioeconomic status have better communication skills, education, reading, comprehending and remembering information; stored information from background knowledge increases awareness and understanding; relevant social contact and social integration creates opportunities to counter various perspectives; are better in selective exposure, acceptance and retention; and the very nature of the mass media itself is geared toward persons of higher socioeconomic status. Thus, in presenting information, media practitioners should realize that people of higher socioeconomic status get their information in a different way than lower educated people.<sup>16</sup>

Gaventa<sup>13</sup> argue that by employing mechanisms of power, the powerful may manipulate information and events to ensure that certain beliefs and actions emerge in one context as important while apparently contradictory grievances may be expressed in others. Reducing the knowledge gap within a community can go a long way to more affirmative action and improve people's life with information. However, improving access to information via media might not always work the way this is planned because mass media might widen gap between different social classes. However, Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien<sup>16</sup> identified three factors can help reduce knowledge gap: Impact of local issues that directly impacted people aroused more of social concern than national issues; Level of social conflict surrounding the issue tends to grab more attention and weakening the knowledge gap; and homogeneity of the community i.e., a homogeneous community has lesser gap. Addressing knowledge gap can will reduce the powerlessness of the community.

### Perception of the CDC land surrender process in Fako

Regarding the overall perception of the land retrocession by the interviewees, the results presented in the table below reveals that over 48% of the respondents thought the process was characterized by administrative bottlenecks and huge financial demands perpetrated by corrupt rent seeking administrative officials and chiefs who abused their positions to grab land to the detriment of the population. however, 17.6% noted that the CDC land surrender created development in the villages are it replaced plantation areas with new residents and created space for the installation of social services such as schools. The results presented in the table above reveals that the lack of clear communication and transparency left the population to speculate on the outcome of the land surrender process. It also promoted the feeling of suspicion towards their leaders. The administrative officials also used their privileged position to manipulate the entire process to their favor. Power and social differentiation are therefore the major determinants of the outcome of the land restitution process from its

inception to the redistribution of the surrendered land to the population of the village.

This article draws attention to how historical processes and land reforms has fostered the Bakweri land problem and creates an enabling environment for government officials and traditional authorities produce "powers of exclusion" and "powers of compliance" in their mediation of land restitution and capture land meant for natives. It points to social differentiation and power imbalances between subgroups as critical lenses through which to understand variation in responses to land restitution outcomes in different communities. It shows that, in socially differentiated populations, formal compliance can reflect processes of different natures: "compliance as acquiescence" for some; constrained hope and a challenging of local structures of domination, or "compliance as resistance" for others. It explores the underlying factors that underpin local views on the land restitution process as well as choices to express, or suppress, subversive voices. It also analyses the vulnerability of state authorities to social movements, competition for the resources of patronage and strategies used by citizens to activate key alliances which opens spaces for influence and a chance of being heard.

## Conclusion

Following decades of land rights contestations by the Bakweri's and the need for urban expansion and development, the government of Cameroon in 2003 decided to progressively redistribute portions of the CDC concession to the natives. Unfortunately, the CDC land redistribution program seem to have created several unanticipated problems because it failed to address the unequal power relations between the stakeholders. The purpose is to analyze the politics of land grabbing and land redistribution and, focusing on how power is distributed and how social inequalities enhances dispossession and capture. To this end, the paper has highlighted some of the outcomes of the interplay of both exogenous and endogenous socio-political context, institutional processes, and power dynamics that surround the Bakweri land restitution. It notes the extent to which collective agency have influenced the dynamics of the ongoing struggles over land rights and the role of the media in promoting agency.

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## Conflicts of interest

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