

Large-scale agro-industries and host community land restitution demands: understanding the land-use conflicts between the CDC and Fako elites in the south west region, Cameroon

Abstract

Large-scale land acquisition has been frequent in most parts of Africa. This frequently led to extensive dispossession among other pitfalls of violation of indigenous land ownership rights. A significant proportion of Fako division's fertile slopes and plains were expropriated by the Germans for implantation and development of plantations. Ownership rights of indigenous community lands were transferred without the legal consent of the rightful native authorities. Against the backdrop of this colonial intrusion and consequential violations of local customary tenure rights, the growing need for justice and restoration of dignity has been a shared value among a preponderant proportion of the local Bakweri ethnic group. This culminated in a restitution decision of CDC leased lands to the Bakweri by the African Commission on Human and People's Rights. Nonetheless, the proportion of restituted lands has not been significant and satisfactory enough to conciliate the expropriated host communities of the extensive CDC leaseholds. As such, landownership contestations and its consequential socio-political tensions still persist in Fako. This paper is centered on yet a more frequently expressed contestation: encroachment into and occupancy of CDC leaseholds by natives of Fako as a whole and Ndongo of Tiko sub-division in particular. Prior extensive documentary review was done which pointed to the locality of Ndongo as a suitable case of interest. Contrary to the general land grabbing tendencies of agro-businesses, community members here are accused of unauthorized intrusion into and tenancy of lands with legal ownership rights belonging to the CDC. The study was ethnographic comprising of individual in-depth interviews and observations. A qualitative interpretative approach centered on the narrative analysis method led to some findings: Against the backdrop of the government's reluctance to implement the land retrocession decision of the ACHPR, the Anglophone crisis was a welcome opportunity for encroachment as an attempt to possess the long desired ancestral lands.

Keywords: agro-business, colonial intrusion, land dispossession, plantations, customary tenure rights, Bakweri ethnic group, ACHPR, socio-political tensions, encroachment.

Volume 8 Issue 4 - 2024

Ndoh Lawrence Nkwain,¹ Jean-Marie Nkenne,² Henri Yambene Bomono,³ Reine Fosso Simun⁴

¹Anthropologist, Ass. Lecturer/Researcher University of Buea, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Cameroon

²Sociologist-Geographer, Coordinator of Groupe de Recherche et d'Action en Milieu Urbain et Rural (GRAMUR), Cameroon

³Ethno-Geographer, Senior Research Officer at CNE/MINRESI and GRAMUR, Cameroon

⁴Anthropologist, Research Officer, National Centre for Education/Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation (CNE/MINRESI), Cameroon

Correspondence: Henri Yambene Bomono, Ethno-Geographer, Senior Research Officer at CNE/MINRESI and GRAMUR, Cameroon, Tel (237) 699922135, Email hyambene@gmail.com

Received: August 8, 2024 | **Published:** August 23, 2024

Introduction

Principal among the direct consequences of the industrial revolution of the 18th Century was the increased necessity for natural resources as manufacturing inputs. The scramble for and partition of Africa was understandably triggered to a large extent by the quest for its rich, extensive and unused lands for easy production of some of these resources. As such, there has been increasing pressure and interest for the commercialization of the continent's land.¹ Over the years, many individuals and establishments have therefore made substantial land acquisition endeavors for diverse reasons pertaining to their manufacturing objectives.^{2,3} Large-scale land acquisition has been frequent in most parts of Africa;⁴ Scoones et al.,⁵ which has led to extensive dispossession and expropriation among other pitfalls of violating indigenous landownership rights of hosting communities.

Rural communities across the South West Region of Cameroon have been experiencing a wave of conflicts resulting from large-scale land acquisition, in which commercial interests are threatening local land-use practices and access to land. It threatens local livelihoods,

transgresses cultural norms and therefore significantly encourages proliferation of land-use conflicts with hosting communities.⁶ A glaring case in point is that of Fako Division, host to the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC). Generally, vast humid and virgin forest areas characterized most parts of the South West Region during the colonial era. However, the high soil fertility from the rich volcanic soils of the Fako Division was particularly attractive for commercial agricultural schemes.⁷ As such, a significant proportion of the division's fertile slopes and plains were confiscated by the Germans for implantation and development of plantations.⁸ They cultivated crops like cocoa, coffee, rubber, oil palms and tea,⁹ on several thousands of hectares.¹⁰

About 58 of these private German-owned plantations,^{11,12} were established on indigenous community lands without prior lawful or mutual agreement for the most part. These illegally acquired holdings laid the unfortunate foundation of what is known today as the CDC. The said German plantations were transformed into the Commonwealth Development Corporation by the British following the League of Nation's placement of the region under their

protectorate.¹³ The appellation was subsequently changed to the CDC in 1947. The corporation eventually amassed a total of about 98,000 hectares of native community lands by 1989.¹⁴ The establishment of the CDC was significantly boosted by the land decree No. 39 of 1946 which prescribed a certificate of occupancy for sixty years.¹⁵ This was preceded by the order to purchase German lands and properties subjected to postwar seizure after their defeat in World War II.¹⁶ Ownership rights of indigenous community lands were consequently transferred, again without the legal consent of the rightful native authorities. In this light, these authorities and their populations were relegated to mere users instead of owners of their rightful lands.^{17,18}

Against the backdrop of this colonial intrusion and consequential violations of local customary tenure rights,^{19,20} the growing need for justice and restoration of dignity has been a shared value among a preponderant proportion of the local Bakweri ethnic group. It was in this light that the Bakweri Land Committee (BLC), later renamed Bakweri Land Claim Committee (BLCC), was created by elites of the Fako Division with the objective to contest and win back every hectare of lost native lands.¹³ Notwithstanding the local and national socio-economic importance of these plantations,^{21,22} the aged-old landownership violation of the CDC has for a long time been subjected to vigorous contestations.^{23,24} This culminated to a restitution decision of CDC leased lands to the Bakweri by the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR),²⁵ Molua PE.¹³ As such, it is reported that up to 10,586 hectares of the said lands have been restituted to local communities by 2011.²⁶

Nonetheless, the proportion of restituted lands has not been significant and satisfactory enough to conciliate the expropriated host communities of the extensive CDC leaseholds.²⁷ As such, landownership contestations and its consequential socio-political tensions still persist in Fako. Indicative of this is the 2007 banana deracination attempts by natives of 19 Fako villages.²⁸ This paper is centered on yet a more frequently expressed contestation: encroachment into and occupancy of CDC leaseholds by Fako natives as a whole and particularly those in Ndongo, Tiko sub-division. Prior to the Anglophone crisis, the situation was minimal, isolated and under control by the CDC management. However, things went out of hand with escalating violence and chaos as the crisis dragged on. The corporation's battle to maintain its colonial boundaries and landownership rights by chasing away encroached natives has led to frequent tensions and land conflicts. Understanding this situation has been the principal objective of this paper.

Materials and methods

Spatial and human framework

According to the Communal Development Plan (CDP) for Tiko, the council is one of the five councils of Fako Division in the South West Region of Cameroon. It was created in 1974 as a rural council and was transformed into a Municipal council in 2004 by virtue of Law No. 018/2004 of 22nd July 2004. It has a total surface area of 4,840 km² and is bounded to the West by the Limbe council, to the North by the Buea council, to the North-East by Muyuka council, to the East by the Dibombari council in Mungo Division and to the South by Bonaberi council. The council has 28 villages, 16 of which are located in the mainland while 12 are found in the creeks. Three of these villages fall within the urban spaces of Tiko municipality. They are Tiko, Likomba and Mutengene. The locality is endowed with a rich volcanic soil reflective of its high and extensive cash crop producing

capacity. The Tiko Sub-Division is host to the CDC factory at Ndongo where basic transformation of harvested agricultural produce is carried out. Tiko is a semi-urban settlement with a population of 134,649 and a population growth rate of 2.9%. About 80 % of forestland in the Tiko municipality has been converted to farmlands of oil palm, rubber and banana plantations. The biggest farmers here include the CDC, Delmonte and PHP.

Methodological framework

The fieldwork phase of this research ran from May 2nd to May 5th 2023, within Tiko Sub-division. Prior extensive documentary review was done on subjects revolving around the conflictual relationships stemming from rural land tenure within the region. This scientific exercise pointed to the locality of Ndongo as a suitable case of interest. The study was ethnographic comprising of individual in-depth interviews and observations. Given its capacity to trigger insightful accounts of personal points of view and experiences of interest to our research, semi-structured interviews were engaged with four key participants. The latter were chosen on the strict basis of their stakeholder characteristics, revealing of their proximity to the subject and suitability to provide the required information. As such, participants were chosen from four main categories consisting of the following: a personnel of CDC as a victim of land encroachment, a neighboring resident to a CDC disputed land as an eye witness to the manifestations of the conflict, traditional and civil authorities given their involvement in land management.

Enlisting of respondents was powered by snowball sampling till saturation point; when nothing different from the already collected information filtered from new interviews. Civil and traditional authorities on the ground were preliminary informed before the commencement of our fieldwork. Following expression of participation consent, every potential research participant was offered fundamental information like research purpose, choice to participate, modes of presenting and accessing the research findings, potential benefits and shortcomings. Prior to each interview, every participant was requested to and actually offered verbal informed consents authorizing our research and protecting their welfare. Assurance of confidentiality was built on anonymity of respondent's identity. Research tools, principally interview and observation guides were employed to investigate and highlight important aspects of land-use conflict. All discussions were conducted in pidgin; understood and used by almost every community member. The place and time for each discussion was chosen at the convenience of the respondent and the average duration per interview was 45 minutes.

Problems encountered on the field

The first and perhaps most difficult hindrance encountered was mistrust generated from the tensed socio-political atmosphere of the Anglophone crisis. Within such context, it was very difficult to go about asking questions, recording conversations and taking snapshots without constituting a target to the frequently local kidnapping-for-ransom phenomenon. Hence, our fieldwork was characterized by uncooperative and skeptical tendencies from potential informants vis-à-vis our presence, activities and purpose. Furthermore, taking photographs in most cases was totally out of question given the expressed sensitivity and denial of participants. These notwithstanding, four key respondents with suitable characteristics were successfully interviewed as seen on the Table 1 below:

Table 1 Respondents with suitable characteristics of inclusion

	Stakeholder	Connecting structure	Suitability
1	Traditional Authority	The Chief Palace	Strong local reliance on traditional land security
2	CDC personnel	Ndongo CDC Camp	Personally experienced and fight against illegal land occupancy
3	Close neighbours to Illegal occupation site	Disputed site	Eye witness to land conflict between CDC and individuals
4	Assistant D.O	The Sub-Divisional Office	Legal land management authority

Source: Construction of the author (May, 2023).

Data processing

Data processing was quite fundamental in the treatment of collected data for construction of themes and patterns required to interpret and make sense with respect to research objectives. As such, field notes were used to enhance and complete the tape-recorded discussions upon verbatim transcription. These transcripts were stored electronically in Microsoft word files, each of which was read meticulously. In the course of this, the color reference technique was employed. As such, particular colorations were given, still electronically, to closely related portions of the transcripts. They were then regrouped into different files depending on their assigned colors. This categorization led to the development of patterns and the emergence of themes and sub-themes.

Based on these, a qualitative interpretative approach centered on the narrative analysis method was established. It enabled us to examine certain cultural characteristics like beliefs, customs, values and the social contexts of when, how and why sequence of events occurred. The choice of this method was powered by the latitude given by our less structured interviews to research participants for description and exploration of their personal experiences. The selected tool employed for this analysis was ATLAS.ti given the ease with which it deals with the large sections of transcribed texts. It enhanced formulation of categories and themes, thereby reducing time used to analyze data manually.

Results

Based on its ability to emphasize certain noteworthy points, presentation of data shall be done in line with the textual or descriptive technique. The structure shall be reflective of emerged themes as seen below:

Land management in current conflict situation

Just like most rural communities with strong traditional rulership institutions, Tiko's traditional authorities still exert significant influence on land management. As such, land is predominantly managed traditionally by the local chiefs and their councilors. They supervise access and acquisition of community lands to natives for diverse needs. Therefore, they frequently oversee fundamental aspects of land tenure management such as location and size of the requested land. A prior deployment of these authorities on the piece of land is required for witnessing which ensures land ownership rights to the new owner. It also gives room for verification and assurance that the land has no current owner or occupant for avoidance of possible conflictual ownership rights. They then proceed with marking of the land in the presence of a few friends and or family members of the supplicant. By so doing, they bear witness to and authenticate the ownership rights of the latter. However, there exist family lands owned and transmitted across successive generations. Here, the family heads are charged with land management rights whose manifestation may vary from one family to another. This is supported by the following excerpts from an interview with a traditional authority:

[---even though the crisis has greatly affected our activities, we are still very active when it comes to managing our community lands to an extent. Before now, our community has been enjoying peace because of this and it is our duty to continue. Our traditional method of land witnessing during acquisition of land offers ownership security to people. No one can lay claim to what the community can testify against him]

Cause of the conflict between the CDC and the Ndongo community ofTiko

As shall be seen, there are two discordant versions about the root cause of the conflict between the CDC and its hosting community of Ndongo in Tiko. Emerging from our field investigations, each version is understandably a reflection of either of the two protagonists accusing the other. Nonetheless, the bone of contention is centered on encroachment and unaccepted occupancy of CDC lands by community members. Prior to the Anglophone crisis, there were few and isolated cases of such illegality on CDC unused lands. However, things changed right from the onset of the crisis. Given the frequent violent attacks against the corporation's infrastructural and agricultural installations, there was widespread but misguided belief that the collapse of CDC was imminent. According to CDC management, one of the immediate consequences was the scramble for CDC lands by natives, especially traditional authorities and other elites. Furthermore, it was a rare but suitable opportunity to take back long desired community lands. Hence, they took advantage of the consequential chaos generated by the conflict and its negative influence on badly hurt CDC to take over unused lands for personal ownership and use. Because of their money and affluence, they reportedly had significant support from the local community and its authorities. This is affirmed by the following field account:

[---the cause of the conflict is simple, people came in to take over CDC land because they thought that the Anglophone crisis will cause us to close our doors. When they saw that it wasn't going to happen, they went for illegal land titles enabling them to mislead others and have their support]

However, local traditional authorities refute this version and highlight the ministerial order of June 2020 that granted two CDC leasehold lands to the Tiko Village Community. They emphasized their legal rights of ownership over the said land and the consequential prerogative to redistribute them to community members fulfilling traditionally established criteria. In this light, acquisition, ownership and occupation of these lands are reportedly done in all legality. Local CDC authorities are rather reproached for their bad fate in delaying implementation of the said ministerial retrocession decision. This is supported by the following excerpts from an interview with a traditional authority:

[---our community was amongst the few who benefitted from land retrocession orders of the government addressed to the CDC. Many people are not aware of this and we think it was for a peaceful purpose since other communities may also pressure the government for similar

benefits. The issue is that CDC personnel in charge feel that giving up the lands would be a sign of weakness. As such, other communities will pressure the government for the same benefits. They prefer to put up all efforts against our community's right]

Consequences of the conflict

Given the glaring significant and vast economic contributions of CDC both locally and nationally, it goes without saying that the ongoing landownership tussle with the community has far-reaching consequences. The following were thus highlighted:

There has been a reported increase in anti-CDC sentiment amongst the Ndongo community. The CDC has for a long time been a source of pride to natives of Tiko and other hosting communities. However, the land conflict has generated some unpleasant feelings amongst sympathizers of those dragged to courts for land encroachment. They think the corporation's reaction is out of proportion on such a minimal offence that could have simply been settled amicably and locally. Some violent attacks on CDC workers by armed separatist fighters have been attributed to this bad sentiment.

Destruction of CDC properties including farm products like banana and rubber. The management of the cooperation did recount disheartening experiences of intruders' destruction of some agricultural products on cultivated portions of some plantations claiming to belong to them. The impact of this is said to be enormous in terms of financial losses. In addition to this, are material and human losses caused by separatist fighters on several CDC landed properties.

There has been increasing perception from the community that CDC is highly exploitative of local lands. The apparent grip on lands, even unused, has been an eye opener to increasing number of natives who foresee difficult days ahead in the community's strive to recover its land when the leasehold of CDC expires.

About 80% of Tiko's total surface area is used for plantation agriculture. In addition to this, the sub-division is experiencing rapid population growth. This has aggravated the fear of not having enough land for desired collective and individual endeavors by present and future generations. As such, more than ever before, there has been increasing pressure from the population to regain landownership rights from CDC. This is mostly through increasing demands for restitution of ancestral lands.

There has been an unconscious split among Ndongo community members; those in support of CDC's legal procedures to defend its landownership rights and those against. This has reportedly brought about suspicion and increased insecurity and violence. A case in point is that of neighboring residents to disputed lands. Information reportedly spread right to traditional authorities that they are sellouts to CDC about access and occupancy of disputed lands by community members. They are said to operate against their own community. Vulnerability to violence on them has been a daily reality. This is supported by the following excerpts from an interview with a resource person:

[---There is now increased insecurity around our neighborhood because of the conflict. Inhabitants here are scared of assaults from those who might have been manipulated by illegal occupants of CDC lands. They believe that we collaborate with CDC as informants on daily happenings on those lands. They call us blacklegs and say we work against our own community and merit grave sanctions]

Resolution of the conflict

Local traditional institutions often constitute the nucleus for

immediate and long term conflict resolution. However, in the land conflict situation between CDC and the Ndongo community of Tiko, the said authorities are themselves directly involved. They allegedly sell out unused CDC lands to natives and do not discourage illegal occupancy. As such, legal judicial procedures like police arrests and court judgments initiated by CDC are some of the measures taken for resolution of the conflict. There have been legal and judicial cases against illegal occupants of CDC lands as highlighted in the following field account from a CDC personnel:

[---It's a difficult situation dealing with illegalities of community members. We have to act with prudence not to turn the entire community against. At the same time we must act with much firmness in order to dissuade others from copying. A lot of our reactions to the situation have therefore been legal. Legal pursuits have been engaged against culprits individually and let justice take its course]

Recommendations for a definitive end to the conflict

As earlier mentioned, it's quite a challenging situation for CDC to engage in a conflict with its host community. Notwithstanding the apparent polarization of opinions on the underlying cause of the conflict, some solutions were however formulated for its ultimate end. These include the following:

The network for illegal production of fake land certificates should be identified, and appropriately wiped-out. The CDC management believes that the production and provision of this document by well protected fraudsters has been the principal encouragement and justification for encroachment. Stopping them and their illegal act will greatly expose the illegality of encroachment and dissuade perpetrators.

CDC should reconstitute significant portions of unused lands back to the community who has rights to their heritage. This will significantly increase access to land, reduce the increasing pressure land restitution and the desire for encroachment.

Civil authorities should be more present in land acquisition procedures, CDC should improve protection of its unused lands with visible barriers indicating ownership to discourage encroachment. Acquisition of legal land certificates should be extensively encouraged after every land purchase. CDC should be involved in many more local development activities to improve its relationship with the community.

Perceived importance of land security prior to the Anglophone crisis

Land security is revealed to be important at all times even in localities where land is abundant and cheap with peaceful transactions. It provides legal guarantee against forceful eviction, harassment and other threats. As such, its fundamental role pertaining to prevention of land conflict was emphasized. However, the conflict between the CDC and Ndongo community was independent of land security given that both the cooperation's management and local traditional authorities reportedly know their respective boundaries. The consequences of the violence and disorder that came with the Anglophone crisis were catastrophic even to normal functioning institutions.

Furthermore, a correlation was established between the importance of securing land and the potential occurrence of conflict within the society. The local strategy for securing land was mainly through effective occupancy. Putting a piece of land to use grants ownership rights to any individual over the said land. Legal land registration demands from community members was said to be quite rare. Ignorance of the importance and legal procedures for obtaining

land certificate were reportedly noteworthy obstacles. It was reported that a large majority of natives did not even know how and where to obtain land certificates, though some claimed to be in possession of it. Furthermore, the active presence of traditional authorities on issues of land acquisition and security through witnessing prevented many community members from soliciting legal land securing procedures. However, things have changed particularly with the Anglophone crisis. Traditional authorities have reportedly lost their control over land and their usual witnessing has lost its value.

Essential factors for securing land rights after the Anglophone crisis

There was a general consensus vis-à-vis the effects of the Anglophone crisis on land rights and security in the locality. Given its importance, the following were suggested as factors essential for securing land rights after the crisis:

Renewed solid respect for traditional authorities as custodians of local cultural land heritage. Significant support for traditional land security method. Since most people know nothing about the civil method, it cannot help as much as the traditional method mastered by all. Civil authorities should be more present in land acquisition by community members. Possession of legal land certificates by everyone laying claim to any piece of land.

Discussion

Extensive land grabbing by large-scale plantation owners for agribusiness has often been the underlying trigger to conflicts in land with hosting communities. However, an inverse scenario is observed in our case study between the Cameroon Development Corporation and its Ndongo host in Tiko sub-division. Here, many natives are accused of unauthorized encroachment into and occupancy of lands with legal ownership rights belonging to the CDC. Before attempting to understand this case in point, it is worth underlining that the concept of “conflict” here refers to contrasting interests, ideas, and perceptions resulting to legal and judicial contestations and confrontations. Except for cases relating to the Anglophone Crisis, physical violence between the protagonists of the land conflict is rare.

The native Bakweri ethnic group in Fako has successively suffered from a series of historical events that saw the unfortunate transfer of ownership rights of their ancestral lands to some non-native proprietors. To begin with, a significant proportion of lands constituting the CDC or the then private German-owned plantations across Fako were reportedly acquired through violence, deception and deceitfulness of the colonialists. The latter took advantage of the ignorance and hospitality of natives to dispossess them of their lands. Furthermore, these lands were seized from the Germans and handed to the Custodian of Enemy Property by the Allied Forces during World War II without the consultation and consent of native authorities. With the region placed under the protectorate of the British, they took over ownership and use of the lands without negotiating with or compensation of the natives. In addition to these, the enacting of the 1974 and 1976 laws after reunification saw the assimilation of CDC lands into state lands. These events stirred up a lot of tension among natives towards the CDC management.

Most of the aforementioned historical events that saw the change of ownership rights over expropriated native lands transpired when a significant proportion of the local population could neither read nor write. They were thus ignorant of legal procedures at their disposal to contest and be treated fairly and justly. With the evolution of time, there has however been growing education and awareness. Many

have become highly versed with their rights and are sensitizing others on the gravity of the colonial exploitation of their lands for many generations. The consequential feeling of injustice has increasingly animated many natives for decades. Against the backdrop of the government’s apparent unwillingness to comply with local land retrocession demands, the burning desire to impulse change has led many to illegal occupancy of portions of the said lands.

Annoyance heightened among natives following the announcement of the 1994 presidential Decree No. 94/125 announcing the privatization of the Cameroon Development Corporation.²⁹ An understandable response to this situation was the creation of the BLCC which registered a landmark success at the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights. The instance passed a decision requesting retrocession of colonially seized Bakweri lands to natives. As such, some villages in Fako have actually been handed back a few hectares of their lands. However, the expectations to see more lands handed back have been left hanging. Moreover, many other villages are yet to receive even a single hectare. The slowness is blamed on the considerable time required to appropriately determine rightful landowners, given the influence of time on human migration. The consequential impatience stirred up among the natives of these villages has been a decisive trigger to some of the observed encroachment into these lands. A case in point is the long delay in implementing the ministerial order of June 2020 that granted two CDC leasehold lands to the Tiko Community. The natives emphasized their legal rights of ownership over the said land and the consequential prerogative to redistribute them to community members fulfilling traditionally established criteria. In this light, natives believe that acquisition, ownership and occupation of these lands are done in all legality.

Yet another noteworthy determinant to the CDC land conflict with natives has been the size of the local population. In the colonial era when the lands were expropriated, the population size was minimal and by far smaller with a consequential low population density. Even though vast community lands were seized, there was still enough land for habitation of villages and economic activities of their members. Today, the population of Tiko stands at 134,649 and a population growth rate of 2.9%. About 80% of its forestland has been converted to farmlands of oil palm, rubber and banana plantations. The population density has significantly increased with a corresponding increase in pressure on land. It’s only a matter of time for natives of Ndongo and other neighboring villages to start experiencing real land scarcity. The advent of such a disturbing scenario transpires where vast unused CDC lands exist. In anticipation of eminent shortage of community lands, encroachment and occupancy of these idle lands without prior authorization is quite natural and understandable.

Not long after the reunification of the British and French administered Cameroons, the feelings of inferiority and subordination grew among native communities of the South and North West regions of the country. There have even been talks of a Machiavelli cultural assimilation scheme of the two regions by the government. The 1974 and 1976 laws integrating CDC lands into state lands were discomfiting proofs to many. The Anglophone Crisis was therefore not only an attempt to solve “the Anglophone problem” but was also a rare and suitable opportunity to recover long desired community lands. The separatist fighters have been particularly violent towards CDC. Their frequent attacks have led to the death and injury of some workers and the destruction of vast fields of crops, many equipments and infrastructures. Many were led to think that the CDC was about to collapse and that the liberation and independence of the two English speaking regions was eminent. This encouraged many natives to boldly take over and occupy pieces of lands belonging to

the corporation. Construction of houses among other investments in land has been effected. Leaving these lands at the request of the badly injured but functional CDC would certainly not be done without a fight: hence, the ongoing conflict.

Conclusion

Given the significant economic importance of CDC, it goes without saying that the ongoing landownership tussle with the elites of Fako Division has far-reaching consequences. A 2020 correspondence from the Minister of State, Secretary General at the presidency to the Minister of State Property and Land Tenure suspending all land transactions in Fako is testimonial of the governance challenges caused by the land conflict. In an attempt to understand the situation, a number of factors have been examined and associated with the origin of the conflicts. Principal among these has been the colonial expropriation of native lands and the non-implementation of the land retrocession decision of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. The peaceful settlement of Fako natives by the government's land restitution decision No 0000797/2.5/MINUHD200 is yet to yield its intended fruits, several years following its entry into force. Fako division is still characterized by recurrent tensions from frequent landownership contestation, illegal transactions in land and unauthorized occupancy.

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflicts of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

References

1. Vermeiden, Sonja, Cotula L, et al. Over the heads of local people: consultation, consent, and recompense in large-scale land deals for biofuel projects in Africa. *J Peasant Stud.* 2010;37(4):899–916.
2. Borras Jr, Saturnio M, Jennifer C Franco, et al. Global land grabbing and political reactions «from below». *Third world quarterly.* 2013;34(9):1723–1747.
3. Wolford Wendy, Saturnio M Borras Jr, Ruth Hall, et al. Governing global land deals: the role of the state in the rush for land. *Develop Change.* 2013;44(2):189–210.
4. Oya Carlos. The land rush and classic agrarian questions of capital and labour: a systematic scoping review of the socio-economic impact of land grabs in Africa. *Third World Quarterly.* 2013;34(9):1532–1557.
5. Scoones Ian, Ruth Hall, Borras SM, et al. The politics of evidence: methodologies for understanding the global land rush. *The J Peasant Stud.* 2013;40(3):469–483.
6. Fonjong Lotsmart, Violet YF. Rethinking the water dimension of large-scale land acquisitions in Sub-Saharan Africa. *J Africa Stud Develop.* 2015;7(4):112–120.
7. Lemoigne N. Mémoire des hommes, mémoire des sols étude ethnopédologique des usages paysans du Mont Cameroun. Thèse to obtain the grade of Docteur in Géographie. Ecole doctorale Montaigne Humanités. 2010.
8. Bederman HS, Delancey M. The Cameroon development corporation, 1947-1977: cameroonisation and growth. In Ndiva KK (Ed.), *An African experiment in nation building: The bilingual Cameroon republic since Reunification.* Boulder: Westview Press. 1980;251–278.
9. Bandindi PU. Tole tea estate as a factor of socio-economic development, dissertation. Pan African institute for development, Buea. 1979.
10. Ardener E, Ardener S, Warmington A. Plantation and village in the Cameroons. Oxford University Press; Oxford. 1960.
11. Ardener E. The sources of labour supply, plantation and village in the Cameroons. Some economic and social studies. Adener E, Adener S, Warmington WA, et al. (Ed). Oxford, Oxford university press. 1960;195–210.
12. Epale SJ. Plantation and development in West Cameroon, 1885 -1975: a study in agrarian capitalism. Vantage Press, New York. 1985.
13. Ewange MP. Land restitution/surrender saga in FAKO division: the nefarious role of government administrators and FAKO chiefs in the CDC land restitution/surrender policy. *Int J Trend Sci Res Develop.* 2023;7(1).
14. Belfi E, Sandiford N. “Decolonization Part 3: Land Back”. Brandauer S, Hartman E (Eds). *Global solidarity and local actions, the community-based global learning collaborative.* 2021.
15. Bederman SM. The Cameroon development corporation: Partner in national development. The Cameroons development corporation, Bota-West Cameroon. 1968.
16. Matute JM, Ngange KL, Moki SM, et al. Media's roles in reporting corruption in the Cameroon development corporation (CDC) lands restitution process in Fako division: 2014-2021. *Adv Soc Sci Resh J.* 2022;9(8).
17. Diaw MC, Njomkap JCS. La terre et le droit. Une anthropologie institutionnelle de la tenure coutumière, de la jurisprudence et du droit fonciers chez les peuples bantou et pygmées du Cameroun forestier méridional forestier. Document de travail. 1998.
18. Puépi B. Land ownership conflict in Cameroon. Statutory versus Customary. *GIM International Newsletter.* 2010.24(12):6–7.
19. Dibussi T. A brief history of the Bakweri land problem. Buea: BLCC communications department. 2006.
20. Oyono PR. The foundations of the conflict de language over land and forests in Southern Cameroon. *African Study Monographs.* 2005;26(3):115–144.
21. Fossung EYW. The role of plantation agriculture in regional development: the case of the Cameroon development corporation. In Lambi CM, Eze BE. (Eds.). *Readings in Geography.* Unique Printers Bamenda. 2001.
22. Kimengsi JN, Lambi CM. Pamol plantations plc: prelude to a looming population problem in ekondo titi sub-division, south west region of Cameroon. *J Sustain Dev Afr.* 2015;17(3):79–94.
23. Anyangwe C. Land tenure and interests in land in Cameroonian indigenous law. *Cameroon Law Review.* 1984;27:29–41.
24. Alden Wily L. A qui appartient this terre? Le statut de la propriété foncière coutumière au Cameroun. Yaoundé/Brussels/London, CED/FERN/RFF. 2011.
25. ACHPR. Bakweri lands claim committee vs Cameroon. Banjul, Gambia. 2002;26.
26. CONAC. Cameroon's 2018 anti-corruption status report. 2018;26.
27. Teclair SM, Fonjong L, Agbor A, et al. Contentious politics over authority and control of the Cameroon development corporation's surrendered land in Fako division-Cameroon. *Socio Int J.* 2022;6(4):205–211.
28. Abah I. Villagers tell Fako land-grabbing administrators to hands-off ancestral heritage. *J Du Cameroun.* 2018.
29. Agbor-Ndakaw ET. Land restitution in Cameroon: a critical analysis of the Bakweri land problem. Thesis, Department of Political Science. University of Buea. 2013.