

# An Evaluation of Land Conflict Resolution on Local Development in the Nkambe Plateau, Northwest Cameroon

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**Abstract:-** Land conflicts resolution has far reaching consequences in most parts of Cameroon, particularly in the Nkambe Plateau. The main objective of this paper is to evaluate the effects of land conflict resolution on local development, and suggest more effective measures to land conflict resolution in the Nkambe Plateau, Northwest Cameroon. In order to achieve this research objective and to test the hypotheses a multi-disciplinary research method was used involving the collection of primary data through field observations, the administration of questionnaires, 21 interviews and the organization of 3 focus group discussions each comprising of 7 members. This was complemented by secondary data sources. The study was based on a survey conducted among 300 participants using stratified random sampling technique. Data have been analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively; and have been presented on maps, figures, tables, and plates. Inferential statistics was achieved through the application of the Chi-square test of proportion, Logistic Regression Model and the Log-Likelihood Ratio test. The findings suggested that effective land conflict resolution that ensures proper land management and development in the Nkambe plateau cannot be separated. This is because land conflicts that have been effectively resolved alleviate poverty, improved the quality of life of the victims, and offers greater prospects for social cohesion and sustainable development.

**Keywords:-** Land Conflicts Resolution; Local Development; Nkambe Plateau; Social Cohesion.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Despite the efforts of British colonial authorities aimed at resolving land conflicts before the close of the colonial era, Post-colonial administrations in Africa have failed to follow through and effectively address these conflicts. At independence on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1960 for the French Cameroon and on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1961 for the British Cameroon, three land tenure laws tailored after the German *Kronland* Act of 1896 and French 1921 land tenure laws, (Ordinance No. 74-1 of 6<sup>th</sup> July 1974, Ordinance No. 74-2 of 6<sup>th</sup> July 1974 and Ordinance No. 74-3 of 6<sup>th</sup> July 1974, supplemented in 1976 with three decrees of application) were passed.

The Federal Republic of Cameroon repealed the statutory recognition of the customary tenure in 1974, passed the Land Ordinance-laws 74-1 and 74-2. The new Ordinance-Laws unified the land tenure systems of the two territories but maintain land title at the centre of new national tenure system. Land titles and leases, were perceived as more modern than the local systems and became the only legal means of land ownership rights. The Ordinance-Laws are complemented by large number of decrees and executive decisions or orders. For instance, Ordinance-Law 74-1 established the State as “guardian of all lands” to ensure “the rational use of land in the imperative interest of national defence or economic policies of the nation”. Cameroon Land Ordinances recognise three different types of land which are regulated differently. These are National, State and Private Lands. Customary communities however classify land differently, regrouping it mostly into village and family lands. Whatever the case, and by law, all Cameroonian customary communities living on national land, no matter how long they have lived on and exploited the land without formal titles, have no secured tenure.

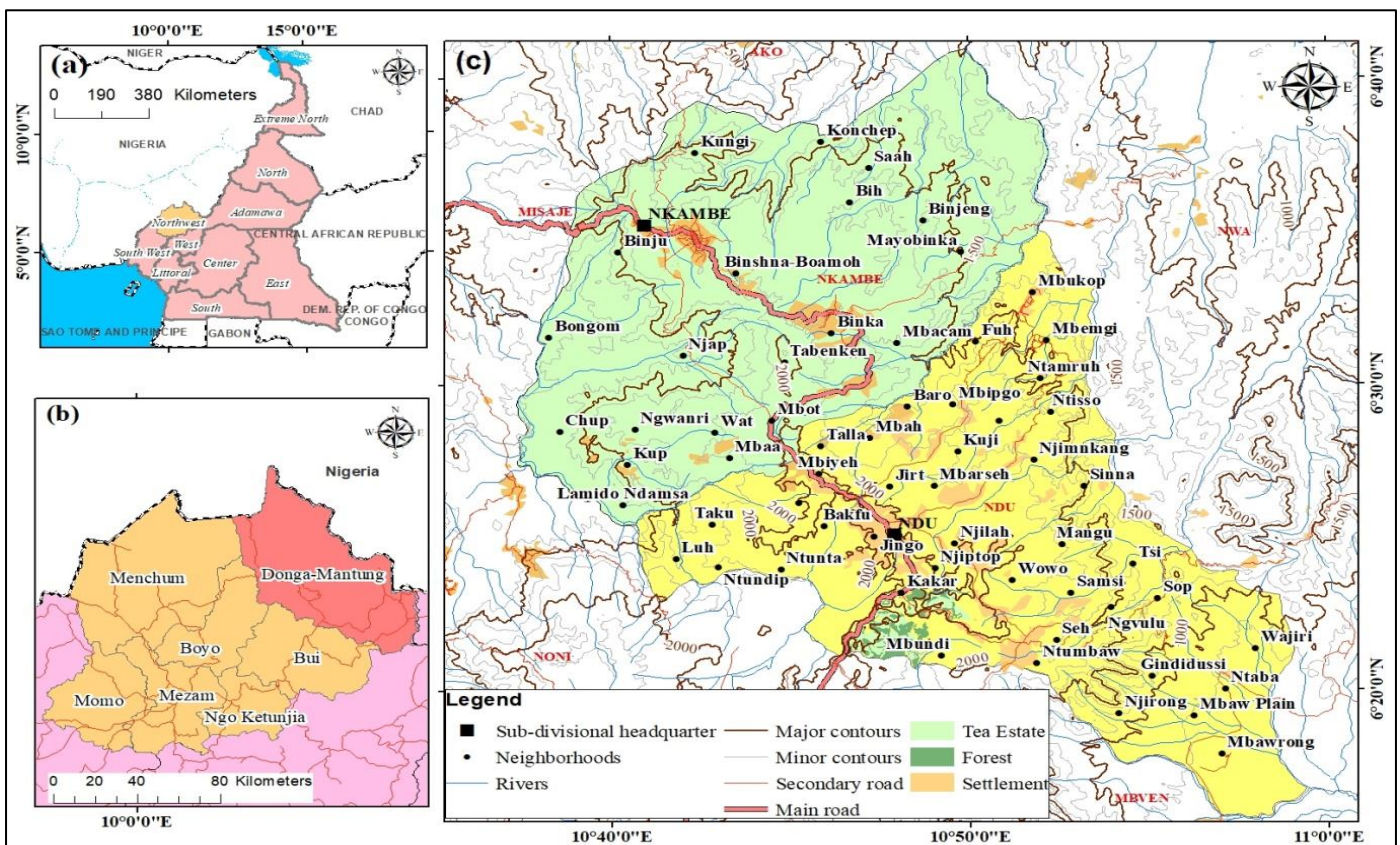
The reunification of former British and French Cameroons marked the establishments of Land Commissions which presides over cases on untitled lands (Land Consultative Board which presides over cases on national land, and Site Board Commission which presides over cases on State land), and the legal system which presides over cases on titled lands (Courts) at Divisional and Sub-divisional levels. The decisions of the different boards have to be ratified by the Ministry of Territorial Administration (Diyamba, 1997), a process that takes years. In this regard, the government in 2005 initiated decentralization and simplified land-titling procedures to encourage Cameroonians to have land ownership rights. However, recent studies depicts that, in practice, land-titling procedures remain long and complicated (AfDB, 2009), implying that there is ineffective implementation of the new land-titling procedures. This explains why only a small proportion of Cameroon’s lands are registered and titled, holders of land ownership rights are more in the urban areas (about 60%) as opposed to the rural areas (AfDB, 2009). Also, few women have land ownership rights in both urban and rural areas. Thus, since the colonial times land registration and land-titling rates have not significantly increased.

However, irrespective of these new arrangements (land registration and land titling against a fee) a majority of the local population in the Nkambe plateau still hold to their ancestral claims on family and village lands. Because they see this as foreign, the local population continue to show preference for indigenous land conflict resolution through amicable settlement using dialogue since the administrative and judicial authorities take a long time before intervening in land conflicts, often when the situation has gone out of control, necessitating the deployment of troops to restore order. These soldiers inflict added casualties during their deployment, as the case of Ntumbaw and Njirong at Mbawrong farmland hostility which has remained unresolved for decades (Mukong, 1997). Even when there is evidence of an imminent confrontation, authorities do little to pre-empt it. Measures taken by these authorities to resolve conflicts are implemented ‘piecemeal’, occasioning their reoccurrences, and sometimes their decisions are not based on facts but on the bargaining power of the belligerents and even based on “lies telling” from the conflicting parties (Ngeh et al., 2019). Even when a judicious decision is taken by an authority, the successor may scrap it (Mukong, 1997) at the death or transfer of the predecessors. The nature of land institutionalization has rendered its access, ownership rights and effective land conflict resolution difficult, especially as some authorities manipulate land policies and laws for selfish interests.

## II. THE PROBLEM

Land conflict resolution in the Nkambe Plateau is a complex issue to reckon with, especially as it is not effective and poses great repercussions on local development. This is so because most of her population are locals with a low purchasing power and hardly break-even with their agricultural productions. Thus, land conflicts situation that has been resolved continue to persist because finding a lasting solution has remained a nightmare. This has created uncertainty resulting to degrading livelihoods and impedes local development. Land conflict resolution is a fundamental area which if it not effectively planned for and managed will continue to retard local in the Nkambe plateau. Furthermore, the reoccurrence of resolved land cases are associated with devastating consequences such as out-migration of mostly the youthful population, who are the future of development in the Nkambe plateau, and this challenges “the adage that *‘Today’s youths are tomorrow’s leaders’*”. Thus, the reoccurrence land conflict has remained fundamental problems still to be resolve effectively in the Nkambe plateau. It is against this background that this paper set out to evaluate the effects of land conflict resolution on development in the Nkambe plateau. The *raison d’etre* is to highlight effective measures in land conflict resolution in order to create a situation that enhances social cohesion and promote local development.

## III. METHODOLOGY



Map 1: Location of the Nkambe Plateau

a=Northwest Region in Cameroon, b= Nkambe Plateau in the Northwest Region, c=A Layout of Nkambe Plateau

Source: Adapted from the Shuttle Topography Mission, <http://www2.jpl.nasa.gov/srtm-visited>, 2024

The Nkambe Plateau lies between Longitudes 10°50'48" east of the Greenwich Meridian and Latitudes 6°20'02" and 6°41'25" north of the Equator, and Longitudes 10°23'03" and 11°55'48" east of the Greenwich Meridian. It constitutes the area covered by the Nkambe Central (which doubles as the Divisional headquarter for Donga-Mantung) and Ndu Sub-Divisions. Nkambe Plateau shares common borders to the West with Misaje Sub-Division, to the North Ako Sub-Division, to the North-East Nwa Sub-Division, and to the South, South-East/South-West Bui Division (Map 1). The principal tribal group in the Nkambe Plateau is the Mbum, whose ancestors are believed to have hailed from Tikari in Adamawa, Cameroon. Their local dialect is Limbum. Nkambe Plateau is made up of forty-one (41) communities, with a population of 120,781 inhabitants covering a total surface area of 2112.4 km<sup>2</sup> (CVUC-visited, 2024), and has a population density of 57.2 persons per km<sup>2</sup>. Most inhabitants in the Nkambe Plateau are peasants with land as the lone source of livelihood.

A multi-disciplinary approach for data collection has been employed for this study. Although, Nkambe Plateau might be divided into three clans (*Wiwat, Witang and Wiya*) as often claimed, their customs and traditions are homogenous. This necessitates a stratified sampling technique. The sample size was estimated using sample calculation for population using Epi Info 6.04d software (Nana, 2018) to be 300 participants. Primary data collection methods for this study included: field observations, personal communications, key informants interview, administration of questionnaires and focus group discussions. From this population, the sample size was estimated using sample calculation for proportion with the support of Epi Info 6.04d (CDC, 2001) as explained by Nana (2018) to be 300 participants (Table 1), was made up of women (51%) and men (49%). This adequate gender stratification was commendable for diversity and representativeness.

Table 1 The Distribution of Questionnaires in the Nkambe Plateau

S/N	Community	Population	Sample	Percentage Distributed	Percentage Return
1	Nkambe	17191	42	14	14
2	Ndu	12531	30	10	10
3	Mbaa	2201	5	1.7	1.7
4	Nwangri	831	2	0.7	0.7
5	Wat	4039	10	3.3	3.3
6	Chup	418	1	0.3	0.3
7	Binju	3273	8	2.7	2.7
8	Mbot	5357	13	4.3	4.3
9	Njap	3428	9	3	3
10	Kungi	2916	7	2.3	2.3
11	Binshua	2858	7	2.3	2.3
12	Bongom	1487	4	1.3	1.3
13	Saah	1286	3	1	1
14	Njirong	2737	7	2.3	2.3
15	Sop	106	1	0.3	0.3
16	Nseh-makop	536	1	0.3	0.3
17	Ntumbaw	5203	13	4.3	4.3
18	Nsop	5509	14	4.7	4.6
19	Mbawgong	822	2	0.7	0.7
20	Ngarum	908	2	0.7	0.7
21	Konchep	1042	3	1	1
22	Njimnkang	1776	4	1.3	1.3
23	Kakar	500	1	0.3	0.3
24	Wowo	3011	7	2.3	2.3
25	Sehn	1864	5	1.7	1.7
26	Ngvulu	753	2	0.7	0.7
27	Mbipgo	1591	4	1.3	1.3
28	Sinna	1291	3	1	1
29	Njilah	943	2	0.7	0.7
30	Mangu	1192	3	1	1
31	Njipfah	91	1	0.3	0.3
32	Kup	816	2	0.7	0.7
33	Bih	2180	5	1.7	1.7
34	Mbacam	597	1	0.3	0.3
35	Binka	9672	24	8	8
36	Talla	3813	9	3	3
37	Ntundip	2266	6	2	2



S/N	Community	Population	Sample	Percentage Distributed	Percentage Return
38	Taku	3863	10	3.3	3.3
39	Tabenken	6401	16	5.3	5.3
40	Jirt	459	1	0.3	0.3
41	Luh	3031	8	2.6	2.6
	Total	120781	300	100	100

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

After the participants were ascertained, the study communities were sampled using stratified random sampling techniques. A total of forty-one (41) communities were sampled for this study (Map 1 and Table 1). Also, a category of stakeholders have been considered for this study, namely, victims of land conflicts, customary and administrative authorities, religious authorities and NGOs through a purposive stratified random sampling techniques to be 21 (Table 2).

Table 2 The Distribution of Informants in the Nkambe Plateau

S/N	Categories of Interviewees	Number Interviewed	Percentage Interviewed
1	Government Officials (SDO, DOs, Mayors, Parliamentarians & Delegates)	12	57.143
2	Indigenous traditional authorities (Traditional council chairpersons, Quarter heads and Family heads)	07	33.333
3	N.G.Os	02	9.524
	Total	21	100

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

In order for in-depth study to be carried out, taking into account all the variables, this study employed both the qualitative and quantitative approaches. Descriptive and analytical writing techniques were used conveniently to represent the qualitative and quantitative data collected. The quantitative approach seeks to yield quantifiable data in terms of numbers and measures that can permit statistical analysis, and measure the extent of validity and reliability of the study. The data for quantitative analysis were collected using questionnaires and secondary sources. Binary Logistic Regression which depicted a significant association between the outcome of land conflict resolution and local development according to The Omnibus Test of Model Coefficients (Chi-square=28.066; df=5; P=0.005), supported by Wald statistics (Wald=79.467; df=1; P=0.000) and the Likelihood Ratio Statistics (Score=27.108; df=5; P=0.007) were used to test some of the research hypothesis in this study.

The analytical stage of the analysis consisted in relating concepts or ideas in a meaningful and logical manner, what is termed concept-building in qualitative analysis (Nana, 2018) and the final product is generally identified as conceptual diagram. In the context of this study, the major concepts or codes that emerged from the study were first of all summarized in code-grounding-quotations tables. All statistics were discussed at the 0.05 and 0.01 significant level ( $\alpha=0.05$  and  $\alpha=0.01$ ). In a way, whenever the P-value was less than Alpha, there was a significant difference, a significant relationship, a significant dependence or association or a significant variability as explained.

- Hypothesis which state that The resolution of land conflicts has significant effects on local development, was tested using the Binary Logistic Regression depicted a significant association between the outcome of land conflict resolution and local development according to

The Omnibus Test of Model Coefficients (Chi-square=28.066; df=5; P=0.005), supported by Wald statistics (Wald=79.467; df=1; P=0.000) and the Likelihood Ratio Statistics (Score=27.108; df=5; P=0.007).

The design was deemed appropriate for the study because the quantitative techniques were used in analyzing the relationships between study variables and for eventual hypothesis testing. In contrast, the qualitative or descriptive approach provided a critical analysis of variables which are difficult to be measured quantitatively, and developed an insight and generalization out of the data collected and analyzed. Interviews were analyzed using qualitative approach, since information from this source aimed to corroborate data from other sources on the effects land conflict resolution. 3 focus group discussions with 7 students each were also organised, making a total of 21 participants

Secondary data were collected from both published materials such as journals, articles, textbooks, manuscripts; and unpublished materials such as research works, reports from government and Non-Governmental Organisations working in synergy on land administration in the Nkambe plateau. The monographic studies of the Nkambe and Ndu municipalities were very instrumental as they provided data on development variables. The key informant included administrative and traditional authorities as well as the local population. Some official documents on land matters were consulted from the secretariats of the Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) of Donga-Mantung Division, Sub-Divisional Officer (DO), Divisional and Sub-Divisional Delegations of State Property, Survey and Land Tenure. Population statistics were obtained from the Northwest Regional Delegation of the Economy and Planning and some files from archival materials on land matters, the Land Management Authority, State inspection Office (both at the

Division and the Sub-Divisional levels) and National Assembly. Various historical and legal documents were important in verifying and complementing the views of the informants.

Data clean up (content clean up and exploratory statistics): Exploratory statistics is an integrated part of data clean up. Variables were explored to identify questionable entries, inconsistency in responses and outliers and their validity discussed to make the necessary corrections (Nana, 2018). During this stage, the fate of missing data was defined. Some were set as missing and some recoded depending on the statistical requirements. Frequency analysis was used for categorical variables as to identify invalid entries and missing values. For instance, for a dichotomous variable whereby the code 1 and 2 are expected, any other entry as 3 will be considered as an invalid entry. At the end of this exercise, the proportion of valid cases in relation to what was initially expected was appreciated and data was then validated for analysis. For data clean-up, variables were expected to identify questionable entries, inconsistencies in responses and outliers discuss their validity and make necessary corrections (Nana, 2018). Frequency analyses were used for categorical variables so as to identify invalid entries and missing values. At the end of this exercise, the proportion of the valid cases in relation to what was initially expected was appreciated and the data were then validated for analysis. Generally, the proportion of return of the questionnaires was 100% (300).

In this study, a mixed-method approach was used. Data gathered from open-ended items of the questionnaire and interviews from community members, community leaders and members of the land consultative board were analysed using the thematic approach. Qualitative data were mainly aimed at probing in-depth Preference for land resolution institutions, why perceiving that promises made to victims were not respected, perception about the fairness of justice, satisfaction with conflict resolution outcome. Another dimension was to appraise the challenges faced in resolving land conflicts and proposed response measures.

Open-ended items were analysed using the process of thematic analysis whereby concepts or ideas were grouped under umbrella terms or key words as explained by Nana (2018), which is the coding stage of the process. The first stage involved deciding on the level of analysis. At this level, single words, clauses and sets of words or phrases were coded. The researcher did not initially decide on how many different concepts to code and for this reason, a pre-defined or interactive set of concepts/categories were not initially developed and concepts or umbrella terms were to emerge from the data. To be more specific, the researcher did not have an initial code list earlier developed based on the major indicators of the study and umbrella terms or codes were generated following the standard process of thematic analysis. The primary documents of textual data were coded for existence and for frequency of concepts by coding for every independent idea as it emerged from the data. During the coding it was assumed that any idea that

emerged at least once was relevant. The existence of ideas was therefore considered more important than frequency or grounding. However, the frequency or grounding also reflected how many times a concept emerged and was a major indicator of emphasis. After taking the generalization of concepts into consideration, the researcher created translation rules that allowed the streamlining and organization of the coding process so that what was being coded was necessary. This stage enabled the researcher to determine the meaning of words and what they stood for so as to know where to code each statement. The results of the analysis were visualized on figure, tables, plates and pie-charts.

**IV. RESULTS**

➤ *Effects of Land Conflict Resolution on Local Development*

The effects of land conflict resolution on local development in the Nkambe plateau are even more precarious as institutions for land conflict resolution faced enormous challenge. Field investigations reveals that the implications of land conflict resolution on development range from: reduced arable crop farmland and grazing land 96.7%; increased poverty 94.3%; retaliatory acts 92%; inadequate education and medical attention 83%; family separation and lack of participation in development 78.7%; unemployment and rural exodus 75.7% and increased tendency of bribery and corruption 50.7% (Figure 1).

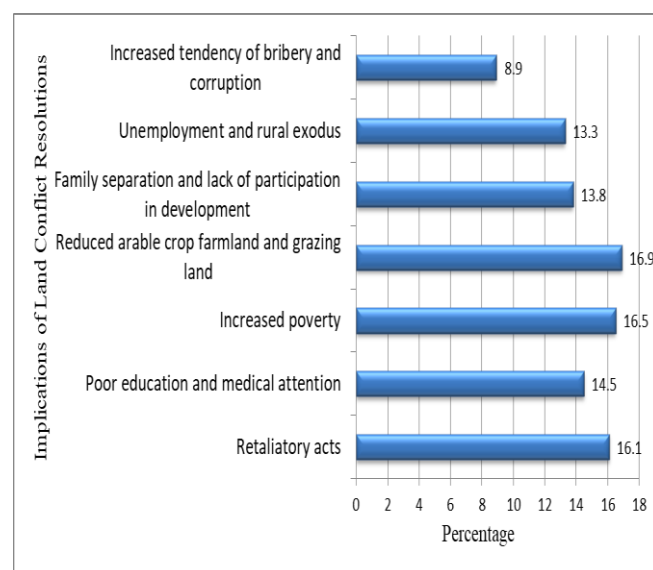


Fig 1 Effects of Land Conflict Resolution  
Source: Statistics generated from Questionnaire Analysis by Authors (2024)

Furthermore, the study recorded that the victims who were dissatisfied with land conflict resolution outcomes moved to towns, cities and even out of Cameroon. This deprived the local communities of their productive labour of mostly the youthful population which is the future of local development (Fonjong et al., 2010 and Ngeh et al., 2019). This is because they believed these areas offer greater economic opportunities and improve their wellbeing. Land conflict resolution has a stronger impact on the livelihood of

the disadvantaged population than that of the well-to-do but it also have different impacts on men, women, urban, rural populations, farmers and pastoralists, as observed in Mbawrong between Ntumbaw and Njirong (Nformi et al., 2023). It appeared that the difference in perception denoted

by  $P < 0.05$  were for the following indicators: “Retaliatory acts”; “Inadequate education and medical attention”; “Unemployment and rural exodus”; and “Increased tendency of bribery and corruption” (Table 3).

Table 3 Participants’ Effects of Land Conflict Resolution in the Nkambe Plateau

S/N	Effects of land conflict resolution	Chi-Square test
1	Retaliatory acts	$\chi^2=16.272$ P=0.003
2	Inadequate education and medical attention	$\chi^2=11.032$ P=0.026
3	Increased poverty	$\chi^2=7.467$ P=0.113
4	Reduced arable crop farmland and grazing land	$\chi^2=9.030$ P=0.060
5	Family separation and lack of participation in development	$\chi^2=4.023$ P=0.403
6	Unemployment and rural exodus	$\chi^2=77.934$ P=0.000
7	Increased tendency of bribery and corruption	$\chi^2=13.198$ P=0.010

Source: Statistics generated from Questionnaire Analysis by Authors (2024)

The resolution and persistence of some land cases in the Nkambe plateau have created adverse relationships with catastrophic socio-economic implications which impede development drives. This is so, because many authorities charged with the resolution of land conflicts perceived it as money making events.

➤ *Test of Research Hypotheses*

Land conflict resolution has significant effects on local development:

Binary Logistic Regression depicted a significant association between the outcomes of land conflict resolution and local development according to “the Omnibus Test of Model Coefficients (Chi-square=28.066; df=12; P=0.005)”, supported by Wald statistics (Wald=79.467; df=12; P=0.000) and the Likelihood Ratio Statistics (Score=27.108; df=12; P=0.007).

The findings are presented on Table 4 and Table 5

Table 4 Binary Logistic Regression Model; Significance of Variability Explained

Wald	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
	1.432	.161	79.467	1	.000	4.187
Likelihood Ratio test (LRT)	Score=27.108; df=12; P=0.007					
Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients	Chi-square=28.066; df=12; P=0.005					

Source: Statistics generated from Questionnaire Analysis by Authors (2023)

Table 5 Binary Logistic Regression Depicting the Association between Indicators of Local Development and Outcomes of Conflict Resolutions

Indicators of local development	Score	df	Sig.
The quest for revenge from victims who are not satisfied with the resolution verdict/retaliatory acts	0.433	1	0.511
Inadequate education and medical attention	0.097	1	0.756
Family separation	0.360	1	0.548
unemployment and rural exodus	0.709	1	0.400
increased tendency of bribery and corruption	0.006	1	0.937
The planting of injunction orders on land reduces farmland, grazing land and settlement land	9.790	1	0.002
Inadequate standard of living	0.323	1	0.570
Destruction of properties aggravates poverty and homelessness	10.600	1	0.001
Work on disputed land are suspended during hearing	0.775	1	0.379
Waste of resources (logistics and litigation costs)	0.431	1	0.512
The loss of traditional values	0.240	1	0.624
Inadequate community solidarity contributes to hatred and the spread of witchcraft	5.449	1	0.020

Source: Statistics generated from Questionnaire Analysis by Authors (2023)

➤ Among these 12 Predictors, 3 were Significantly Associated with the Outcome of Land Conflict Resolution (Table 5):

- The planting of injunction orders on land which reduces farm, grazing and settlement lands were significant impacts of land conflict resolution.
- The destruction of properties leading to the aggravation of poverty and homelessness of some people significantly emanated from land conflict resolution.
- Inadequate community solidarity which contributes to hatred and the spread of witchcraft is a significant impact of land conflict resolution.

## V. DISCUSSIONS

The resolution of land conflicts in the Nkambe plateau is the function of effective (sound, transparent and efficient) institutions in place. The proportion of those who agreed to the statement was 77%, significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) higher than 15% for those who said no and 8% for those who were not sure. The Chi-Square test was then used to establish the level of difference between the indicators. Thus, it was established that effective land conflict resolution guarantee peace and stability which are favourable conditions for social cohesion and local development.

Many of the respondents admitted that some members of the land commissions use land conflict situations for money making through the exploitative attitudes. According to these respondents, land conflict resolution were very expensive processes, and thus, many people adopted the attitude of “*I do not care*”, while some of them simply endure the pain caused by these land conflicts; and do not report their case to any institution. The government through the SDO and DOs, in consultation with the Fons, some notables and invited representatives from some ministries at the divisional and sub-divisional levels enforces the resolutions of these Boards. Research findings, equally revealed that some respondents accepted that they settle their land cases with the police, gendarmerie, and religious institution. This is in line with a study carried out on land disputes and local conflict resolution mechanisms in Burundi which revealed that the effects of the resolution process in felt more by both the local population and the victims (Leeuwen and Haartsen, 2005)

Regarding land conflict resolution, persistence of some land conflicts, and the emergence of new forms of land conflicts, the respondents indicated that apart from the text in force which states that the land commissions’ meetings are to be convened once in three (03) months (MINATD, 2024), the land commissions for Nkambe and Ndu meets monthly, and sometimes depending on the severity and intensity of conflicts that cropped up, ad hoc sessions are convened to address pressing land issues. On the other hand, the traditional council meets more frequently, that is every week with that of Ndu on *ntalla*, Wat on *yih* and Tabenken on *ngang* (interviews conducted with the local authorities of these areas, 2023). The persistence of land conflicts, even after their resolution in the Nkambe plateau has created an

adverse relationship with catastrophic socio-economic implications which impede local development. This is in line with a study carried out on land tenure reforms and persistence of land conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa-the case of Botswana which revealed that vast land are owned foreigners not the local population, leaving the land idle (Kalabamu, 2019). This has been argued, based on waste of land and labour (as they idle) and time, reduction of agricultural productivity through crop damage, abandonment of farms, inadequate harvest and as well, the loss of animal through theft and death, loss of human lives, individual impoverishment and loss of government revenue sources. All these account for the stagnating development in the Nkambe plateau.

Generally, the respondents agreed that the inspection fees required to visit the land in conflict for on-the-spot evaluation was not fixed, and victims also provided transport fares, feeding and drinks to the commissions (logistics for locus). The fee ranges from 5.000 FCFA to 50.000 FCFA and even more depending on the crop type, and the location of the farm as determined by the presiding commission. Thus, the respondents hold that the absence of a fixed rate gives room for corrupt practices amongst the stakeholders in land administration. Therefore, the existence of a fixed field visit fees across the different villages, categorized according to their location in the sub-division is very important and can reduce corruption in the whole process (especially with members of the land commissions).

The respondents observed that the penalty levy paid by defaulters was not fixed. Some 28.57% of the respondents admitted that penalty levy ranges from 200.000 FCFA to 500.000 FCFA or even more, while 71.43% of the respondents admitted that the penalty levy paid by defaulters was not fixed, but depended on the gravity of the loss recorded. They hold that it takes members of the land commissions with good will and promoters of development to ensure fairness as far as these payments are concerned (considering penalty levy paid by defaulters as compensation for the loss and not punitive measures that retards development).

Historically, colonial and post-colonial governance in Cameroon have remained highly centralized. Despite the much talked about ‘decentralization’, the authority of decision-making and execution of projects, have remained in the hands of those people without sound knowledge of the conditions prevailing in affected communities (local reality), since the Ministry of State Property, Surveys and Land Tenure still resolve some land cases. Additionally, there is no real coordination between the related ministries in the domain of land administration, with each of the ministry acting independently of another instead of working together as a team when it comes to land conflict resolution. Government inadequacy in planning and implementation of local development projects such as schools, roads, markets, hospitals, commercial farms among others is particularly apparent. For example:



- Officials directly involved in local projects may lack the sufficient capacity to make better decisions, as most of the well-trained officials preferred to work only in the cities, out of Cameroon and not in the villages.
- In most cases, workers in the fields only provided information but without the power to act and make decisions without referring to hierarchy located in the sub-divisional, divisional, regional or national capitals far away from the local communities. During this time, the local authorities and general population are bound to bear the stress of waiting for feedbacks or instructions from the centre for a problem they do not really have mastery over. The respondents who indicated that the approach adopted by the government towards land conflict resolution has been reactive attribute it to these complexities. This situation has caused the inhabitants in the Nkambe plateau to adopt an attitude of feeling neglected from the centre of power, thus the need to promote local governance in the country as a whole in the areas of project identification, execution, monitoring, conflict resolutions, to name just these few.

While 59.7% of respondents admitted that promises made by offenders to victims of land conflicts were respected, 40.3% thought otherwise. A number of reasons were identified for the non-respect of these promises which included: embezzlement, lack of proper follow-up, bribery and corruption (administrative bottlenecks), violation of orders and decisions.

Land conflict resolution in the Nkambe plateau affects different groups in different ways. Not only do they generally have a stronger impact on the livelihoods of the disadvantaged population than that of the well-to-do of the society; also they impact differently on men and women, urban and rural populations, farmers and pastoralists; with groups such as squatters, ethnic minorities, widows or orphans being extremely marginalized (Fonjong, 2016). These different ways of perceiving the impacts of land conflict resolution have strong implications on local development. Land conflicts that have been effectively resolved, tend to improve the economic well-being of the inhabitants in the Nkambe plateau in several ways. In another dimension, land conflict that has not been effectively resolved tends to stagnate local development, and adversely affect the economic wellbeing of inhabitants.

We found out that a land conflict is considered resolved by the land commissions and court judgments without opposition. Though in several occasions these judgments are violated and opposed. Thus, the government promotes the acquisition of land title as the ultimate resolution of land conflicts. Subject to the provisions of articles 2(3) and 24 of the decree of Land Tenure and State Lands in Cameroon, land certificate shall be unassailable, inviolable and final. If it concerns State lands, the case shall be brought before the Minister in charge of lands, who shall

make a final decision. But if it concerns private property, the case shall be brought before the appropriate institutions.

Land conflict resolution processes in the Nkambe plateau have been observed to be marred with a lot of injustice, partiality, and oppressions on the vulnerable population. Field evidence suggests that most of the land has been acquired on national land without due process.

The limitations of highly centralized extension systems in agriculture pose a challenge for practitioners to adopt alternative client-oriented strategies whereby the various stakeholders can participate in identifying, problems, solutions and opportunities. Involving farmers and extension agents in decision-making ensures farmers' problems, their objectives and choices of possible extension strategies are in harmony with the farmers' felt needs. Extensive services most often are provided on "man-know-man" basis. This has further weakened most farmers towards government institutions.

The high level of awareness among farmers regarding the process of participation indicate the farmers' willingness to accept major innovations in their ways of working with support services that can provide appropriate solution to their problems. The impact of participation enhances creativity and innovation in approaches to farm improvements. Participation has encouraged many farmers to use modern farming methods and farm inputs, thus contributed to increased yields and incomes of the farmers who had greater contact with extension agents and who participated in demonstrations of new technologies. Our recommendation is that, there is a need for the adoption of a participatory management style, which improves the decision-making powers of all extension stakeholders. This inclusion is necessary as farmers need to be clearly informed about how the extension is evolving over time in order to prepare them to take appropriate and timely decisions in their requests for information and advice. This inclusion ensures the representation of the priority need of the farmers.

Field investigation revealed that the effective measures that can be put in place to ensure credible institutional framework in the Nkambe plateau include: effectiveness of justice (Fighting corruption and favouritism, Fairness) 12.8%, support for traditional councils 11.2%, effective decentralization 11.2%, development on the land 10.4%, fairness in the resolution of land conflicts 7.2%, land titling 6.7%, avoiding retaliatory acts 5.6%, Legal education/preference for the land commission 5.3%, promoting respect, love and unity 5.3%, proper land demarcation 4.8%, involvement of municipal council activities 4.3%, adopting proactive approach to land conflict resolution 3.5%, proper and clear allocation of plots 3.5%, leave wills on how their properties are to be shared after their deaths 3.5%, giving incentives and promoting innovations in farming 2.4%, and introducing the practice of two farming seasons and irrigation 1.9% (Figure 2).



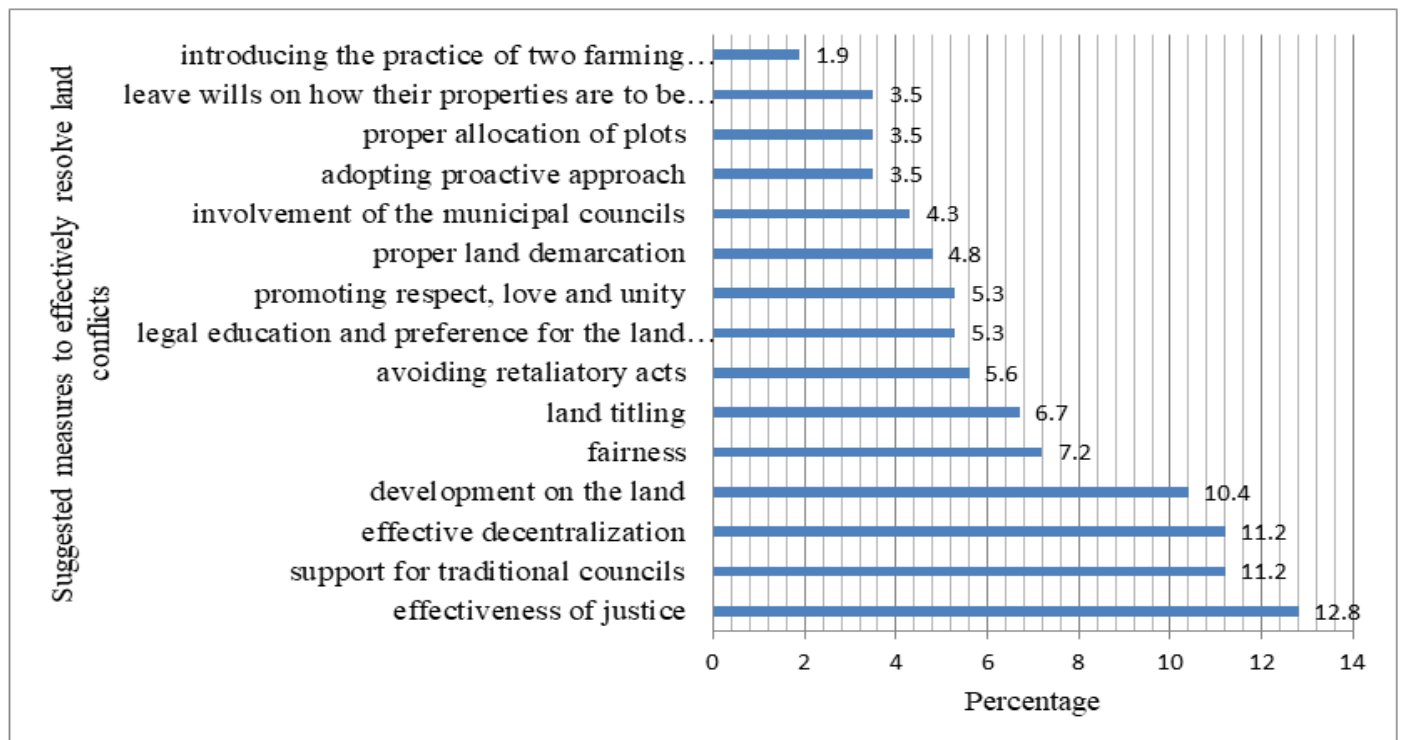


Fig 2 Suggested Measures to Effectively Resolve Land Conflicts in the NKambe Plateau  
 Source: Statistics generated from Questionnaire Analysis by Authors (2023)

Field investigation revealed that where eucalyptus, cypress, pear and kola nut trees have been used as boundary marks, which instead triggers land conflict between neighbours of adjacent lands. This has been so because of the spread effects of the tree branches and leaf fall, roots that draw up much water from the soil and some when felled destroys crops of the adjacent farm which is a potential source of land conflict (Nformi, 2019).

**VI. CONCLUSION**

This study points to the fact that effective resolution of land conflicts is fundamental to creating enabling environment for development in the Nkambe plateau. Thus, it is imperative for the stakeholders in land conflict resolution to prioritize the early warnings of land conflicts in order to reduce the human, economic, social, and environmental costs of land conflicts. This is because when peace and security are guaranteed the local population go about their economic activities without fear of any eventuality. Furthermore, our study holds that, the way forward in resolving land conflicts effectively is for the Government and its development partners, and the local populations to seek means by which the relevant aspects of conflict resolutions of the customary institutions can be synthesised with those of the administrative institutions in order to harness their potentials. This will offer greater prospects for social cohesion and sustainable development. The local inhabitants in the Nkambe plateau in conjunction with government should be encouraged and assisted to build capacity and skills on non-farm activities (transport, health, industries and education) in order to reduce over dependence on land. This will reduced the numerous land conflicts in the Nkambe plateau.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The government should recognize, strengthen and empower both the formal and informal institutions for land conflict resolution and harness the potential of both systems. This should take the form of training community leaders on the various land policies and implementation process. Our observation is that contemporarily, land conflict resolution systems in the Nkambe plateau neglects the importance of the customary institutions as the state propagates land title as an ultimate goal in the resolution of land conflicts. It is important to investigate and understand the customs and traditions of indigenous communities, to ensure that they respect, protect, promote human rights, freedoms and the democratic principles in land administration. Our critical observation is that, the ineffectiveness in land conflict resolution in the Nkambe plateau led to the conviction that any state intervention for promoting peaceful coexistence which is not firmly rooted in the people’s culture will not be sustainable.

The government should ensure participation in agricultural extension services among its stakeholders (farmers, senior extension officers and extension agents). With the problems of a rapidly increasing population, the pace of growth in agricultural production is generally slow due to rural poverty, ineffective farming practices, soil degradation and above all, inadequate extension services to farmers as most of their concerns and aspirations, are not considered in the design of extension programmes.

There is a need of coming up with laws which will be able to promote good governance. These laws and regulations should not only be made, but should be

conformed to and be implemented adequately. Principles of good governance should be followed without an excuse by the leaders, public officials and the community at large. The society, political leaders and public officials should actively participate in governance as this will help in legitimising their government. They must all take an active part in policy making, implementation, and all aspects of service delivery.

Transparency means that governments can defend the decisions that were taken and that mechanisms were created to facilitate a say in the making of those decisions. It means that government-related information must be freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement. It also means that enough information is provided and easily understandable forms. Transparency refers to the availability of information to the general public and clarity about government rules, regulations and decisions. Transparency in government decision-making and public policy implementation reduces uncertainty and can help inhibit corruption among public officials. To this end, rules and procedures that are simple, straightforward, and easy to apply are preferable to those that provide discretionary powers to government officials or that are susceptible to different interpretations. Openness should be a rule to secure public accountability.

After the establishment of the rule of law and implementation of good governance to minimize the abuse of power and corruption, beyond this, there should be the integration of psychotherapeutic methods for active trauma counselling and reappraisal of historical injustice so as to restore missing trust in the institutions at the local level. This is imperative; otherwise parties will stick to their positions and unconsciously force each other to adopt increasing extreme positions. Retaliation will remain, deepening mistrust for institutions resolving land conflicts, endurance of stress, and the adoption of “*I don't care*”. Changing the perceptions of conflicting parties is necessary to pave the way for equitable dialogue, as these parties will develop empathy for their positions, behaviour patterns, interests and needs.

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