

The Historiography of Forests use Types and Implication for Forest Conservation in the Montane Forests of Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem and Kovkinkar

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Abstract:- This study explores the timeline history of forest use types and beneficial relationship of forest, forest communities and conservation in the montane forests of Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem and Kovkinkar from the mid-1970s to 2015. Data and/or information collected for this study comprise literary, questionnaire, interview, focused group discussions and observations. Data for the study was secured from person directly resident adjacent forest in 29 villages.

The study shows that apart from being a source of food and medicine, forest first served as settlement and refuge sites for the Nso, Mbiame and Oku people. Today, forest serves as cemetery for the *fons* (kings), and host shrines which have become conservation hot spots and nurseries which have engendered plants and animal species, where the Nso, Mbiame and Oku also performed sacrifices. These conservation hot spots help to sustain the forest in montane ecosystems where pressure on land and forest is high and on the rise. Due to population pressure and limited grazing the grassland compartments in the above forests have been transformed into grazing ground. The long period of intercourse between the Nso, Mbiame, Oku people and their forest enabled them to accumulate rich and useful knowledge of the forest and established customary (non-statutory or quasi-statutory) regulatory frameworks for effective management of forest resources to improve their livelihood and culture. Due to the depletion of forest and the adoption of stricter conservation policies, some forest activities particularly carving and hunting have decreased in intensity while some like *Ngwa'a* (royal hunt) has simply phased out due to the extinction of animal species which were hunted.

The paper recommends that traditional systems of managing forest be reinforced to enhance the conservation of resources in sacred groves that are nurseries for threatened and extinct species in degraded ecosystems. The state should recognise and integrate non-statutory forestry policy frameworks established in the Nso, Mbiame and Oku into the national forestry policy as village-based institutions for the management of land and forest in forest communities. The government should also empower traditional authorities (*Fon, Nwerong* and *Lanlords (ataangven)*) and support reforestation and forest restoration programmes formulated by them. This is because laws put in place by

these institutions are respected in the most part by their subjects without being forced to do so, unlike in the Ngongbaa and Kilum forests managed by the state, where forestry laws are permanently violated by local people who consider forestry authorities as state agents who are depriving them of their right of tenure and usufruct. This would likely help to maintain biodiversity and knowledge attached to it, which is gradually disappearing due to forest depletion.

Keywords:- *Historiography, Forest use Types, Implication, Conservation, and Montane Forest.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Since human history, a win-win inextricable and interdependent relationship exists between the natural milieu including forest and forest people including communities living adjacent the montane forests of Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem and Kovkinkar. The importance of vegetation in general and forest in particular to man cannot be underestimated. Vegetation constitutes a principal base for security, settlement, source of food, building and industrial raw materials, fuel wood, medicine and abode of the gods (spirits). The livelihoods and cultures of the Nso, Mbiame and Oku people largely depend on the forest. For this reason, forest is conserved to sustain livelihood and cultural practices linked to forest, host settlement, and provide security to forest people. Also, forest preserved for cultural reasons help to maintain biodiversity and ensure the sustainability of threatened forest species. In the Nso, Mbiame and Oku fonderies, this relationship dates back to about 1394 when the Nso Dynasty from which the above fonderies originate was founded by Yaa Ngonso (Nso Heritage Association 2007, and Lamnso Literate language Organisation, 2010). An inextricable relationship exists between forest and livelihood activities, customs, beliefs, practices, social behaviours and gods (spirits) of forest people including the Nso, Mbiame and Oku. Forest plays important roles in marriages, dances, rituals, sacrifices, taboos, myths and cultural practices in Nso and Oku. This research paper explores the historical beneficial relationship that exists between forest and forest people resident near the montane forests of Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem and Kovkinkar on the one hand, and forest conservation on the other.

II. LOCATION OF THE STUDY AREA

The Ngongbaa and Kilum Forests are located on the west of Bui Division on the Bamenda Highlands of Cameroon. Ngongbaa Forest also known as Ngongbaa Kov is located on the east-facing slopes of Mount Oku between latitudes $N6^{\circ}11'$ and $N6^{\circ}14'$ north of the equator and between longitudes $E 10^{\circ}31'$ and $E 10^{\circ}35' 50''$ east of the Greenwich meridian. The Kilum (Oku section of the Oku Mountain Forest) is found on the western half of the Mountain between latitude $6^{\circ} 10' 0'' N$ and $N 6^{\circ}14' 0'' N$. of the Equator and between longitudes $10^{\circ} 28' 0'' E$ and $10^{\circ} 34' 0''$ east of the Greenwich meridian as depicted on Figure 1. The

Ngongbaa Forest parallels the Kilum forest on the west face of the Oku Mountain (3011m). The Kovifem and Kovkinkar sacred forests on their part are found on the eastern part of Bui Division on the Bansa Plateau. The Kovifem sacred forest is located in Nkum subdivision between latitude $N06^{\circ}16'29''$ and $N06^{\circ}18'0''$ and longitudes $E010^{\circ}46'15''$ and $E010^{\circ}47'18''$ and extends to the summit of the hill in Kovifem forest at an elevation of 2147m (GPS data, 2012). Meanwhile the Kovkinkar sacred forest is located in Mbven Sub-division some 11km southeast of Kovifem forest between latitudes $N6^{\circ} 12'0''$ and $N6^{\circ} 13'0''$ north of the equator and longitudes $E10^{\circ}47'$ and $E10^{\circ}54'0''$ east of the Greenwich Meridian.

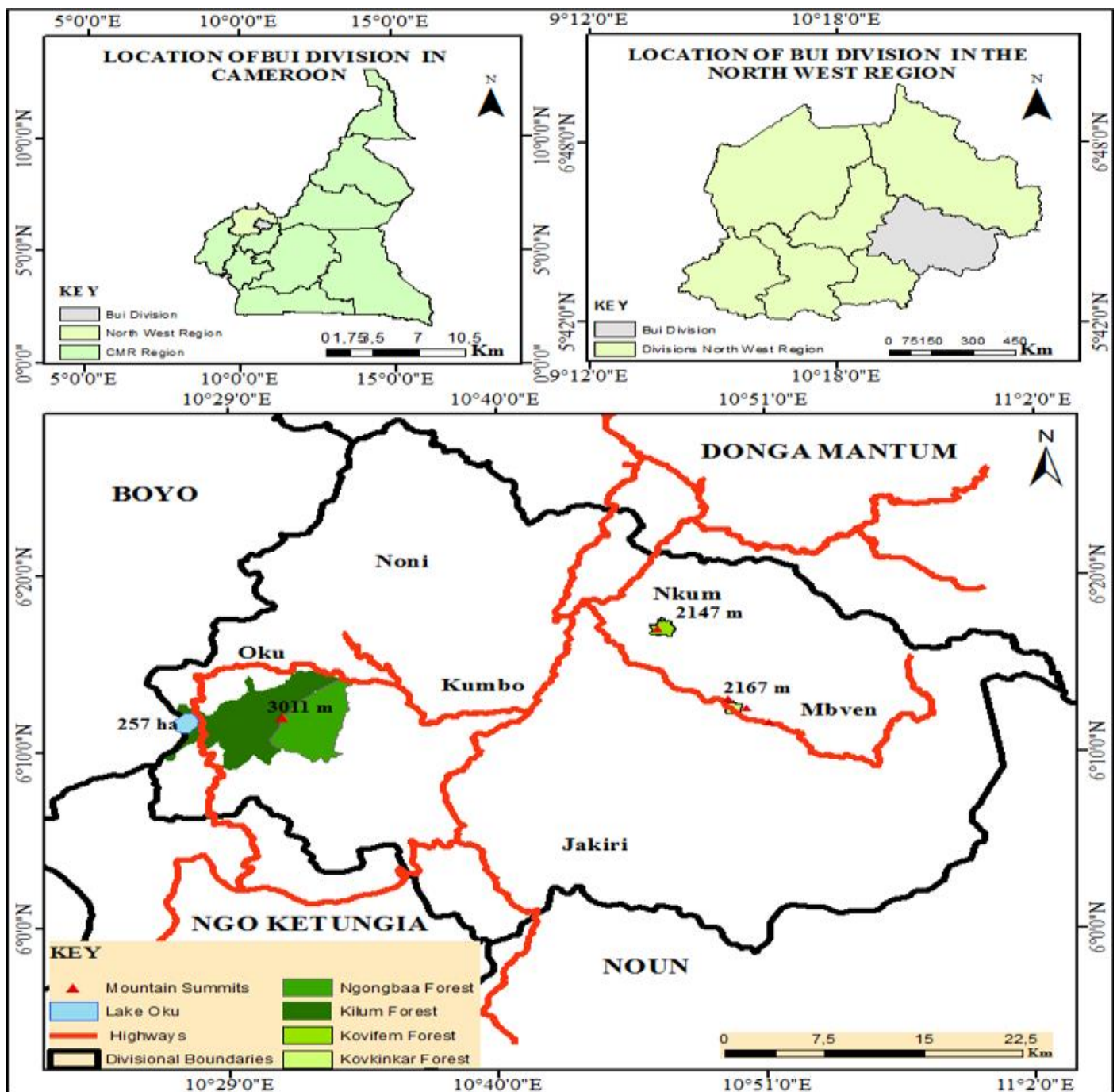


Fig 1 The Location of Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem and Kovkinkar forests in Bui Division
Source: National Institute of Cartography, LANDSAT Image 2015, and GPS databy Tatah Jean-Louis Banadzem

III. RESEARCH METHOD

Data and/or information collected for this study comprise literary, interview, field observation and focused group discussions data. In the field, information was sort from persons directly involved in the management of these forests. Based on the above criteria, survey was conducted in 29 villages as follows, 11 villages in Ngongbaa Forest area, 11 villages in the Kilum forest area, 4 villages in Kovifem forest area and 3 villages in Kovkinkar forest area. In Ngongbaa Forest area, villages included Simonkov, Fonmboh, Mbontovi, Buh, Tadu, Mbonyar Taashem, Vekovi, and Ntur. In the Kilum area, the study villages included Lang, Mbockevu, Mbockejikijem, Jikijem, Ngashie, Keyon, Kissotin, Manchok, Ngemsiba, Ngenkei I and Ngenkei 11. Study villages in Kovifem, forest area included Kovifem (Shuukov), Ndzevru, and Waikov. For the Kovkinkar forest area, study villages included Rifem, Tamborong and Shukov (Sangere). A questionnaire was used to collect qualitative (descriptive survey) data through a systematic random sampling (SRS) procedure. The first household was chosen randomly and one person of age 20 years plus was interviewed in every tenth households of the year 2005 household population. The interviewee who fulfilled the admissibility criteria were chosen on the basis that they have lived in the area for a long time and have good knowledge of activities practised there. Interview data was collected from the Fons of Nso, Oku and Mbiame, landlords, village heads (*afaay and ashuufaay*), *manjong* group leaders, and landlords (*ataangven*) who perform sacrifices in the shrines. Guided visits were affected to 40 shrines (sacred groves) in the company of landlords who own the shrines or authorisation from them or the *afon* (kings). 21 traditional medical practitioners were also interviewed to collect data on the sources and uses of medicine. Information was also gathered from forest beekeepers, carvers, hunters, mushroom harvesters, and wild honey. Data was also procured through observation and personal communication (pers.com.). The cumulative responses of respondents and other data are presented on tables, photos, plates, graphs and figures.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings from oral history show an inextricable link between the montane forests of Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem and Kovkinkar, and the Nso, Mbiame, Oku a people on the one hand, and security, settlement, livelihood, culture, and conservation on the other. Information gleaned from literature and field survey revealed an intricate blood relationship between the Nso, Oku and Mbiame people.

A. Timeline Relationship between the Nso, Mbiame and Oku People and their Forest before the Mid-1970s

Oral and literary history indicates that the Nso, Oku and Mbiame people were once an integral part of a larger Nso Fondom. The Nso Fondom was founded by Yaa Ngòn Nso' in 1394 (Nso Heritage Association 2007, and Lamnso Literate language Organisation, 2010). The Nso and Mbiame speak *Lamnso* (Nso language) while the Oku people speak *Emblam Ebkuo*, a language inherited from the Ntur clan

(indigenous Oku people) when the Nso prince over ran the Ntur after he separating from the Nso. In recognition of Yaa Ngonso (Ngòn Nso') her statue is erected at the courtyard of the Nso Palace, Kimbo as depicted on Photo 1. An annual cultural festival code-named, "Ngnnso Cultural Festival" is also organised annually in her honour. The Nso, are descendants of Kimi, the fon who ruled Rifem on the Adamawa Plateau many centuries ago. Kimi had many wives amongst who was Yay who gave birth to three children who were Ngòn Nso', Nchare and Mfoombam (Fanso, 1989). Corroborating this view, Ngaàlim Soh Elias (per.com.) added that the traditional authorities of Mbiame gave him the title "Nformé, Kimih", in memory of their ancestral origin, Kimih in Tikari some 600 years ago. In the views of Chilver and Kaberry (1960), Ngonso did not leave Rifem with the intention of founding a tribe but circumstances forced her to. The Oral tradition concerning the foundation of Nso holds that Kimi, the fon who ruled Rifem, had many wives including Yay, who gave birth three children, Ngonso who was a woman and her two brothers, Ncharé and Mfoombam.



Photo 1: The statue of Yaa Ngonso (Ngòn Nso') at the courtyard of the Nso Palace

Photo by Tatah Jean-Louis Banadzem, March 15, 2015 at 6:11 P.M

Before Kimi died, he had groomed the son of Yay Ncharé to succeed him. However when the time came for Ncharé to take over, he was bypassed in favour of his half-brother called Mbwandu. For fear of humiliation, Ncharé decided to leave Rifem for another destination. He then hinted his younger brother, Mbam and elder sister, Ngon Nso. They both decided that they will follow him but Ncharé did not want Ngonso to follow him, so he left with his brother in the night. When Ngonso knew their plan, she, her husband, and servants decided to follow them. For several days, they followed Ncharé and the brother. Ncharé

and his group came to a bridge over the stream known as Mbam. When they saw a group coming and ascertained that it was Ngonso and her husband following him, he destroyed the bridge. When she reached the stream and was unable to cross the stream, she and her family followed the valley upstream and settled among the people of the plain in the area now known as Mbonso. From Mbonso, she climbed up to a place now known as Kovifem where they met the *Visalé* people. This small group of people (*Visalé*) of which thirty were males warmly received them. The *Visalé* are the indigenous people of Nso, known as *Mntar Nso* (literally the Thirty Nso People). *Mntar Nso* refers to the 30 males that Ngòn Nso' and her family met when they arrived Kovifem. The son of Ngòn Nso' later on and during her lifetime succeeded to the throne of the *Visalé* thereby integrating the two people to become anucleus (one ethnic group), Nso. The *Visalé* voluntarily offered their allegiance to the Ngon Nso's family in return for certain privileges. Following the agreement that they reached with the Nso Royal Clan (*Duy*) at Kovifem, the *Mntar* are landlords who are in charge of pouring libations (performing sacrifices) on land while the *Duy* play the administrative role. Meanwhile, for a prince from the *Duy* clan to be crowned fon in Nso, his mother (queen mother), the fon's wife must originate from the *Mntar* Clan. Enchaw (2009) describes the *Mntar Nso* as the real Nso people or the people of the earth. This author adds that *Mntar* in the language of the Widikum signifies 30 implying that the *Mntar* in Nso may likely be part of the Widikum family that is considered as the indigenous people of the North West Region of Cameroon. When Kovifem was brutally ransacked about the middle of the 18th century possibly by Gawolbe's Ba'ni, the dynasty took refuge for some time at Taavisa, where the reigning fon, believed to have been Ndzefon, his sons and followers went

Later on, frequent attacks on Kovifem probably by Fulani and the later alliance of Wiyaa chiefdom (a former ally of Nso in her raids against various Wimbun groups) with *Bara' nyam* that made Seembun to seek for a safer place for his palace in Kimbo (Kumbo) where they met with the indigenous *Mntar* Clan and *Vedo'o* Clan of Rùn which later moved to Kitiwum. (Lantum, 2011) contends that the Nso and Oku people who lived together in Kovifem since 1394 transferred the Nso capital of Kovifem to the Kimbo site in the 1780s after the radical sacking of the Nso community and their king by the "*Barrah Nyam*" (raiders on horseback or the mounted raiders). The transfer of the capital did not mean complete abandonment of the relic (old palace) at Kovifem. In spite of the attacks in Kovifem, the Nso Palace in Kovifem sacred forest has survived till date as depicted on photo 2.

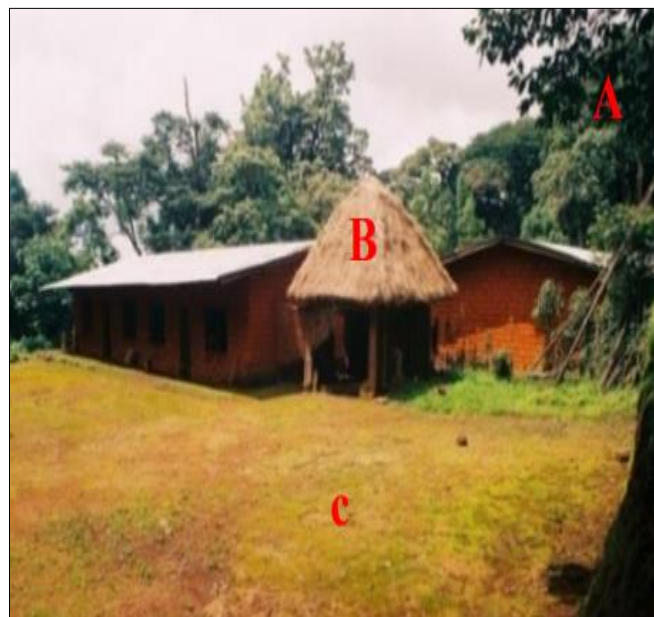


Photo 2: The Nso Old Palace at Kovifem Sacred Forest
A Forest at the back yard of the Kovifem Palace (Ntoh Nso).

B=some of the houses at the frontage of the palace.

C= The courtyard of the palace

Photo by Tatah Jean-Louis Banadzem, August 15, 2012 at 10: 25 a.m

Up to the reign of Seem II (1875-1907), Kovifem was still inhabited by some of the *Kfém se fon* (eldest wives of the fon). The forest backyard of this Palace hosts the burial sites of 13 Fons of Nso, and the compounds of the two secret cults, *Nwerong* and *Ngiri*, and the Nfuh House. Apart from serving as the settlement and refuge ground, the preservation of the relict Kovifem forest has given it the status of a conservation and biodiversity hot spot that acts as a reservoir for endemic and endangered species of biodiversity. When the new capital was attacked and destroyed by Barah nyam between 1805 and 1815, Seem I who had sought refuge in the Nun marshes of Papia (Baba), now in Bamum land did not stay there for long due to the Bamum attacks which forced his escape to the Ngongbaa Forest (also Ngongbaa kov) on the east face of mount Oku where he, his family and a few notables remained until the raids ceased. From Ngongbaa he returned to Kimbo where he rebuilt his new capital that was completely wrecked by Gawolbe's Ba'ni raiders, the ancestors of the present Balis. The Kimbo Palace has survived as the Nso Capital, with the Kovifem and Mantum Palaces as satellite palaces.

The Nso paramount Fomdom occupies more than 75 percent of Bui Division with a surface area of approximately 2300 square Kilometres. Its headquarters, Kimbo also Known as Kumbo, is also the capital of Bui Division. The various chiefdoms that make up the Nso Paramount Fomdom include Mbiame to the north east, Oku to the south west, the chiefdoms of Nderem, Ddzeen, and Kiluun to the southeast, the chiefdom of Nseh to the north and the chiefdom of Nkar to the south and Noni chiefdoms to the west and northwest. This embracing attribute of the Nso since their pact with the *Visalé* made the Nsoto integrate the Ibos since 1960 that have a chief who pays allegiance to the traditional authority

in Nso. The Nso paramount fondom shares boundaries with Bum Fondom to the North, Kom to the west, Ndop Plain chiefdoms (Babungo, Babessi, Baba and Bangolan) to the southwest, Bamum sultanate to the southeast and the Wimbun to the east as depicted on Figure 1. Thereafter, in Kimbo a conflict erupted in the Nso royal family where one of the princes who committed an act of felony in the 19th century probably during the reigns of either fon Fomukong, (1805-1840), Tamanjo (1840-1875), Sermbum or Sehm II (*Kinforkir kee chison*, (1875-1908), Mapiri, (1908-1910) or Fon Ngah Bifon I (1910-1947) and was excommunicated. Lantum, (1985 and Enchaw, 2009) stressed that the conflict between the Nso princes actually took place in 1892, resulting in the breakaway of the princes that founded the Fondoms of Oku and Mbiame. When the Mbiame people left Nso, they migrated east and settled in Kovkinkar forest, while the Oku went west. After several stops, the Oku people finally settled at Bô, a location in the neighbourhood of Mbam village, north of Oku (Ntaih, (2012). Later on, the Oku relocated to the present site at Elak that developed into what is now referred to as Oku Subdivision with headquarter at Elak. We gathered in the field that the banished Nso prince went and settled at Saanyar for some time and later on for fear of persecution, by the *nwerong* of Nso, sought refuge temporally in Mbai compartment of Ngongbaa and finally settled in Oku with Ntur people where he eventually succeeded to the throne of the Ntur Clan. Oral History in Oku claim that the Nso prince who migrated to Oku was Tatah due to a succession conflict with his brothers was accompanied by his mother *Yeefon*, who died on the way and was buried at the hill side above Kwanso on the Oku Mountain referred to as *Yeefon ebkven or ebkwa'ak*, meaning, *Yeefon Hill*.

The Ntur territory and people were later renamed *Vikuulav* (which literally mean wall scrubbers after an incident that occurred in Nso where people from Oku invited to daub the walls of a house with daub scrapped off the mud angered by the non-entertainment of those who participated in the daubing exercise). This population has developed to form the present Oku state and people different from Nso people with whom they share a common ancestry. The Mbiame people who settled at Milai in Kovkinkar forest relocated in 1962 to the present grassland site at Rifem (Kunkov) (Ngaalim Elias alias Mfome Kimi, pers. com.). While the Mbiame have maintained *Lamnso* (Nso Language) as their language, the Oku people have adopted *Eblam Ebkwuo* (Oku Language) which is a mélange of the Nso and Ntur vocabularies. Due to its vast territory and large population, the Fon of Nso plays a pivotal role in Bui since colonial times until date. This led the Cameroon Government to designate the Fon of Nso as the paramount ruler of Bui Division as per Decree No.77/245 of July 15, 1977. The Nsaw Division that was created following Decree No. 66/DF/431 of August 26, 1966 was changed to Bui Division by Decree No. 68/DF/509 of December 30, 1968. This gives the Fon of Nso a dual status as Fon(king) of the Nso Fondom and the Nso Paramountcy in Bui Division) by virtue of the 1977 and 1968 decrees. The Nso Paramountcy consists of the *Lamnso*-speaking and non-*Lamnso*-speaking chiefdoms in Bui Division. Meanwhile the Nso Fondom is

the *Lamnso*-speaking territory of Bui Division occupied by the *Mbiame*, *Nkar*, *Nderem*, *Ddzeen*, and *Kiluun* chiefdoms. For political and administrative reasons, Mbiame and Oku have been carved out of the former larger Nso fondom to form the Mbven and Oku Subdivisions respectively in the Nso paramount Fondom. However, in spite of this leading role played by the Fon of Nso since the colonial period, elitist politics and the desire by some second- and third-class chiefs in Bui Division to increase their administrative territory and/or rise to the position of first class fons are claiming autonomy and rulers of some Nso villages in order to reduce the powers of the Fon of Nso. This has engendered land disputes such as the Nso-Oku over the northern half of Ngongbaa Forest and adjoining villages, the Nkar-Nso conflict in Jakiri Subdivision; the Nso-Nsè conflict over Kuvlu Village, the Nso-Mbiame conflict over Mbonso and the Nso-Djottin conflict in Buh and Mbiim villages.

B. Timeline History of Previous Resources use in the Montane Forests of Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem, and Kovkinkar before the Mid-1970s

The oral history of resource use on the slopes of these forests indicates that the Nso and Oku jointly manage the Oku Mountain Forest. The Nso people own the east face of Mount Oku while the Oku people own the portion on the west face of this mountain. The Nso also own and manage the Kovifem sacred forest while the Mbiame own and manage the Kovkinkar sacred forests (also Mbiame forest. We gathered from the local communities living around the above forests that before the mid-1970s livelihood activities in all forests were mainly for subsistence and cultural fulfilment. At the time, mostly men (forest users) had the tendency to leave their villages and spend some days in the forest where they exploited resources. During this period, forests were thicker than today and hosting resources with customary regulations guiding forest use by the indigenous populations who respected them. Due to the rich biodiversity of the Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem, and Kovkinkar forests, several livelihood activities are practiced in these forests as depicted on (table 1). From the views of respondents on table 1, the principal activities practised in the Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem, and Kovkinkar forests in the past include farming, bee farming, hunting, extraction of medicine, carving, harvesting of fuel wood, extraction of building materials, sacrifices, wild mushrooms, honey, and vegetables etc. Formerly, farming which was practiced in Ngongbaa and Oku areas was not done in Kovifem and Kovifem before the 1980s because these forests served as settlement and place of sacrifice. Farming in Kovifem and Kovkinkar were restricted to lands outside forest. 82.5% of respondents are of the view that farming was practised in the contiguous Ngongbaa-Kilum forest before the 1970s in the lower slopes of the forests where small portions of forest were cleared for the cultivation of crops like tobacco (*Nama-ah* in Nso and *Ndahki* in Oku), vegetables, maize, beans millet, cocoyam, yam, and Irish potatoes etc. Tobacco was cultivated for local consumption and commerce while other crops were cultivated for subsistence. However, 82.5% of the respondents were of the view that carving is an activity that is predominant in Oku. The Nso have for long managed the Ngongbaa, Kovifem and Kovkinkar forests in a

sustainable manner. The Nso people exploited resources and also conserved water catchments, biodiversity and shrines/sacred grooves in the forest. In the past, the Nso and Mbiame men organised a royal hunt known as *ngwa'a* (royal hunt) (*Eybume Fon* in Oku), during which they hunt large mammals like leopards, buffalos, leopards, and deer. Large mammals caught during the *ngwa'a* hunt (*ebum me Fon* in Oku) were carried to the the Fon, the custodian of land and institutions. The fon in turn, grants a traditional title, "*Laangwa*" to the hunter. We gathered in the field that

two leopards caught at Simonkov village in 1981 were taken to the Fon of Nso. In the same vein in Oku, on December 2023, a hunter captured a leopard a fully protected species in Cameroon in a section the Kilum forest reserve at Manchok village with a trap and the animal was carried by the *Manjong* group to the Oku palace. The hunter was decorated with a red feather of *Tauraco bannerrmanni* (*Fen*), conferring him a title of bravery "*Nforme Nkonyam*" (Ngalla), (twitter.com, 26 December 2023 at 9. 07 a.m.) (Photo 3).

Table 1 Livelihood Activities Practised in Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem and Kovkinkar Forest

Name of forest	Study villages	Number of Respondents	Major activities carried out in your forest by residents of your village in the past?					
			Farming	Bee keeping and Hunting	Extraction of Medicine	Carving	Extraction of Fuelwood and building materials	Sacrifices
Ngongbaa	Ntur	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Vekovi	100	100	100	95	100	100	100
	Wvem	45	45	45	42	45	45	45
	Taashem	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
	Shuukov	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
	Fonmboh (Tankiy)	5	5	5	4	5	5	5
	Tadu	35	35	35	25	35	35	35
	Simonkov	28	28	28	25	28	28	28
	Buh	25	25	25	23	25	25	25
	Mbontovi	6	6	6	5	6	6	6
Kilum	Mbonyar	8	8	8	6	8	8	8
	Mbockevu	30	30	30	26	30	30	30
	Lang	35	35	35	35	35	35	35
	Mbockejikijem	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
	Jikijem,	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
	Ngashie	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
	Keyon,	35	35	35	35	35	35	35
	Kisottin	17	17	1	17	17	17	17
	Manchok,	45	4	45	45	45	45	45
	Ngvenkei 11	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Kovifem	Ngvenkei 1	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
	Ngemsiba	25	25	25	25	25	25	25
	Kovifem(Shuukov)	7	0	7	7	0	7	7
	Kuintar	18	0	18	16	0	18	18
Kovkinkar	Ndzevru	20	0	20	15	0	20	20
	Waikov	17	0	17	17	0	17	17
	Shukov (Shangere)	10	0	10	8	0	10	10
	Rifem	43	0	43	41	0	43	43
Tamborong		6	0	6	0	0	6	6
Total		691	570	691	643	570	691	691
Percentage			82.5	100	93.1	82.5	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2012-2015

This decoration is at variance with state policy that prohibits the hunting of endangered Bannerman's Tauraco and leopard the Kilum-ijim forest reserve. This has sparked controversy amongst conservationists who call for change such traditional rituals, which if implemented will kill the

culture attached to this animal. To maintain the tradition and protect the animals, the time frame and the number of leopards and/ or other animals to be killed for indigenous traditions should be defined through negotiation between the state and local people. From oral sources, in Ngongbaa area,

since pre-colonial times, the Fon of Nso gave the Ngongbaa Forest (also Ngongbaa kov) to the Kih family to manage. The Nso and Oku men developed the practice to leave the villages and spend some days of the 8-day Nso week in the forest during which they perched beehives, trapped rats, monkeys, leopards, birds, termites etc. They also collected firewood for themselves and their Fon. They also extracted Indian bamboos (*Ntom ntom* in Nso, Eytotom in Oku) for the construction of shelter and other uses. They harvested mushroom (*Kirim in Nso and kilim in Oku*), and vegetables (*kifom*). Hunting of animals was highly sustainable and selective involving the killing of mature animals and allowing the younger breeds to mature. Animals were hunted to feed children and pay dowry over women and Surplus trophy was sold in the local markets to obtain shillings (cash). Hunting of animals was prohibited in sacred places in the forest and this permitted the conservation of natural resources in these parts of the forest. One of the major activities practised in Ngongbaa and Oku to date is traditional medicine. The activity is well developed because the Oku Mountain and the Nso Plateau host a wide variety of medicinal plants, animals, birds, shrubs and herbs that have rich medicinal potentials.



Photo 3: Manjong group carrying a leopard killed in Kilum Forest reserve at Manchok Village to the Oku Palace
Source: (Ngalla Killilian Chimntom, (Twitter.com, 26 December 2023 at 9. 07 a.m.) plate).

These medicinal resources include *Prunus africana*, *Voacanga*, *Aloe Vera*. *Aguria salicifolia*, include *Comelina cameroonensis*, *Adenosten mautitanum*, *Sorindia orotiode*, *Emelia cogsina* (long kingha), *Loberia columnaries* (*Ntom ngo-oh*) “seng”, “nyuywan”, “mbavnsai” etc. Lake Oku with its outlet at Ngeiwi in Kom harbour aquatic plants with high medicinal potentials useful to indigenous medicine. Lantum (1985) as quoted by Binla (2001) adds that the Oku people living in their terrestrial ecology and alpine climate have developed the African science and art of traditional medicine to the extent that they have become famous healers and some of them serve as reference centres for treatment of diseases difficult to treat. The Nso and Oku Traditional Medicine Industry has remained outstanding to date. Due to the limited population of some species of

animals in the forest with high medicinal value the killing of such animals is proscribed and its harvesting restricted to traditional medical practitioners. This restriction has contributed enormously to the conservation of animals.

The Ngongbaa Forest first served as a hiding place for Fon Seem I during the Bamum attack that forced his escape to this forest where he, his family and a few notables remained until the raids had ceased as well as during the Nso war with the Germans in 1906 (Shey Ghanghanin, 2012). Forest users practice an “*Overlap Forest-Use System*” that involves and individual carrying out several forest activities simultaneously in the same forest. According to an informant who distributes land and, controls land use on behalf of *Faay Membvetin*, landlord of Kih family, the principal forest users of the Ngongbaa Forest before the 1970s gave part of their hunt and honey to as tribute (*Nsuh Ngven*) to *Faay Yunkavi* on behalf of *Fay Membvetin*. After collecting the tributes from forest users, the latter would carry the tributes to the landlord who kept part of the tributes for himself and forward the rest to the Fon of Nso. Tributes from honey production were given to the Fon while the landlords received rat intestines and rat parcels (*Kifu ke mbav*). Hunting was carried out in the forest for subsistence and to pay allegiance to the Fon of Nso and Oku while beekeeping was a commercial activity. These tributes were given to the *afon* because the fon and *nwerong* are custodians of land in Nso and Oku. After extracting honey, the bee farmer would select the best part and threw it in the forest for the gods (spirits of the forest), keep part for the landlords, and part to the fon. The money generated from honey sales helped men to buy salt, palm oil and other household needs. The control of activities in the forest was done by landlords who perform traditional rites (pour libations) to enhance the health of the forest.

To protect forest from fires, the fon and *Nwerong* (*kwifon* in Oku) give orders to *manjong* groups (military groups) to clear fire-protecting tracks round the forest (Mformi Buh, (alias Baraah Cyprian) (pers. com.). During the 1973 drought, the *manjong* groups in Nso and Oku mobilised its members to fight the spread of fire in the forest. While some livelihood activities are still in practice today, some have reduced in intensity while some have simply phased out. The rituals that have reduced to their lowest ebb include, the royal hunt (*Ngwa-a*), offering firewood to the Fon (*Kimbunfon*), and harvesting of wild vegetable, “*kifom*”. Also, blacksmiths in Oku extracted coal and iron ore from the Kilum forest which provided raw material for the Royal foundry (*Kelam*). (Fon Ngum III of Oku (pers.com. 2007), The Nso and Oku graziers rear their goats on grassland compartments such Kilum, Wohyewiyi, Mbai etc.

Kovifem is the first settlement site of the Nso when they migrated from Tikari. According residents of Kovifem, when the Nso, relocated from Kovifem to Kumbo, nobody settled near the Kovifem forest until Fon Ngah Bi’fon 11(Denis Dine Mofor (1972-1983) resettled the princes that were displaced from Yee during the construction of the Kumbo water Project in 1975.This Waikov Market that now

serve the inhabitants of Kovifem and neighbouring settlements was created outside the forest to replace Wainso (Nso Market) in the forest, now a Shrine (Nyuy wo Wainso). From oral history in Nso, the pioneer settlers of Kovifem, Visale people (*Mntar Nso*) who were later joined by the Nso in 1394 depended on the forest and its resources. Presently,

Kovifem is a reserve and sacred forest where the Fon of Nso performs traditional sacrifices on a day called *Ntangrin* which mean Sacrifice, referring to the day the first Sacrifice was performed in Kovifem. These sacrifices are performed in 5 shrines (figure 2).

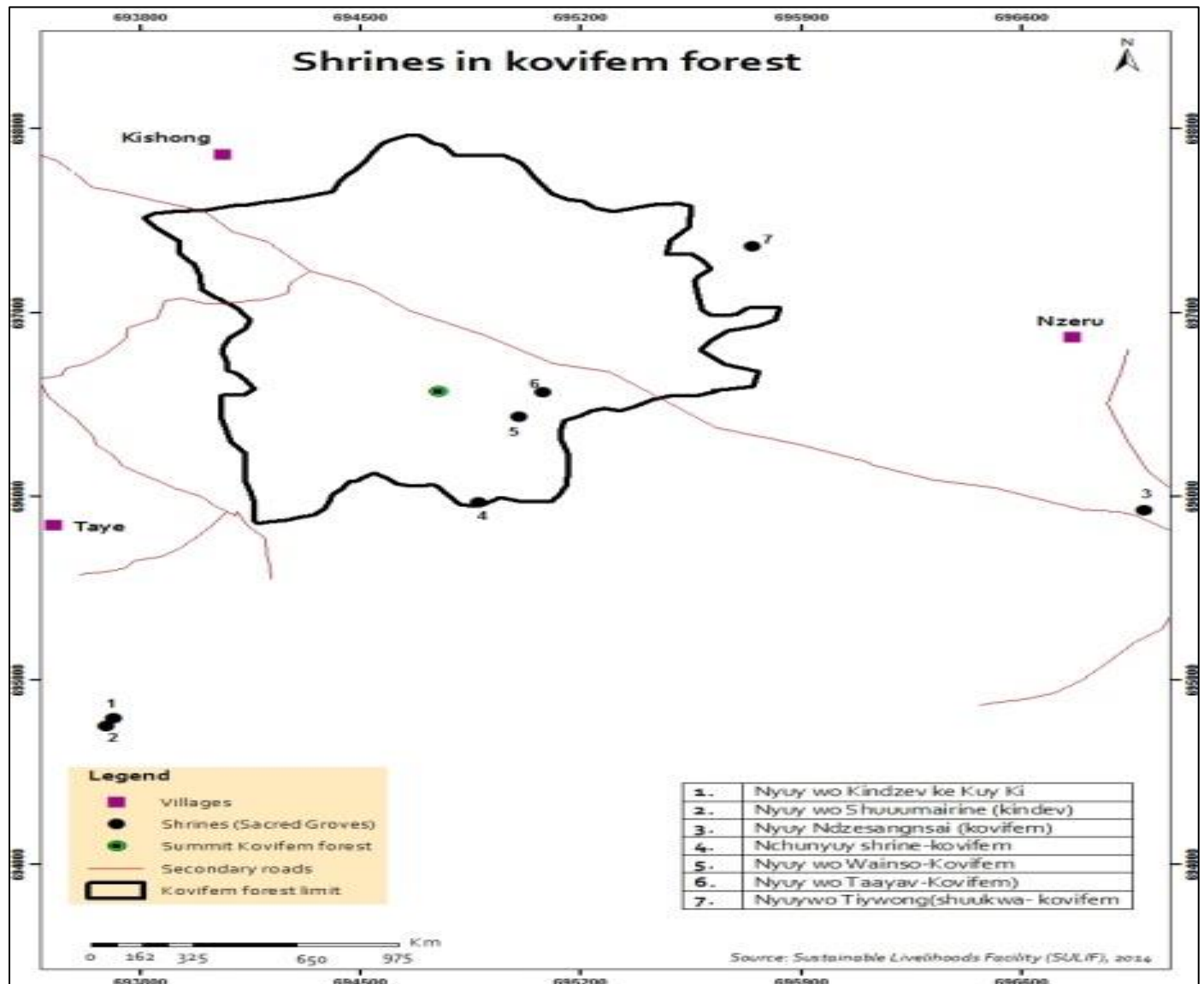


Fig 2 Shrines in Kovifem which Serve as Conservation Hot Spots

These shrines include *Nchunyuy*, *Nyuy Wo Shuukwa* (also *Tiywong*), *Nyuy wo Taayav* (*fem*) (cemetery of fons), *Nyuy wo Wainso*, *Nyuy wo Shuumairine* (also *Kindzev ke Tsenki*), *Kindzev ke Kuyki*) and *Fondzev* in order to appease the gods of Kovifem. These shrines now serv as conservation hot spots where extraction of forest products is prohibited. Sacrifices begin at *Nchunyuy* and end at *fem* the fon also perform sacrifices. In the past, there was no farming of any kind in Kovifem sacred forest until 1984 when farmers started encroaching into the forest and depleting it. When fire occurs in the Kovifem forest, ululations from residents of Kovifem will alert the community that the Nso forest is burning and the *manjong* groups (men groups) will mobilise the population to fight the fire.

The Kovkinkar sacred Forest constitutes the first settlement sites of the Mbiame people. The palace was located at Rooh Milai compartment under the reign of Mbijame¹, the founder of Mbiame. Due to tribal war between the Nso and the Bamoun, the Mbiame people left to Kovifem and later to Oku where they sought refuge at

¹Mbijame that means the son of Jame in Tikari language was the first Fon of Mbiame when the Mbiame and the Nso migrated from Tikari. Etymologically, Mbiame as fondom is named after Mbijame who is considered as the founder of Mbiame. He is told to have brought the Mbiame people from Tikari and settled them at Rooh Milai (shrine and burial ground for Mbiame fons) in Kovkinkar forest.

Mbijame near Mbam for many years. After the German overran the Nso in 1906, the Mbiame people went back to their former settlement in Kinkar. While in the forest, the Mbiame people who consisted essentially of royal family lineage practiced subsistent agriculture, hunting of birds and animals, and gathering of forest products such as mushroom, honey, wild vegetable (*kifom*) and harvesting of medicine etc. Due to population pressure, limited land and threat to the life of the forest, the Mbiame relocated their palace and settlement from Milai (Photo 3) to the neighbouring Rifem grassland in 1962, where they built a new settlement (Mformi Kimi (Ngaalim Soh Elias). pers.com.). The Mbiame people and neighbouring villages have since this period relied on Kovkinkar for their wellbeing. The forest presently is fully protected as a reserve under the leadership of the Fon of Mbiame. This forest now, serves as a place of sacrifice for the *Nwerong* and the Fon of Mbiame.

➤ *The Link between Forest, Settlement, Security and Culture in Nso, Mbiame and Oku*

Oral history reveals an inextricable link between forest on the one hand, and settlement, security and culture on the other in Nso, Mbiame and Oku fondoms. At first, the forest served as settlement and refuge sites for the Nso, Mbiame and Oku people. Back in 1394 when the three groups of people were still a single entity, their first settlement site

was in Kovifem forest. This forest served as a refuge ground for Nso People from raids of the Ba'ni, Fulani, Bamoun and Germans. Due to frequent attacks on Kovifem, by probably the Fulani (Bara' nyam) and the later alliance of Wiyaa chiefdom (a former ally of Nso in her raids against various Wimbum groups) Seem bum I sought for a safer place for his palace in Kimbo (Kumbo). When the Germans ransacked Nso in 1906, the Fon of Nso, the royal family and some retainers, (Nshiyselav or Wonle ntoh) took refuge in Ngongbaa Forest. During fieldwork in Mbiame, we gathered that the Mbiame people for security reasons first settled in the Milai depression since the 17th century and resettled to the present Rifem site in 1962. This Milai shrine is where the remains of 18 fons of Mbiame were laid to rest (Photo 4). In addition, the first Oku settlement site was in a forest depression at Bô. Ntaihah (2012) gave the view that the first settlement of the *Mbe'ele* clan in the mainland Oku from Yefon-ekven was at Bow in about 1600 where the host had built a palace holds this view. Tatah, the dissident Nso prince arrived in Oku from the mountain and met a sizeable settlement at Lui from whom he inquired where their leader was living. He was directed to go down to the valley at Bow where the host's palace was constructed. For security reasons, this palace was relocated to Tangko'o, Chiluk, Ekal, ðbke-em and Ntok-Etine sites respectively.



Thatched house hosting the graves of 18 Fons of Mbiame

Photo 4: Milai Shrine in Milai depression in Kovkinkar Forest

Photo courtesy of the Centre for Nursery Development and Eru Production (CENDEP), February 1, 2008

This was the case in Ngongbaa and Oku areas in 1997 during the Cameroon Government's crackdown on Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC)² activists who were alleged to have attacked brigades of the gendarmerie in Jakiri, Kumbo and Oku. The SCNC and other separatist groups in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon are advocating for the independence of the former British Southern Cameroons territory, now North and south Regions of Cameroon. With the resurgence of the activities of separatist groups in Northwest and South west regions of

Cameroon ensuing from the protests in these regions on April 22, 2016, forest has regained its role of refuge ground for local people and separatist fighters running away from the raids of the Cameroon Government's soldiers. In the forest, caves are used as shelter (Plate 1). The long period of intercourse between the Nso, Mbiame and Oku people and their forest enabled them to accumulate a rich and useful knowledge of the forest. For effective management of forests, the Nso, Mbiame and Oku people have formulated customary regulatory frameworks (quasi- statutory) for the management of land and forest in a sustainable manner.

²The SCNC is a Cameroon-based pressure group claiming to struggle for self-determination for the Anglophone part of Cameroon.



Plate 1: Caves in Ngongbaa Forest serving as refuge ground for Nso people during external attacks

Photo: Takiyah Forest compartment cave

photo 2: Mbai Forest compartment cave

Photos by Tatah Jean-Louis Banadzem, 2004, and 2010

C. The Typology of Livelihood Activities Practised in the Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem and Kovkinkar forests at Present

Today, some of the activities that were practiced in Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem or Kovkinkar forests in the past have either reduced in intensity or simply disappeared. This is because the resources on which these activities relied on, have diminished or disappeared completely.

➤ Indigenous Medicine in Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem or Kovkinkar forests

Indigenous medicine is as old as the history of the Nso, Mbiame and Oku people. In spite of the presence of modern hospitals in Bui such as the Bansa Baptist Hospital, Catholic Hospital Shisong, and several district hospitals, the bulk of the population in Nso, Mbiame and Oku still rely a lot on indigenous medicine for treatment. Forest is the main source of medicine for traditional (natural) medical practitioners, as depicted on (Table 2).

Table 2 Views of traditional Practitioners on the Sources of forest Products used for Traditional Medicine in Nso, Mbiame and Oku

Name of forest	Study villages	Number of traditional medical practitioners interviewed	Sources of medicinal products			
			Forest	Residual forest	Private Garden	Market
Ngongbaa	Ntur	1	1	0	1	1
	Vekovi	3	3	0	3	3
	Wvem	1	1	0	1	1
	Shuukov	1	1	0	1	1
	Fonmboh (Tankiy)	1	1	0	1	1
	Tadu	1	1	0	1	1
	Simonkov	2	1	1	2	1
	Buh	2	2	1	2	2
	Mbontovi	1	1	0	1	1
	Mbonyar	2	2	0	2	2
Kilum	Mbockevu	1	1	0	1	1
	Ngashie	1	1	0	1	1
	Keyon,	1	1	0	1	1
	Mboh	1	1	1	1	1
Kovifem	Waikov	1	1	1	1	1
Kovkinkar	Sangere (Shuukov)	1	1	1	1	1
Total		21	21	05	21	21
Percentage		100	100	21.7	100	100

Source: Fieldwork by author, 2010 and 2013

Out of the 21 traditional medical practitioners contacted, 21.7% of them obtain their medicine from the remnant and gallery forest that harbour hundreds of plants species including trees, herbs, roots, xerophytes, epiphytes, lianas, succulent plants etc. The Oku traditional medical practitioners treat common and mystical diseases. For instance, the castor oil extracted from the (*Ricinus communis*) plant is associated with some herbs for the treatment of cancerous body inflammations and other diseases. This castor oil plant produces a toxic substance known as ricin that destroys cancer cells during bone marrow transplant (Microsoft® Encarta® 2009. © 1993-2008). *Prunus africana* (Kirah and eblah in Nso/Mbiame and Oku respectively), is a popular tree used in combination with herbs, tubers and succulents for the treatment of abdominal disorders, gonorrhoea, pile, body pain etc. Mbenkum and Fisiy (1991) added that *Prunus* treats benign prostrate hypertrophy that if not treated likely develops into

prostate cancer. Traditional medical practitioners also use body parts of insects, birds and animal such as skins, bones, hairs, feathers, fats etc. for medicine. Some forest fauna species whose body parts are extracted for medicines include lions, monkeys, sheep, “seng” antelope baboon etc. Other species of fauna used for traditional medicine include spiders, scorpions, snakes, chameleons, ants, “nyuywan”, “Mbavnsai” (*Fehntieh in Oku*) etc. Due to the highly developed traditional medicine in Nso, Mbiame and Oku, people come from several parts of Cameroon to seek treatment. Traditional doctors possess private medicine gardens at the backyard of their homes and/or shrines where they plant some rare species of plants harvested in the forest which supplement medicine from the forest. Plate 2 portrays a private medicine garden and shrine of a traditional medical practitioner in Simonkov village. If forest disappears, traditional medicine will disappear with the knowledge attached to it and put the lives of forest people in peril.



Plate 2: Peter Kintati, one of the Traditional doctors in his Medicine Garden (Shrine) at Taashwir, Simonkov Village

Plate 2a: Traditional doctor in his private medicine garden that supplies medicinal products on a regular basis.

Plate 2b: Medicine shrine where traditional medical treatment is carried out.

Photos by Tatah Jean- Louis Banadzem, 2010 at 8:25 a.m.

➤ Carving Activities in Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem and Kovkinkar Forest Areas

Carving is one of the oldest economic and cultural activities in Nso, Mbiame and Oku that relies a lot on forest for its raw materials. Carving is predominant in Oku than in Nso and Mbiame. We found in the field that the few carvers in Mbiame originate from Oku. Some forty tree species are used for carving, particularly hard species including *Prunus africana*, *Albizia gummifera*, and *Carapa grandiflora* trees. Soft and light-weighted wood species are good for sculpting of drums, tables, beds, stools, masks etc, including *Gnidia glauca*, *Ficus oreodryadum* *Ficus vogelliana* etc. Since the 1980s, This lucrative activity witnessed a decline due to the depletion of forest and the transformation of the Ngongbaa and Kilum forests, into a forest reserve, and ban imposition

of a ban on the felling of trees. For this reason, carvers buy domesticated indigenous and fruit trees from farmers who plant them in their farms (Table 3). 12.5% of carvers obtain wood freely from friends and close relatives. Fruits trees used to supplement indigenous trees, including pears, mango, kola nut and plums, cypress etc. Due to the depletion of the forest, the bulk of trees are young and small in size. The carvers explained that young trees are not good for carving because artefacts carved out of immature trees easily crack, susceptible to weevil attack and less demanded in the market. If forest disappears, its trees and the carving culture depending on forest would disappear. This calls for sustainable use of forest resources. Plate 3 depicts some carvers and the various artefacts that they produced from forest trees.

Table 3 Sources of Wood for Carving in Ngongbaa and Kilum Forests

Community Forest area	No of carvers	Sources of wood for carving			
		Forest	Domesticated	Buy	Beg
Bihkov	6	6	6	6	2
Mbai	4	4	4	4	0
Nchiiy	2	2	2	2	0
Emfvee-Mii	5	5	5	5	1
Ijim	2	2	2	2	0
Kidzem-Mawes	3	3	3	3	0
UpperShinga	2	2	2	2	0
Total	24	24	24	24	3
Percentage	100	100	100	100	12.5

Source: Fieldwork by Tatah Jean-Louis Banadzem, 2010 and 2011-2015



Plate 3: Wood Carvers in their Respective Workshops in Ngongbaa Forest Area

Plate 3a: Carver of door, posts masks, and drums, Plate

3b: Carver of stools and doorposts,

Plate 3c: Carver of axe and hoe handles.

Photo by Tatah Jean-Louis Banadzem

➤ *People-Forest-Hunting Relationships in Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem and Kovkinkar forests*

In the past, large mammals which are extinct or rare in the wild like buffalos, leopards, gorillas, baboons and deer were also hunted. Hunting in the above forests today involves the trapping of small mammals like squirrels, giant rats, cane rats, monkeys, wild dog (*kishov*). Hunting in the above forests is largely subsistent in nature where animals are hunted for household consumption and cultural fulfilment with a few numbers of rat trappers hunting for commercial reasons. Because large mammals are extinct, the *ngwa'a* (royal hunt) is now a shadow of itself as it is done symbolically only during cultural ceremonies in palaces. This implies that if the biodiversity of forest disappears, culture and knowledge attached to it will face out. we observed in the Tehjav compartment of Ngongbaa forest, that the rat trapping activities are phasing out due to grazing and farming. This is evident by the decaying traps (*Kooh*) (photo 5).



Photo 5: The Decaying “Ko-oh” (rat trap) depicting the phasing out of rat trapping activity in Ngongbaa Forest
A= Forest floor with dry leaf litter and soft stem herbes.

B= Relic of decaying “Ko-oh”

Photos by Tatah Jean-Louis Banadzem, April 16, 2015 at 9:21 A.M

However, rat trapping is still in practice in Kundzev sacred forest and Doh family sacred forest (Mbvehvifaveyi) as shown on photo 5. The trapping system on Photo 5 is a local hunting system known as *Ko-oh*, which is widely used in Nso, Mbiame and Oku. Implicitly, nature influences livelihoods activities, culture, human practices, behaviour, and knowledge systems. This man-nature–hunting relationship in the forest are summarised on figure 3. The past practice whereby, hunters would give a portion of their game to landlords is no longer in practice. This is because landlords have lost control over forest due to the over-

bearing influence of governments over forests. However, if larger mammals are caught, they are taken to the fon (King), in exchange for title. The hunting norm for shared resources of the Oku Mountain stipulates that “if a hunter kills a large mammal like buffalos, leopards, or gorilla, on the Ngongbaa side of the Oku Mountain Forest, the animal is taken to the Fon of Nso because the Ngongbaa forest is the Nso side of the forest”. Conversely, if any of the animals is caught on the western section of the mountain (Kilum), the animal is taken to the Fon of Oku.

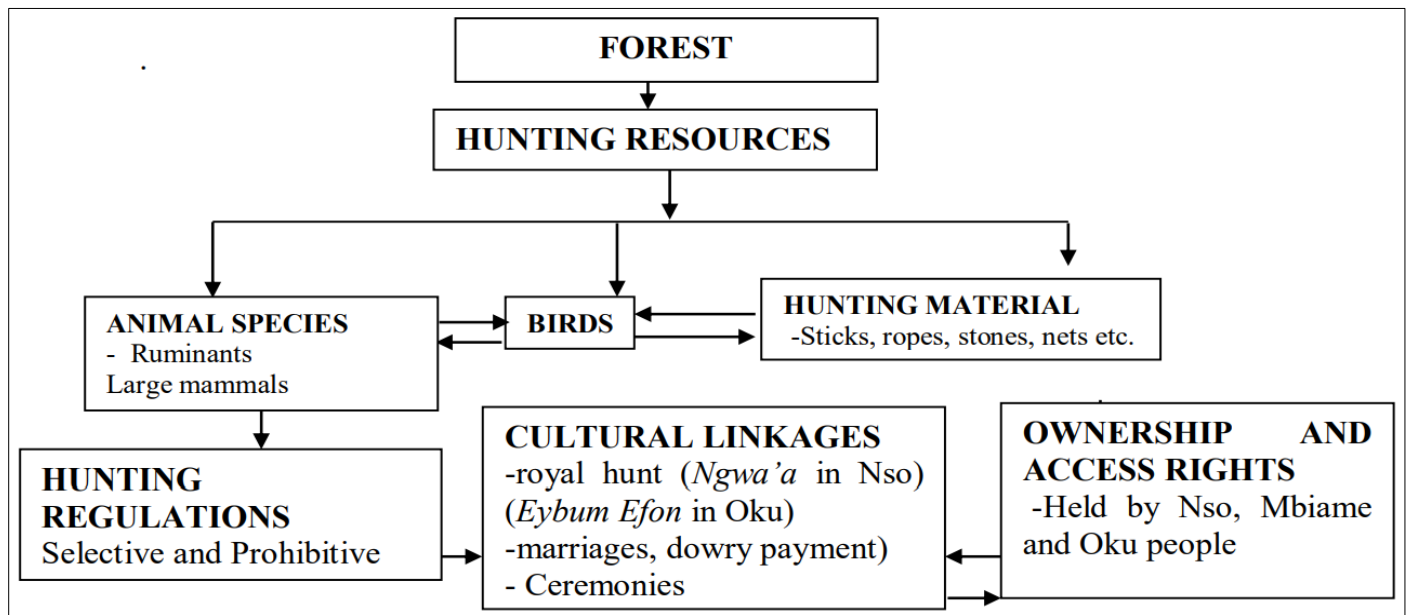


Fig 3 Inter-Relationship between the Man, Nature and Hunting in Ngongbaa, Kilum and Kovkinkar Forest
Source: Conceived by Tatah Jean- Louis Banadzem, 2010

We gathered in the field that, during the reign of Ngah Bifon (1910-1947), the fon of Nso, *Faay Kingah*, the landlord of *Tanini* compound killed two leopards in the Ngongbaa Forest bordering Simonkov village and took the

animals to the Nso palace. This means that hunting norms is determined by the type of animals and right of tenure and ownership of forest.



Photo 5: The Local Trapping System “Ko-oh” in (Mbvehvifaveyi) Shrine in Wvem
A = forest floor, B= the “Ko-oh” made of two range of short stakes planted on two sides of the a rat track and stones mounted on a metre long flat wood in the middle of the track that collarpes on the rat when it passes under, Photos by Tatah Jean-Louis Banadzem, March 6, 2015 at 10:44 A.M

➤ *Forest- Grazing Relationship in the Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem and Kovkinkar Forests*

Grazing is a second economic activity after crop farming in Nso, Mbiame and Oku. We gathered in the field that grazing was introduced in the Ngongbaa and Kilum forests in the 1970s due to the monopoly of the limited grazing lands in the lower slopes of the Oku Mountain by Mbororo graziers and Farmer-graziers' conflicts. The contiguous Ngongbaa-Kilum forest has abundant pastures on rock outcrops that attract graziers (Plate 4). In Kovifem and Mbiame, Mbororos and some few Nso graziers introduced animal rearing in the 1980s. In spite of the

Cameroon Government's ban on grazing in the Oku Mountain Forest imposed since 1987, graziers are still grazing in the forest. Meanwhile, in Kovifem (Kov Vifem) and Kovkinkar sacred forest where forest is managed by the Fon of Nso and Mbiame respectively. The ban on grazing has obliged graziers to remove their animals from the forest. Due to the economic and cultural importance of goats and sheep in Nso, Mbiame, and Oku, every family rear either of them. Cattle rearing are dominated by the Mbororos, but, a few numbers of Nso, Mbiame and Oku people rear cattle. We observed that an inter-dependent-beneficial relationship exists between grazing and forest as depicted on figure 4.

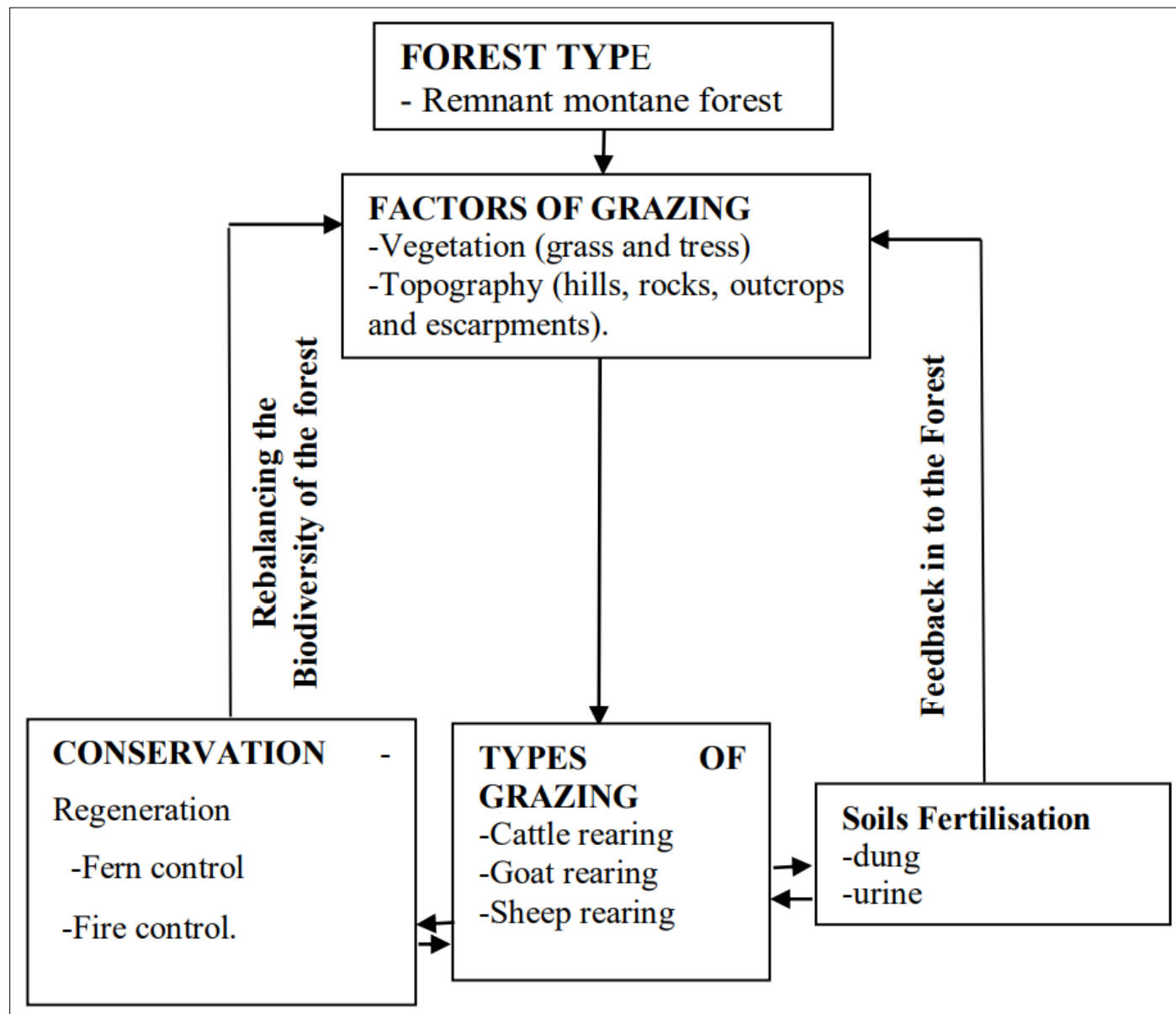


Fig 4 Inter-Dependence of Domestic Animals and Forest
Source: Conceived by Tatah Jean- Louis Banadzem

In this relationship, goats play an important role in the life of plants and the conservation of the forest. In Kovifem and Mbiame animals are raised mainly at the forest fringes (Photo 6).



Photo 6: Grazing Activities at the Boundary of Mbiame Forest

A=Bamkov section of Mbiame forest.

B=one of the cows tethered at the forest fringe.

C=A section of the forest depleted by crop farming and livestock rearing.

Photo by Tatah Jean-Louis Banadzem, March 13, 2015 at 9.17A.M

However, some graziers clandestinely send animals into the forest. Forest provides abundant pasture to animals and host trees that are important to the animals in the following ways:

- Forest trees provide shed and resting spots for goats, sheep and cows during the hot periods.
- The animals feed on yellow leaf falls from the parasitic *Globimetula oreophila* plant species known locally as *Biybiylam* (*eylam* Oku), lichen on rock surfaces and from trees.
- The steep escarpments and the thick forest surrounding Savana that acts as barriers that prevent animals from

going out of the forest thereby reducing fencing cost. This explains near absence of animal fences in village.

The gazing-forest relationship correlates with the concept of determinism, which contends that, the natural environment determines man's action on the natural milieu. When goats trample on dry fern, the soil is exposed to sunlight, enhancing the sprouting and growth of trees. When trees grow above the fern, they limit the amount of sunlight received by the fern and inhibit its growth and reduce the risk of wild forest fires. We observed that the trampling of ferns by animals has engendered secondary plant succession in the Ngongbaa and Kilum forests.

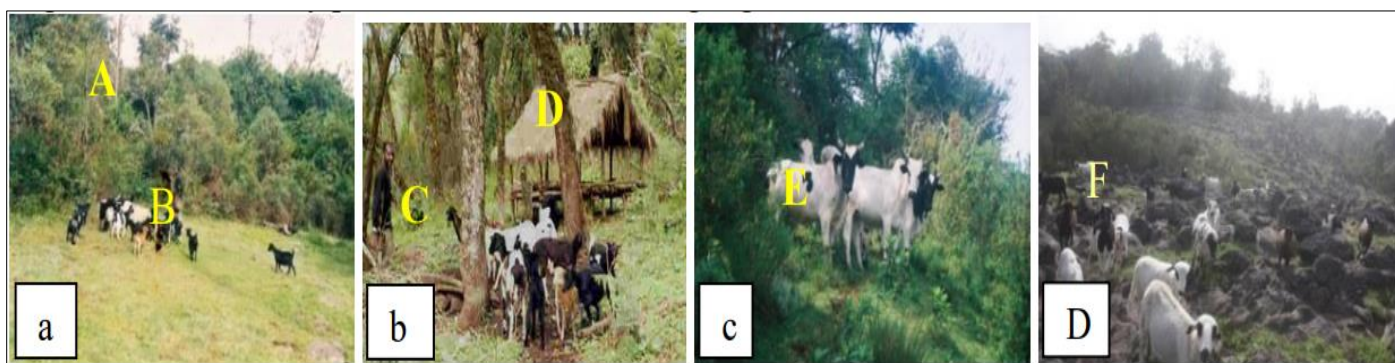


Plate 4: Some Compartments in Ngongbaa and Kilum Forests Where Graziers Raise animals

Plate 4a: A= Forest. B= goats and sheep grazing on savannah which serves as grazing ground in the Forest.

Plate 4 b:C= Grazer feeding his sheep near a hut) D) which serves as shelter for animals.

Plate 4c: E= Cattle grazing in the Ngongbaa Forests.

Plate 4c: F= Goats and sheep grazing on pasture on rock outcrops. Photos a and b on Plates 3 and were taken in January 2004.

Photos c on Plate 3c were taken on August 12, 2012 3:50 P.M. Photos d on Plate 4 was taken on April 16, 2015 at 8:28 A.M

Photos by Tatah Jean- Louis Banadzem.

➤ The Importance of Grazing in Forest Conservation in Ngongbaa and Kilum Forests

From forest users, grazing is useful to the life and conservation of the forest. Animals that graze in the forest

enhance the regeneration of the forest by trampling and breaking down dry bracken fern (*Pteridium aquilinum*). The fern plant inhibits tree growth and increases the risk of wild fires in the forest in the dry season figure 30. In addition,

graziers, helps to clear off bracken fern in order to enhance the development of pasture for their animals. This further facilitates the up-shoot and growth of tress in the forest. Banadzerm (2008), added that, besides the economic and cultural value of goats, it has replaced herbivores (primary consumers) like (buffaloes (*bovidae*), antelopes (and deer (*cervidae*) that are extinct. Goats eat and reduce excessive growth of grass in the forest and create foot tracks that inhibit the spread of fire in the forest. We gathered from forest users that they take advantage of tracks created by goats in the forest to clear grass and enlarge the tracks to prevent the spread of wild fires in the forest. More so, dung secreted by animals fertilises the soil and enhance plant growth. However, the disadvantage of goats, sheep and cows is that, they trample on young and sprouting tress thereby reducing tree population and development in the forest but, their inhibiting character to the growth of fern and dry grass in the forest is very important in protecting the forest and its biota from wild fires.

➤ *Bee Farming-Forest relationship in the Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem and Kovkinkar Forests*

Beekeeping is a very old economic and cultural activity in Nso, Mbiame and Oku. This activity is known as “Lem nwa’a.” in Nso language (Lamnso) and (Makebnwak in Oku). The natural environments of the Oku Mountain, Kovifem and Kovkinkar favour beekeeping. These forests have cool climatic conditions and a wide variety of trees that provide nectar for bees. The trees include Scheffera abyssinica, Gnidia glauca, Rauvolfia volmitoria, and so on. White Honey is extracted from these trees’ species. In Kovifem and Kovkinkar sacred forests, bee farming is practiced on a small scale compared to the Ngongbaa and Kilum forests. Bee farmers pitched their hives on tree branches, fags, rock surfaces, dead tree trunks and/or apiaries (Plate 5). The bee farmers use both the traditional and modern Kenyan Top Bar Beehive (KTBH).

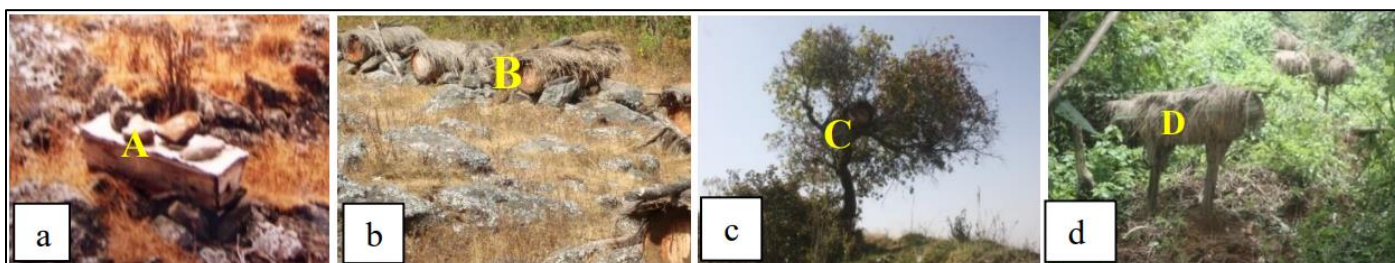


Plate 5: Types of bee hive and Methods of pitching hives in Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem and Kovkinkar Montane Forests

Plate 5a: A =KTBH hive pitched on rock out crop

Plate 5: B=Traditional beehives pitched on rock outcrops in Kilum Forest

Plate 5c: C= Beehive pitched on a tree branch in Kovifem Sacred Forest.

Plate 5d: D =Traditional beehives pitched on fags in Kilum forest

Photo 5a and b, by Tatah Jean-Louis Banadzem, January 2010 at 10 A.M

Photo c and d, by Tatah Jean-Louis Banadzem, March 13,2015at 9:08 A.M and

➤ *Wood Extraction in Ngongbaa, Kilum, Kovifem and Kovkinkar forests areas*

Fuelwood extraction is also one of the activities practised in the Ngongbaa, Kilum, and Kovifem and Kovkinkar forests (Plate 6). Dry wood is harvested mainly for domestic use. Although commercial wood extraction has been forbidden, wood sellers extracted wood clandestinely. Due to the ban on commercial extraction of wood, eucalyptus has substituted indigenous trees as the main source of fuelwood.



Plate 6: Dry wood harvesters in Fonmboh and Ngemsiba villages standing by their wood

Plate 23a: A=wood harvested from Ngongbaa forest. B=Wood harvested from Kilum forest.

Photo by Tatah Jean-Louis Banadzem, January 2010 and February 27, 2015 at 12:59 P.M

D. The Cultural-Forest Relationship in the Ngongbaa, Kilum m Kovifem and Kovkinkar Forests

The Nso, Mbiame and people also use the forest for their cultural activities. The forest serves as a place where they give respect and pay homage to their ancestors and for cultural fulfilment. The royal hunt known as *Ngwa-which* is also organised to hunt animals for the *fon* ritual has become a symbolic ceremony organised during death celebrations in the palaces, in nearby bushes. Animal skins and tree trunks are used to make jujus masks. Dry forest fuel wood extracted from forest is offered to the Fon by every newly crowned *faay* or traditional ruler during a ritual known as *Kinshati ke Fon* or *Kimbunfon*. This ceremony represents homage-paying to the *fon*. The *afaay* are village-based subsidiaries of the *Fon*. During *Kimbunfon*, (*Ey Suu Ntok in Oku*), the *faay* greets the *fon* and do what is referred to as “Filling the fon’s bag” (*waykibamkefon*) *Viy bibam e Fon* in *Oku*) with money. It is after this ritual that the *faay* is recognised as village head and auxiliary to the *fon*. During this ceremony, people who have never greeted the *fon* can take advantage of the event and fill the fon’s bag or during the fon’s visit to his subjects in or out of his fendom (Kingdom). A male or female adult, who has never performed the *kimbunfon* ceremony, cannot greet the fon and other traditional authorities including *faay*, *afaay*, *ayaah* and *asheey menkan*. Unless a *faay* greets the fon, he cannot attend public events, like going to the market or drink from traditional cup (made of animal horn or calabash. There is an inextricable link between forests and location of shrines (abodes of the gods). Most shrines believed to host the bodies and spirits of ancestors are found in thick and relict forest. Sacrifices or libations are performed by the *fon* and landlords in Nso, Mbiame and Oku. Sacrifices are performed to appease the spirits of the gods (ancestors) to request for peace, health, rain and abundant harvests. The Kovifem sacred forest hosts the bodies and spirits of 13 *Fons* of Nso, while the Milai shrine in Kovkinkar sacred forest hosts the bodies and spirits of 17 *Fons* of Mbiame.

In Oku, sacred forests include the Lumetu south of Ngashie village, Lake Oku and *mfvəə*. Lake Oku and surrounded forest, have been classified as a sanctuary (his highness fon Ngum III of Oku, pers.com. 2007). Lumetu is the home of the body and spirit of one of the great ancestors of Oku, *Mnkong Moteh*, and the 6th Fon of Oku (Photo 7). Because he exhibited great power during his reign, he is now considered as one of the Oku gods. Every year, the Fon of Oku accompanied by his people visits and clean up the shrine area. During this visit, the Fon performs sacrifices in Lumetu Forest in order to appease the spirits to bring blessings to the entire Oku land and people. Binla (2001) adds that sacrifices are performed within the first week of December every year to pay homage to the Oku ancestral gods, Bawuchie (in Mfee shrine at Manchok) and *Mkong Mote*. Although the Lumetu Forest is fully protected, people are allowed to harvest wood and other resources on the day the Fon of Oku and *Kwiyfon* visit this forest to perform sacrifices. In the case of Lake Oku and surrounding forest, the Fon of Oku visits it once in his lifetime immediately after his enthronement accompanied by Oku population. It is

during this ceremony that the new fon is officially presented to the people as high priest.

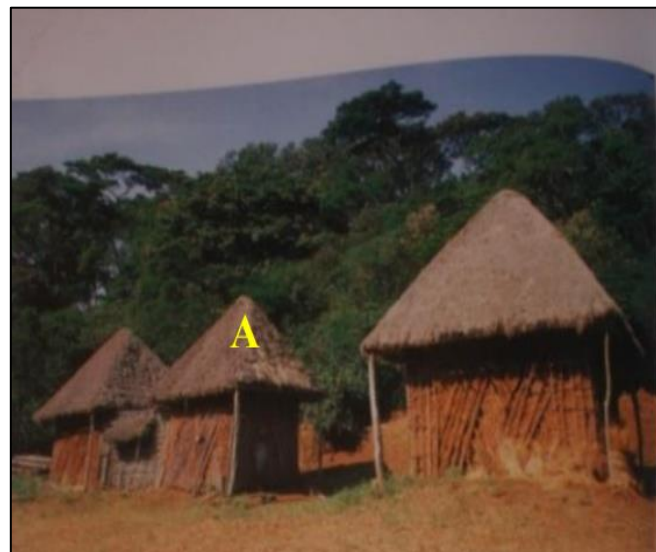


Photo 7: The Oku Palace in Lumetu sacred forest.

A=the central house hosting the grave of Mnkong Moteh.

Photos by Joan Joachim February 8, 1979

The ritual also gives the Fon powers over the management of Lake Oku and forest. Tsalefac, Nkwami, Ngoufo and Djoumessi (1999) add that annual sacrifices and rituals known as (*momesang*) are carried out in the Mawes shrine (Lake Oku) to mark the start of the harvesting season. Because of the sacredness and importance to the Oku people, Lake Oku and Lumetu forest are under the control of the Fon and the *Kwiyfon*. The *Mfvəə* sacred forest at Elak neighbourhood is believed to be where the gods of the rain (Bawuchie) lives. During periods of fluctuating rainfall and/or drought, sacrifices are offered to the gods to appeal for rain. The preservation of the shrines and sacred forests is beneficial to the life of the forest. These sacred groves serve as biodiversity conservation hot spots and habitat for endangered fauna and flora species of the forest.

V. CONCLUSION

The study shows that forest first served as settlement and refuge sites for the Nso, Mbiame and Oku people. The long period of intercourse between the Nso, Mbiame, Oku people and their forest enabled them to accumulate rich and useful knowledge of the forest and established customary (non-statutory or quasi-statutory) regulatory frameworks for effective management of their forest resources. Forest also serves as cemetery for the *fons* (kings), host shrines where sacrifices are performed. Due to the depletion of forest and the adoption of stricter conservation policies some forest activities particularly carving and hunting have decreased in intensity while some have simply disappeared due to extinction of species (raw materials). The shrines and sacred forest now serve as conservation hot spots and nurseries for engendered plants and animal species, and therefore help to conserve and sustain parcels of forest in montane ecosystems where pressure on land and forest is high and on the rise. The paper recommends that traditional systems of

managing forest should be reinforced and resources in sacred groves fully protected to serve as nurseries for threatened and extinct species. The Cameroon Governments should recognise and integrate non-statutory forestry policy frameworks established in village communities within the frameworks of their land tenure and administration system, into the national forestry policy, as the main village-based institutions of land and forest management. The government should also empower traditional authorities like the (Fon, nwerong and Lanlords (ataangven) financially, to help them to establish reforestation programmes like those formulated by the Fon of Nso and Mbiame to restore deforested and degraded forest. This is because laws put in place by these institutions are respected in the most part by their subjects without being forced to do so. This would likely help to maintain biodiversity, knowledge, culture and other practices attached to forest that are gradually disappearing due to forest depletion.

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