

# Farmer-grazier conflict resolution methods and mitigation mechanisms in Bui-Donga Mantung Divisions, North West Cameroon

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**Abstract:** This article examines the general underlying crop farmer grazer conflict resolution methods/mitigation mechanisms in the North West region of Cameroon and in Bui-Donga Mantung Divisions in particular. It argues that the recurrent conflict that has hit the crop farming and livestock sector for several decades still suffers from arriving at a lasting solution. Several strategies have been put in place to bring peace between the two land users, but the dialogue platform (66%) has been sorted out the most effective mechanism. It also argues that the agro-pastoral commission (9.5%) has lost its credibility as the legal forum of conflict resolution, for in several attempts, has never arrived at a lasting solution to the farmer-grazer squabbles. Its effects are devastative and are felt in sectors such as food crop production, peace and harmony, justice, and sustainable development that are needed in the area of study. Therefore, we recommend that different methods can provide solutions, but a well-publicized demarcation of stock routes is by far the best assurance of a sense of belonging that cattle herders can appreciate and adapt to protection of farmlands. The government should therefore make better legislation on the farmer-grazer problem and revise the old ones for their conditions do not satisfy the both the crop farmers and grazers. Both land users should focus on the use of the dialogue platform as the main medium of conflict resolution, for its outcomes are often lasting and satisfactory to both parties.

**Key words;** Conflict, conflict resolution, dialogue platform

## I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, conflicts have been the major issue destroying the economies of many people and the sustenance of their livelihoods. The protracted conflict between the crop farmers and the grazers generally known as the farmer-grazer conflict is a general phenomenon in most agro-pastoral communities around the world. Many factors have contributed to the farmer-grazer conflicts that have little or no link to the environment and natural resources viz; political and ethnic [1]. This is as a result of both local and institutional failures of arriving at a genuine conflict resolution between the conflicting parties.

In Africa, crop farming and grazing are the main occupation of the people that sustains their livelihoods and the development of their rural areas. Though the actions of the government and other stakeholders seems to be silent as

regards the disputes between the crop farmers and the grazers over the use of land resources, both parties in conflict have resorted in taking the responsibility into their hands. This has been through mutual understanding and amicable conflict settlement between the parties involved.

In Cameroon, disputes over the use of land resources have remained a common trait. Land demarcation in grazing and crop farming communities now has been a critical issue since all untitled lands are considered as communal, free to be grazed and cultivated by any one. The decree No 78/263 of July, 3 1978 regulating the agro-pastoral activities in Cameroon provides for the mapping out of grazing and farm lands. Actually, an area is normally called a grazing or farmland when it has been allocated by the agro-pastoral commission, which is the statutory body that adjudicates conflicts between grazers and crop farmers. [2] points out that, crop farmers unlike grazers complain about insecure land rights and feel threatened by the local shortage of land for which the insufficient allocation of land by local authorities is partly to be blamed. In Bui-Donga Mantung Divisions, the competition over scarce land resource has increasingly been posing a challenge to peace, agricultural as well as rural development activities, as crop farmers and herders struggle for land for cultivation and grazing respectively. According to [3], these conflicts are principally the result of the competition over the use of land and water resources both for agricultural and non-agricultural purposes. Such conflicts have in most cases led to misunderstanding and breakdown of the symbiotic relationship that has existed between the two land users in time immemorial. In some cases, such conflicts escalate and results into physical fighting, exchange of blows and sometimes bloodshed.

Moreover, in Cameroon in general and Bui-Donga Mantung Divisions in particular, stakeholders have less interest in resolving grazers and crop farmer issues [4], though attempts have been made in order to solve the farmer grazer conflicts as a result of its devastative effects on the livelihoods of both land users and the community as a whole. The crop farmer grazer commission (set up by government decree No 78/263) is the principal statutory body that adjudicates conflicts between herders and the crop farmers, yet it has limitations in

its interventions, which have more often than not led to outcomes that are ineffective and unsatisfactory to the belligerence, thereby making matters worse. Consequently, the crop farmer grazer commission as an official medium for conflict resolution between land users has lost its credibility that it might have had with the general public in particular and the civil society as a whole.

### 1.1 Location of the study area and methods

This study was carried out in the North West Region of Cameroon particularly in Bui-Donga Mantung Divisions. They are the two out of the seven administrative divisions that make up the Region. More specifically, it was focused on the Noni, and Kumbo Central (Bui Division), Nkambe Central and Misaje (Donga-Mantung) Subdivisions, which are located between latitudes 6°15' and 6°48' North of the equator and longitudes 10° 30' and 11° 0' East of the Greenwich meridian. It covers a surface area of about 327.5km<sup>2</sup> with pockets of concentrated settled agrarian population of about 208552 inhabitants [5]. The study area is part of the Bui plateau with a distinct geographical unit, marked up by escarpments, hills, plateaus and mountains which favours cattle rearing alongside food crop production in basins such as Misaje, Ako Nkowe and Nkor. The rugged hills and the mountain chains of this area especially in places such as the Noni, Kihbo, Binkar highlands and the Bui plateau are better suited for cattle rearing. This is a typical explanation for why these mountainous zones are part of the backbone of cattle rearing in Cameroon.

Bui-Donga Mantung Divisions are also homes to many rivers amongst which are the Mbeim, (the largest river taking its rise from the Ngonzen Hills), Mee, Chau-Chau, Kibanya, and Kiwawah, which flows through Awi and Eleh and empties into River Kimbi passing through Misaje Sub Division. These rivers are being used by both land users for various purposes though some are gradually becoming streams due to encroachment on forestland by both crop farmers and grazers in search of farms and grazing space. The major crops grown in the area include maize, beans yams, cassava, potatoes, groundnuts, vegetables, cocoa, oil palm, and coffee while livestock include cattle, poultry, goats, sheep, pig and horses.

Bui-Donga-Mantung Divisions have for decades suffered from protracted farmer-grazer conflict, but yet, a lasting solution to the issue has still been wanting. Amongst the eleven Subdivisions that make up the study area, four Subdivisions were purposively selected (Noni, Kumbo central, Misaje and Nkambe Central Sub Division). This study was focused on the cattle grazers and the crop farmers. To each sub division, three crop farming and grazing villages were purposively selected based on the recent reports on the crop farmer-grazer conflicts as well as the involvement of this communities in both grazing and crop farming activities, making a total of 12 villages. This led to the randomly selection of 17 crop farmers and 08 graziers per village which gives a total of 200 crop farmers and 100 graziers that make

up the sample size (300) of the study. Opened and close questionnaires were design and randomly administered to the stakes of the four Subdivisions. Focus group discussions with the herders, crop farmers, cattle owners, traditional chiefs, individuals, representatives of agricultural and livestock in the various ministries alongside the leaders of the Fulani communities were not left out. The obtained data from closed questionnaires were analysed using statistical tools as Microsoft Excel spread sheets while the open questions were sorted manually and interpreted.

## II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 2.1. The typologies of crops and animals in Bui-Donga Mantung divisions

The types of crops cultivated and animals reared in Bui-Donga Mantung are many and varies as shown on the tables below. The different categories of crops grown in the study area; food crops, vegetables and cash crops.

Table 1: Types of crops grown in the study area

Category of crops	Types
Food crops	Cassava
	Cocoyams
	Groundnuts, maize,
	White yams
	Sweet potatoes
	Irish potatoes
Vegetables	Sweet yams
	Huckleberry
	Cowpea
	Soybeans
	Okra
	Banana
	Cabbage
	Tomatoes
Beans	

Table 2: Types of animals reared in the area

Categories of animals reared	Types
Cattle	Red zebu
	white Fulani
	Zubu Goudali
Ruminants	Goats
	Sheep
	Pigs
Others	Horses
	Ducks
	Fowls

Source. Field work (2018)

These crop species are being cultivated at different seasons and also being attacked by cattle at various intervals and intensities. Cattle often have a high affinity for maize. This makes them the most exposed crop for damage by cattle alongside other undergrowth like beans and yams. Crop damages by cattle are mostly recorded in the rainy season which is the principal farming season in this area, though other crops like beans, Irish potato, yams and okra that are either being cultivated or harvested during the dry season are often the targets of cattle.

## 2.2. Crop protection against cattle trespass and boundary demarcations

Crop protection has been one of the main ways through which the crop farmers limits conflict outbreak with the cattle grazers, though not all farmlands are being protected as seen on the table below.

Table 3: Protection of farmlands by croppers and boundary demarcations

Farmland protection	Percentages
Protected farmlands	66.6
Non protected farmlands	33.4
Boundary demarcations	
Existence of demarcated boundaries	67
Non demarcated boundaries	33

From table 3 above, household respondents revealed that majority (66.6%) of the crop farmers protects their crops from cattle trespass into farmlands. Crop protection is being carried out in several ways viz; construction of cattle proof fences either with bamboos, sticks or barbed wires, and sometimes through the planting of trees round farmlands. Some crop farmers admitted that despite efforts to protect their crops from cattle destruction, breakdown of fences by herdsmen has still been the order of the day, as herdsmen destroy the fences round farmlands just to let in their cattle feed on their crops. Consequently, some crop farmers have resorted to practicing the sit and wait or the surveillance strategy, just to frequently chase cattle herdsmen trespassing on their farms during the farming seasons. Some crop farmers even threaten to kill cattle or harm the herdsmen if found grazing round their farmlands.

Besides the overwhelm protection of farmlands, a very insignificant percentage of households (33.4%) never protected their farmlands. These were the cases of crop farmers who either lack the financial means to construct cattle proof fences round their farms or those that are cultivating in areas that are only accessible to animals during periods of transhumance. They also included crop farmers who farmed in areas inaccessible to cattle, even during transhumance period. Moreover, some crop farmers are willing to protect their farms but do not have access to either bamboos or trees to use and construct fences round their farmlands.

Land demarcation between the crop farming and grazing land is one of the main assignments of the agro-pastoral commission, though it is now becoming a critical issue since all untitled lands are considered communal, free to be grazed and cultivated by any one. The users of such lands are considered as occupants of state land. With regards to field findings, majority (67%) of the respondent households doubted the existence of any demarcation between the grazing and the farm lands. Though both land users point fingers at each other for boundary trespass, they could still not locate the exact boundary that separates the grazing land from crop farming lands. Both land users laid accusations on the government officials of being at the center of this confusion. On the contrary, less than half (33%) the population of the crop farmers of Bui-Donga Mantung Divisions accepted the fact that there exist demarcated boundaries between the farmlands and the grazing lands. In this case, their arguments were based on individual farmlands being separated from the grazing land with help of fences, eucalyptus trees or the Cyprus tree. Such assumed demarcated boundaries are not legal and can therefore be trespassed by cattle at any time possible.

## 2.3. Reactions of croppers and cattle rearers after an event of crop damage

In the past squabbles resulting from crop damages by cattle were in most cases manageable with the intervention of the traditional authorities and a well-entrenched understanding and harmonious coexistence between crop farmers and grazers. Not so nowadays. With regards to crop farmer's reactions following an event of crop damage by cattle, five main ways were being identified viz; dialogue with the grazers (53.1%), taking of the animals caught on farmlands to the council fence (17.54%), reporting the herder to nearest government authority (9.2%), acting violently by either beating the herder, wounding or poisoning some of the cattle and/or dealing with them mystically (5.7%) and the use of the judiciary (3.3%). The decision to react violently by some crop farmers is in line with the findings of [6] which states that conflicts usually lead to disunity, violence, disagreements and blood shed as the involved parties are trying to reach their individual objectives.



Photo 1. Entrance to the Nkor Council fence where cattle caught destroying crops are being locked up for conflict resettlement

Source; Author (2018)

The significant high proportion of household engaging in dialogue with the grazers can be inferred to the fact that dialogue is a tool to create change in a peaceful manner by developing sustainable approaches and democracy. Therefore, in the absence of mutually accepted mediation mechanisms, these disagreements between the two parties of reaching at a genuine solution to their problem may probably turn into violent conflict which sometimes could lead to physical fighting and bloodshed. While the low proportion of crop farmers involved in the usage of the legal system (the judiciary), (3.3%) is as a result of time wasting and high financial demands by the mediators.

#### 2.4. Crop farmer-grazer conflict mitigation strategies

The framework to mitigate crop farmer grazer conflict in Cameroon in general and in Bui-Donga Mantung Divisions in particular is spelled out in decree No 78/263 of July 3, 1978 in which powers were bestowed on the agro-pastoral commission in any conflict prone area. The representatives of the different technical ministries and traditional authorities in each division constitute this commission which is often chaired by the Sub Divisional officer of each sub division. Supporting this regulated framework are other local initiatives such as the Dialogue platform and the traditional councils. Whenever the agro-pastoral commission, dialogue platforms or the traditional authorities are unable to resolve conflicts and if but only if there are criminal cases of such conflicts, then the judiciary can be used [8]. Several measures have been taken to address the underlying incompatibilities of the crop farmer grazer conflicts, and thereby enabling the disputing parties to terminate the conflict and deal with disputes through an open and a more predictable process.

Conflict mitigation strategies and resolution methods and their level of effectiveness do differ from one conflict zone to another. In Bui-Donga Mantung Divisions, four main measures were being identified to mitigate these seemingly intractable conflicts by both the traditional and governmental authorities. They included; the Dialogue platforms (DP), traditional council, agro-pastoral commission and the judiciary. Field findings revealed that about (66%) of the crop farmers preferred the dialogue platform as a medium of conflict resolution. Further in-dept field findings also led to the identification of two main organizations that have been investing in promoting and encouraging dialogue and mutually beneficial alliances between the crop farmers and the grazers. They included; the MBOSCUDA (Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association) and the Netherlands Development Association (SNV). The Netherlands Development Association (SNV) has been very successful in places like Binshua in Nkambe Central Sub Division and Misaje sub Division and was also noted for facilitating the development of platforms in bringing together grazers, crop farmers and traditional rulers to discuss peaceful solutions to conflicts, and developing annual plans that will help regulate crop and livestock activities so that a mutually beneficial integrated crop-livestock system could be developed.

According to [9], a 65% drop in conflicts was recorded in the Wum area (one of the conflict hotspot of the North West Region) due to the intervention of the SNV to combat the crop farmer grazer conflicts between 2007 and 2010 (SNV Cameroon, 2014). MBOSCUDA is also appreciated by the grazers for its training and education services, whilst the crop farmers recognize it for its own conflict resolution [8].

Table 4: Crop farmer's preference of conflict resolution strategy

Preference of resolution strategy	Frequency	Percent
Agro-pastoral commission	19	9.5
Dialogue platform	132	66
Traditional council	41	20.5
Judiciary	18	4
Total	200	100

Following the dialogue platform as the principal medium of conflict resolution in Bui-Donga Mantung Divisions, far less than half (20.5%) of the crop farmers preferred the traditional council as a medium of conflict resolution. This forum is made up of the village or community head, some notables, chiefs and the representatives of the pastoralist community (*ArDOS*) in some cases. It has no judicial premise and is therefore described by some farmers as "an attempt to resolve conflicts in a friendly way". In areas such as Misaje sub division, the traditional council is the principal medium of conflict resolution and only cases of mass crop damages are taken up to the crop farmer grazer commission for settlement. Some crop farmers admitted that some custodians of traditions remain insouciant to their problems while reaping the necessary funds to sustain themselves and the administration. This therefore implies that, the traditional rulers who forms the traditional council as a medium of conflict resolution has lost objectivity and credibility when seeking solutions to the crop farmer grazer conflicts.

Furthermore, the officially recognized medium for the resolution of crop farmer-grazer conflict is the agro-pastoral or the farmer grazer commission (9.5%) which is being set up in each sub division or division with regards to the 1974 law regulating crop farmer grazer activities in Cameroon (set up by government decree No 78/263). agro-pastoral commission is the statutory body that adjudicates conflicts between grazers and crop farmers and yet it has limitations in its interventions, which have more often than not led to outcomes that are ineffective and unsatisfactory to all parties involved. The commission is made up of the Sub Divisional Officer (SDO) as the chair person, the delegate of land, the representatives of the ministry of agriculture and livestock, the village heads (Fons and chiefs) and the head of the pastoralist communities (*ArDOS*). The low proportion of household respondent using this medium can be based on the fact that the conflicting parties often stands at the position of bearing the burden of sponsoring all the necessary expenses of the agro pastoral

commission geared towards resolving any case of crop damage by cattle. They also fail to acknowledge the first two functions (the allocation of grazing land, the permanent control over the grazing and crop farming activities) and only concentrate in carrying out the last function that holds to do with the resolution of crop farmer grazer conflicts.

Emerging from the above mentioned forums of conflict resolution between the crop farmers and the grazers, the final conflict mitigation opening was the judiciary. Settlement via the court was relatively rare (4%) as compared to other strategies used in many crop farming and grazing communities. The very low proportion of crop farmers using the judiciary as a medium of conflict resolution can be inferred to the fact that it is expensive with very uncertain outcome, as the issue of payments (bribery, extortion and exploitation) was repeatedly raised by both crop farmers and grazers on the field

A number of weaknesses posing limitations on their proper functioning were identified on the field. The two principal weaknesses were; the lack of and/or insufficient running budget allocated for the agro-pastoral commission as the financial handicap makes it difficult in implementing decisions taken by the commission or prefectural orders and lack of good monitoring and reports of incidences of crop farmer grazer conflicts by the technical ministries and the administration of most crop farming and grazing communities. This is because most complaints often submitted by the complainants are often not analyzed and treated on time for better conflict management.

### 2.5. Preferred conflict resolution method by crop farmers

Though conflict resolution is what awaits the conflict mediators in order to appease the conflicting parties, the preferred methods of conflict resolution varied from one crop farmer to another. While others seek for peaceful resolution, others react violently depending on the intensity and magnitude of crop damage. Field findings revealed that, about 72.5% of the victims of crop damages prefer a peaceful and amicable method of conflict resolution with the grazers especially the on-farm settlement. This method has helped maintain the symbiotic relationship that has existed between the two land users for decades. This is in line with the findings of [7] which stated that it is only through cooperation that the local communities could implement sustainable common pool of resource conservation and management strategies. This implies that better cooperation between the different resource users could avoid a conflict breakout and a good local development.

Table 5: Preferred conflict resolution method by croppers

Preferred conflict resolution method	Frequency	Percent
Peaceful method	145	72.5
Forceful or violent method	55	27.5
Total	200	100

Contrary to crop farmers who preferred the peaceful method of conflict resolution, a low proportion (27.5%) of the crop farmers preferred the forceful or violent method whenever their crops are destroyed by cattle. This was similar with the situation in places such as Lassin (Noni) and Kihbo (Misaje). This was because the peaceful methods never satisfied the crop farmers, while the grazers kept breaking the cattle proof fences the farmers construct round their farms, just to let their animals feed on their crops. This type of negative emotions acquired as a result of the failures of arriving at a genuine resolution between the two land users gives most of the croppers no other option than to act violently. Equally, not only the crop farmers react violently but the grazers as well. Some grazers threaten the farmers with knives and sticks, hence provoking the farmers to react as a defensive mechanism.

The use of the violent method has posed a lot of negative repercussions on the society in general. It has led to physical fighting which further results to the internal displacement of both the crop farmers and the grazers when faced with danger, loss of lives, property destruction and abandonment of some farmlands by the crop farmers. This was the case of violent conflict that arose between the indigenous crop farmers and the Fulani cattle grazers in Vun (a quarter in Noni) where some Mbororo grazer's compounds were destroyed by angry mobs of a neighboring crop farming community.

### 2.6. Crop farmer's satisfaction with government efforts in resolving conflicts

The resolution of farmer grazer conflicts is principally the responsibility of the government official, though local measures are also being used to reduce the squabbles between the two land users. It has been the result of government's failure in finding a lasting solution to this problem that the crop farmer grazer conflict has lasted for decades, leaving behind numerous negative memories on the side of both land users. Field findings revealed that a very smaller proportion (8.9%) against a majority (91.1%) of the respondent household crop farmers are dissatisfied with government's efforts in resolving the crop farmer grazer conflicts. The significant number of crop farmers who are not satisfied with government's efforts can be inferred to the fact that the sub divisional officer who is the head of the agro-pastoral commission (SDO) usually promise to look into their problem, probably because time is needed to investigate the damages caused by cattle on farmlands. The farmer grazer commission on its own side is often blamed for delaying in accessing damaged farms. This situation is similar to that of Misaje and Tadu in which crop farmers revealed that they no longer need the "commissions of inquiry and unfulfilled promises". Furthermore, despite the fact that farmer-grazer commission has been put in place to resolve cropper-grazer squabbles, some crop farmers in areas such as Noni added that, when a crop farmer takes any case to the commission, even after paying the required inspection fee of 50,000frs, there is usually delay in assessing the damaged crops probably

because of the remoteness of the farmland or the administrators being occupied with other administrative duties. Sometimes, inspection is not even effected. The S.D.O is also blamed for supporting the grazers, as the administrative authorities uses such conflicts as other means of earning extra incomes to enrich themselves while some crop farmers were even ignorant about local administration's intervention. This abides with the findings of [10] which stated that, the traditional and administrative authorities often shy away from resolving the crop farmer grazer conflicts because the officials have an economic interest in seeing that conflicts continue.

### 2.7. Limitations

The protracted crop farmer grazer conflicts have been a worrisome issue in most crop farming/grazing communities as a result of the institutional failures of arriving at a lasting solution between the two land users. [11] states that there are diverse evidences of institutional failure of traditional and governmental authorities across Africa in an attempt to resolve the crop farmer grazer conflict. Field findings revealed four main government's limitations in resolving the crop farmer grazer conflict such as; longer duration for follow up (6.2%), high cost of follow up (75%), complicated procedure (5.80%) and financial extortion through bribery and corruption (13%).

Table 6: Government's limitations in resolving conflicts

Limitations	Frequency	Percent
Longer duration	12	6.2
High cost of follow up	150	75
Complicated procedure	12	5.80
Bribery and corruption	26	13
Total	200	100

Household respondents admitted that the farmer grazer commissions often delay before visiting the damaged farmland after the fulfilment of their conditions. Sometimes, it takes the government officials lot of time, even close to a week, and as a result, they often arrive the damaged farmland when the destruction may seem less than the initial magnitude, as the real damage could not be seen any more. Furthermore, most crop farmers admitted that cases of crop damages are often being tilted to favor those who are ready to handle a heavy envelop (bribe) to the commission in charge. This agrees with [10] which stated that, the traditional and administrative authorities often shy away from resolving the farmer grazer conflicts because the officials have an economic interest in seeing that conflicts continue. The low proportion of crop farmers (5.8%) who complained of the complicated nature of the procedure towards receiving compensation payments of damaged was as a result of several factors. They ranged from the role played by the traditional authorities, the crop farmer grazer commission, the rural council and the

judiciary in which crop farmers are at times confused on which medium of conflict resolution to use since majority have clear evidences of protracted failures from their previous attempts in conflict resolution. Most grazing and crop communities in Bui-Donga Mantung Divisions have therefore lost confidence in the capacity of their leaders to provide justice, law and order to see that peace and harmony reigns between the crop farmers and the grazers. Majority seems to have taken the law into their hands by applying the peaceful on-farm conflict settlement just to sort out their differences.

### III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The protracted conflict between the crop farmers and the grazers has presented a formidable challenge to both food crop production and rural development in Bui-Donga Mantung Divisions. Several measures to mitigate and resolve these conflicts have been put in place both at local and national level, but has proven ineffective as a result of several factors viz; bribery and corruption, rural poverty, stubbornness, time wastage and high financial cost borne by the conflicting parties. The lack of respect for the equal land rights and the ineffective implementation of the land laws that regulate landownership in the country, coupled with the lack of clear boundary demarcation between the grazing lands and the crop lands have been another catalyst. These have greatly affected food crop production, the peace and harmony, justice, and sustainable development that are needed in these two divisions in particular and the country as a whole. In as much as much as conflicts still remain an issue in every society, when it arises, amicable settlement through a well-established dialogue platform should therefore be encouraged as much as possible. The researcher therefore argues that the local government authorities (especially the S.D.O and the D.O) should therefore urgently carve out the grazing lands from the farm lands so that the crop farmers may not be confused on where to and not to cultivate their crops for fear of destruction by cattle. They should ensure the partitioning of these areas among the grazers where cattle should be permanently maintained. Though success stories of this attempt exist in some parts of the country, there is need to be studied and applied across the entire North Western region.

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