

REPORT ON THE FARMER-GRAZER CONFLICT

Mbengwi Sub-Division

23 September 2015

For presentation to the S.D.O., Momo Division
and the Governor, North West Region, Cameroon

On 26 April 2015, the international community got alerted about the arrest of a human rights activist in Mbengwi, because of his mediation activities in relation to the farmer-grazer conflicts in the Mbengwi Sub-Division, Momo Division, North West Region of Cameroon.¹ The arrest happened upon request of the Senior Prosecutor in Mbengwi Sub-Division Mr. Avoummou Mbaraga, and the activist got eventually released on 27 May 2015 on bail (court), and after being forced to pay bribe money for release on bail.² Yet today, 20 September 2015, the activist still faces court charges, although his activities are known as non-violent³, and interviews with farmers in Mbengwi Sub-Division show the overwhelming agreement that he acted upon specific requests from villagers and Fons in the region.⁴ The exact complaints against the person are not known, as the prosecutors refuse to share the documents with the activist's lawyer.⁵

According to interviewed farmers and Fons, the arrest symbolizes the attitude of some public administrations in general, and the Divisional Officer of Mbengwi Sub-Division Aminkeng Charles Formin in particular. Therefore, a group of 10 Fons and 'elites' from the Mbengwi Sub-Division, as well as almost 400 farmers filed recently several written petitions to the Governor of the NW Region of Cameroon, asking for an in-depth investigation into the unprofessional activities of the D.O.⁶ These petitions were filed between 20 July 2015 and 20 September 2015, and were copied to the S.D.O. and the D.O. himself. The Fons argued that they:

*"strongly disagree with the professional approach of Divisional Officer (D.O) Aminkeng Charles Formin on the matter. His activities intensify land use conflicts, with more poverty as a direct result. He shows no respect for the Fondoms, and he applies intimidation and corruption in order to rule over the land. His approach does not allow anymore for rehabilitation of this land, and to bring peace and development on individual and community level."*⁷

The Fon of Nyen reported to the Governor, on 24 August 2015, that he witnessed irregularities in the attributions of rights for grazing activities in Meta in general, and in Nyen in particular.⁸ The content is similar to a petition that has been filed by almost 400 Mbengwi farmers on 28 August 2015.⁹ With these letters, the undersigned argue that:

¹ <https://mireilletchiako.wordpress.com/tag/christopher-achobang/>

² Interviews with more than 50 local villagers show that these are daily practices by the prosecutors in Mbengwi. These bribe payments are locally known as the "commercialisation of bail".

³ Interviews, researcher with 413 farmers and 7 Fons, Mbengwi Sub-Division, June 2015 – September 2015.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Interview, researcher with Barrister Umenjoh Hirim, 24 August 2015.

⁶ Fons and elites, Mbengwi Sub-Division, letter to Governor, North West Region, 20 July 2015., letter from Farmers, Mbengwi, Momo Division, 28 August 2015.

⁷ Fons and elites, Mbengwi Sub-Division, letter to Governor, North West Region, 20 July 2015.

⁸ Fon of Nyen, written correspondence, Agro-Pastoral Commission, Mbengwi, Momo Division, 24 August 2015.

⁹ Farmers, Mbengwi, Momo Division, letter to Governor, North West Region, 28 August 2015.

“the Divisional Officer of Mbengwi reports to citizens of several villages in Meta that the Divisional Officer takes the decisions in relation to the attribution of rights, single-handedly and/or in collaboration with a two other people. This is also the interpretation of the grazers.

Additionally to this mentioned problem, (...) grazers (...) continue to receive a permit for the development of grazing land.”¹⁰

The Fon of Nyen reminded the Divisional Officer with this letter that:

“grazing land does not exist. Decree No 78/263 of July, 3 1978 stipulates the procedures for the temporarily attribution of rights to a grazer for certain grazing activities. The word temporarily is in this very important, but the permanent activities of the grazers, including the construction of buildings and grazing activities at a few meters of houses of citizens and within existing farm lands in lots of places in Meta, and their interpretation that the Divisional Officer single-handily delivers these permits, indicates abuse of power at the level of the office of the Divisional Officer.”¹¹

The Fon of Nyen argues in the same letter that “he, together with my notables, have never been invited to meetings of the Agro-Pastoral Commission, although legally obliged by mentioned Decree”, and this makes him “to argue that all active ‘permits’ for use have been attributed for use in Nyen in violation of Decree No 78/263 of July, 3 1978. Again, similar practices take place in almost all villages in Meta.”¹²

The Fon, as well as the villagers, invited the Agro-Pastoral Commission to investigate the approaches by the Divisional Officer on the matter¹³, including:

- To provide him with a copy of all attributed, active rights to grazers for use in Meta in general, and in Nyen in particular,
- To provide him with a copy of the notes of the meetings of the Agro-Pastoral Commission, that made the decision to determine these rights for use in Meta in general, and in Nyen in particular,
- To provide him with a copy of the invitations to me, as Fon of Nyen, for those meetings. As mentioned before, I have not seen any formal invitation.

The Agro-Pastoral Commission did not answer the correspondence of the Fon of Nyen before the requested deadline, till date.

Notwithstanding these petitions, the D.O. of Mbengwi Sub-Division seems to continue his general working approach. He, for example, attended a farmers’ meeting in Kob (Mbengwi Sub-Division) in the third week of August 2015, explaining to the farmers that they will not receive any compensation for revenue losses when the crops are about to be destroyed by cows.¹⁴ During that same period, the D.O.’s office forced an old, handicapped man to pay his office an amount of 5500 CFA for compensation of sending out an administrative convocation in relation to a farmer-grazer conflict, and

¹⁰ Fon of Nyen, written correspondence, Agro-Pastoral Commission, Mbengwi, Momo Division, 24 August 2015., Farmers, Mbengwi, Momo Division, letter to Governor, North West Region, 28 August 2015.

¹¹ Fon of Nyen, written correspondence, Agro-Pastoral Commission, Mbengwi, Momo Division, 24 August 2015.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Interview, researcher with a farmer that attended the meeting, 13 September 2015.

tried to oblige him to pay 50,000 CFA for inspection to his land.¹⁵ The grazer in the debate got also forced to pay the 50,000CFA.¹⁶ The farmer refused to pay, but the grazer paid the 50,000CFA.¹⁷

The consequences of the working approaches forced a group of Fons and elites in the Mbengwi Sub-Division to report it the Governor of the NW region, on 20 July 2015, arguing that:

- “Destruction of farmland and farm crops by Mbororo cattle in Mbengwi take place on a daily basis. Families are confronted with enormous losses of net revenue, as a direct consequence of the destructions. We still wait for the direct, professional actions by the D.O. on the matter. He has been regularly informed of the problems, through farmers’ petitions, requests from Fons, campaign reports, and articles in the media. Independent data is lacking, but based on our communications with villagers, we calculate that Mbengwi Sub Division loses 80 percent of its crops, due to destructions by the cows and grazers.
- The Mbororo grazers have been using very intimidating tactics, which are in clear violation of the law. We have reported 4 deaths, beatings and rape of women, and destructions of houses to the Divisional Officer. But our requests to the D.O. for direct actions remain unheard. This intensifies the impression that the D.O. supports the illegalities, and intimidating approaches. We have been informed by some Mbororo grazers that the D.O. accepts bribes in order to avoid direct action against them.
- We have been informed that a Mbororo grazer on our land is heavily armed, and might constitute a direct danger to the lives of our villagers, and to peace. He has been threatening several of our villagers, and he refuses to respect law and order in this country.”¹⁸

More than 400 farmers in the Mbengwi Sub-Division confirmed daily destructions of crops to the advisor of the Fon of Nyen, during his research in the period of June 2015 – September 2015.¹⁹ This has enormous effects on the people, and the environment they live in.

In terms of effects on the environment, international researchers found the presence of the critically endangered Cross river gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla diehli*) in isolated fragmented patches in the 12,000km² surface that covers the border between cross river in Nigeria and Takamanda-Kagwene in Cameroon. Available maps on the species’ distribution do not show the presence of the species in Mbengwi Sub-Division. The core area of the species is the Kagwene gorilla sanctuary located 12 kilometres from Meta land. The remaining population of this species is estimated at 150 individuals in Cameroon, and makes the species the world’s most endangered large primate. But the historical vegetation type in Mbengwi Sub-Division is similar to the types between the Sub-Division and the Kagwene gorilla sanctuary and the Takamanda National Park, which is a mix of dense humid forest and forested savannah. Diverse and distinctive species of flora and fauna find home in these areas. The historical situation of the land in the Sub-Division reveals the presence of forest patches, and trees of low stature and herbaceous vegetation on the hills.

But during a recent survey, scientists witnessed heavily deforested and degraded land in the Sub-Division, and permanent grazing activities.²⁰ This goes beyond the importance to protect transhumance corridors. Several grazers have built permanent ranges in the Mbengwi Sub-Division, allowing several hundreds cows and goats to graze permanently on savannah land, and in forested areas, increasing the risk of entering cultivated farm land. The biodiversity experts argued that, consequently, “the original

¹⁵ Written statement, Godlove Ndah, 20 August 2015, Note by the assistant Divisional Officer Mbengwi that was handed over to Godlove Ndah, 19 August 2015. Letter to the District Officer, Mbengwi Sub-Division, A complaint of harassment by Mr. Godlove Ndah against you, National Organisation for Human Rights, 31 August 2015.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Fons and elites, Mbengwi Sub-Division, letter to Governor, North West Region, 20 July 2015.

¹⁹ Interviews, researcher with 413 farmers (Mbengwi Sub-Division), June 2015 – September 2015.

²⁰ Visit of researchers to Mbengwi Sub-Division, June 2015, unpublished data.

mosaic made largely place for green, almost monotone grassland”²¹ and consequently with a lot of erosion.



Picture 1: Massive forest and savannah loss, and erosion due to intensive, permanent grazing activities in Mbengwi Sub-Division

²¹ Ibid.



Picture 2: The original vegetation in Mbengwi Sub-Division has been seriously degraded to a monotone grassland

According to traditional Fons and interviewed farmers, new types of land use started in 1985. Mbororo grazers entered the Sub-Division and gradually took over the hill area for its activities. Nowadays, “some forest patches can only be found in the deeper valleys, which are used by farmers for extensive agriculture, and agroforestry, and on a few hills close to the periphery of the Kagwene gorilla sanctuary.”²² “Regenerating a contiguous vegetation structure between Meta and Kagwene might expand the geographic range and corridor for certain species.”²³

The researchers argue that “Mbororo grazers use a more intensive approach than the smallholder farmers. They allow large groups of cows, horses and sheep on the hills, and use intentionally created bushfires in order to allow the quick regeneration of green herb for pasture especially in the dry season.”²⁴ During the short survey, the researchers counted up to 100 animals per grazer. The researchers witnessed intensive grazing activities in areas that were historically protected by farmers and hunters for biodiversity reasons, for example duiker reproduction sites and primate feeding ranges. According to local farmers, the area in the village Funbert, in Mbengwi Sub-Division, is populated by the Cross River gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla diehli*). The researchers found the skull of a young gorilla in one of the houses in the village. The animal got killed 10 years ago. In the field, “the Mbororo grazers confirmed the researchers the presence of the gorillas, but they decided anyways to use the land for pasture for economic reasons. Local hunters also confirmed the presence of leopards in Meta land.”²⁵

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.



Picture 3: Skull of Cross river Gorilla, Funbert, Mbengwi Sub-Division



Picture 4: Massive erosion due to intensive cattle movement, forest of Funbert, Mbengwi Sub-Division



Picture 5: Cows, in forest of Funbert (Mbengwi Sub-Division), that is locally known for presence of Cross river gorilla

In terms of effects on the local people, farmers mention the daily loss of almost all revenue. One farmer, for example, reported in June 2015 the destruction of crops, with a total value of 391,000CFA.²⁶ In September 2015, the same grazer took his cows to the farmer's land, and destroyed the cultivation of beans on almost 2 hectares of land. No compensation has been given to the farmer. The land of the farmer is in the valley of the village Tudig, and the farm is at less than 300meters from the family's home. This is one of many reported stories.²⁷

²⁶ Letter from four (4) affected farmers, to whom it may concern, 16 June 2015.

²⁷ Interviews, researcher with 413 farmers (Mbengwi Sub-Division), June 2015 – September 2015.



Picture 6: GPS point, destruction of farm land, Tudig Village, Mbengwi Sub-Division

A list of 132 victims of violence by grazers in Nyen village has been handed over to the Fon of Nyen on 12 November 2014. They argue to be forcibly driven away by Mbororo grazers from the lands that their families have cultivated for several hundreds of years. This has caused high traumatic circumstances, to which the village of Nyen is not prepared for.²⁸

Instead of investigating the matters, it seems there is big unwillingness at the level of the public administration in Mbengwi Sub-Division to investigate the problems.²⁹ The delegate of Livestock of Mbengwi Sub-Division, for example, made reference in a letter to all Nyen villagers, on 3 August 2014, to the existence of “grazing and farming land” in Mbengwi Sub-Division, which “belong to the State”, “no individual has authority over them” and no cultivation of reported land (in this case: a hill in Nyen) in the letter has to be stopped “till the farmer-grazer commission headed by the D.O. Mbengwi Central visits the area.”³⁰ First of all, it is surprising to identify errors in letters to Nyen villagers about the investigation. In a letter by the Delegate of Livestock, from 21 July 2014, to Nyen Village Council, he informed the Council members that there will be a visit by the Agro-Pastoral Commission on 27 July 2014.³¹ It is then surprising that a new letter, on 3 August 2014, has been sent for said land, stipulating that the visit still needs to take place. Secondly, during the inspection that took place on 27 July 2014, a witness was sent by the Nyen Council to check the visit of the Agro-Pastoral Commission to the said land. He saw the presence of the Delegate of Livestock of Mbengwi Sub-Division as the only representative of the Agro-Pastoral Commission. The Fon of Nyen stated at the same time that he was never invited to participate in mentioned visit to the land. The Delegate eventually never communicated on paper the decision of the Agro-Pastoral Commission, of which the visit does not meet the conditions in Decree No 78/263 of July, 3 1978 to the Nyen Council, but

²⁸ Interview, researcher, Fon of Nyen, July 2015.

²⁹ Interviews, researcher with 413 farmers (Mbengwi Sub-Division), June 2015 – September 2015..

³⁰ Letter, delegate of Livestock, Mbengwi Sub-Division, to all of Nyen village, 3 August 2014.

³¹ Letter, delegate of Livestock, Mbengwi Sub-Division, to Nyen Council, 21 July 2014.

reported to the grazers, during its visit to the hill, that this is without any doubt “grazing land.”³² The absence of a formal invitation to the Fon of Nyen, and his notables, is a violation of mentioned Decree No 78/263 of July, 3 1978. And the reference to the existence of “grazing land” indicates a wrong interpretation of mentioned Decree, that refers to a temporarily attribution of grazing rights to a grazer.

The approach by the Delegate of Livestock seems in here similar to the situation in Tudig with the suggested visit by the Divisional Officer of Mbengwi Sub-Division on September 2015, but that visit got cancelled after a complaint by the owner of the land on corruption of the D.O.’s office in relation to this case (cf supra).

In order to provide an alternative to the absence of support by the D.O. and the Delegate of Livestock from Mbengwi Sub-Division, and given the evidences of corruption and abuse of power³³, the Fon of Nyen, together with several other Fons, have been organising a series of meetings with social, human rights and environmental experts, with specific requests of visiting the villages and to make concrete recommendations for rehabilitation of the visited land. These experts have defined the following priorities:

- to map the land types and land use in Mbengwi Sub-Division, in order to gather baseline data on the current land types and land use,
- to evaluate the revenue components of land users, and their contribution in the livelihoods of the villagers,
- to conduct surveys in the forest and savannah patches,
- the protection and conservation of the hill areas with distribution of the Cross River Gorilla, and other critically endangered and other endangered species,
- an agreement with all the hunters on the application of a sustainable hunters’ management plan, and,
- the facilitation of dialogue between farmers and grazers,
- the allocation and protection of sufficient land for sustainable farming and grazing and for agroforestry. The agricultural part of the program has a high social and conservation value: in generating higher, more stable and sustainable farming incomes, what lowers the pressure on forest and savannah land for economic reasons. It constitutes also the first step in resolving the farmer-grazer conflicts.

Dialogue with the villagers indicates strong support for these recommendations. The “experts are currently in contact with international and national governmental officials, law-makers, lawyers and experts, in order to build a network of people”³⁴ that are supporting a full rehabilitation.

³² Meeting, researcher with Fon of Nyen, Mbengwi Sub-Division, July 2015.

³³ Letter to Mayor of Mbengwi Sub-Division, Re: allocation of land for giant agro industrial projects for the Government of Cameroon, Fon of Nyen, 24 August 2015.

³⁴ Ibid.

REPORT ON THE CREATION OF FONDOMS Mbengwi Sub-Division

23 September 2015

For presentation to the S.D.O., Momo Division
and the Governor, North West region, Cameroon

On 20 July 2015, a group of Fons and elites wrote a petition to the Governor of the North West region, Cameroon, about the D.O.'s (Aminkeng Charles Formin) efforts to create Fondoms in the Mbengwi Sub-Division³⁵:

- D.O Aminkeng Charles Formin has been creating new villages in the quarters SANG and MUNAM. These quarters are located on the farmlands of more than three (3) Fons, without any prior consultation and dialogue on the matter.
- He even continues with his battle, with the repositioning of Frigyeng as an independent village, instead of a quarter.
- He has created Fondoms in Sang and Munam in 2013, of which Mr Mukiawa was presented as crowned Fon of Sang, and Mr Henry Mukam Ndegum in Munam. The original Fon of Munam is Fon Fominyen of Nyen, who has ruled over the land for hundreds of years. The D.O. did not organise dialogue with Fon Fominyen, but instead, decided to take these destructive administrative decisions on his own. Frigyeng is a farmland on which Guneku people (descended from Nyen) are settled. D.O. Aminkeng Charles Formin is trying to elevate a quarter head from Oshie to Fon, who was allowed there to farm alongside the Guneku people.
- His attempts to divide the Fondoms further complicate the situation as there are already 31 Fons for 29 villages. We strongly disagree with his approach on the matter, which are an attempt to divide the land and Fondoms. This might provoke civil conflicts. This clearly demonstrates unprofessional behaviour.

For Munam, a letter from the Divisional Officer Aminkeng Charles Formin from 19 November 2012 shows the appointment of Mr Mukam Henry as Administrative Representative in Munam.³⁶ A suggested partnership agreement with financial support from the European Commission, from 5 July 2013, confirms Mr Mukam as the Traditional Authority in Munam³⁷, although the S.D.O. of Momo Division stopped the operations of the D.O., to have taken place in March 2013.³⁸ This area was originally, before the appointment of a Village Head, a farm land that covered several villages, including Nyen.³⁹

For Sang, a document illustrates an invitation for the installation (hand written to replace the word coronation) of Sang Village Head, by the Divisional Officer, which would take place on the 1st March 2013.⁴⁰ This area was originally, before the appointment of a Village Head, a quarter.⁴¹

³⁵ Fons and elites, Mbengwi Sub-Division, letter to Governor, North West Region, 20 July 2015.

³⁶ Decision, Divisional Officer for Mbengwi Sub Division, No 067, 19 November 2012.

³⁷ Suggested Partnership Agreement for the construction and rehabilitation of social infrastructures, with financial support from the European Commission, 5 July 2013.

³⁸ Fon of Nyen, letter to the Senior Divisional Officer, Momo Division, 26th August 2013.

³⁹ Interview, researcher, Fon of Nyen, 21 September 2015.

⁴⁰ Installation of Sang Village Head in Meta Momo Division, North West Region, 1th March 2013.

⁴¹ Interview, researcher, Fon of Nyen, 21 September 2015.

The available information for the installation of a Village Head in Frigyeng is based on internal communications between Fons in Mbengwi Sub-Division and insiders at the level of the administrative offices in Mbengwi Sub-Division.⁴²

⁴² Ibid.