

## **Conflicting Interest over Geographical Space: The Case of Ndokayo Cattle Ranch 1974-2010**

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**Abstract:** The exploitation of land is a consistent factor in triggering conflicts in communities the world over. In Cameroon such land-related conflicts are frequent, with the Ndokayo Cattle Ranch being one of such conflict zones. In this geographical space which is conducive for cattle rearing, there are perennial conflicting interests between the government that owns the ranch and local cattle grazers. Building largely on primary source material, this study examines the dynamic nature of this intra-grazier land conflict along with resolution initiatives and ensuing implications. The paper reveals that the problematic acquisition of land for the establishment of the ranch laid the basis of a conflict over the grazing land, whose sustenance, stalled resolution and negative imprint rested on the lack of collective commitment to address the dispute. The study concludes that the solution to the conflict within the Ndokayo cattle ranch has to hinge on a multi-actor approach which should amount to the allocation of grazing land to the traditional graziers.

**Keywords:** Conflicts, land, Ndokayo Cattle Ranch, SODEPA.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Opposing interests over land use are at the centre of land conflicts. The centrality of land in the wellbeing and survival of populations has increased competition over it, thus entrenching its potential to trigger conflict. In Africa, just like elsewhere, land is required for many purposes, particularly economic considerations. This takes us to the livestock sector which has been labeled by Jahnke as vital to subsistence and economic development [1]. Besides being a major source of government revenue, livestock production is a source of employment, income and improved livelihood for rural populations. This accounts for the reliance of many rural populations on traditional methods of cattle rearing. In rural areas conducive to the activity, traditional cattle production thrives, with the livelihood of millions of people dependent on it.

But the traditional methods that characterize this activity necessitate huge parcels of land, a diminishing resource. The consistent increase in human and livestock populations results in heavy pressure on land, and with it the potential of land conflict involving cattle graziers. While efforts at modernizing the sector via the ranching system with a view to limiting the quantity of land required are yielding, they are at the origin of land conflicts between ranch operators and traditional cattle producers [2]. Such land conflicts that hinge on cattle production are common in Cameroon, especially in areas hosting government ranches that are managed by the Livestock Development Corporation,

widely known by its French acronym, SODEPA. The latter was established in 1974 as part of government initiative to accelerate cattle productivity and output [3]. It was in an effort to meet this objective that SODEPA created ranches in grassland regions of Cameroon. Although these ranches (Ndokayo, Faro and Dumbo-Jakiri) have boosted cattle production in quantitative and qualitative terms, their existence has amounted to land conflicts. The lands on which these ranches are seated were hitherto used by local graziers. The extensive pastoral land needs of traditional livestock producers in such places were ignored by SODEPA officials when establishing the ranches.

In establishing the Ndokayo Ranch in the East Region of Cameroon, SODEPA focused on modernizing cattle production while overlooking the reality that the survival of the traditional livestock production system rested on continued access to vast expanse of land. As a matter of fact, expanses of grazing lands on which local cattle producers had depended were taken away from them by government for the creation of the ranch. Faced with the lack of grazing land, traditional cattle producers undermined the termination of their ownership of the land and remained consistent in encroaching into the ranch land. This amounted to conflicts over the grazing land between the traditional graziers and the ranch authorities. This sustained conflict helped to further drag traditional cattle production in the area into crisis, with embarrassing consequences on the wellbeing of

the local graziers. The officials heralded unrewarding measures to roll away the conflict, while at the same time placing ranch business above the interest of traditional stock breeders.

While a lot of research has been devoted to land conflict, the centrality of Cameroon's ranches in the occurrence and sustenance of such conflicts is yet to attract the interest of scholars. This paper therefore represents a contribution to the limited existing volume of scholarship concerning the liaison between ranches and conflicts over grazing land. The purpose of this paper is to investigate critically the historical roots, changing nature and implications of the conflict over grazing land in the Ndokayo Ranch between traditional cattle producers and ranch authorities. The essential focus is assessing the conflict as a vehicle for the decline of traditional livestock production, with ensuing stresses on the wellbeing of the local population.

### **Analytical Framework**

This study on the perennial conflicting interests in the Ndokayo Ranch between the ranch officials and local cattle graziers is grounded on and shaped by the conflict theory. For many years now, conflict theorists have raised debates about the sources and resolution of the conflicts that have been a defining factor of human societies. Within the conflict theory literature, it is the plurality of opposing interest groups school of thought that is capable of informing analysis on land disputes within the Ndokayo Ranch. Proponents of this school argue that human societies are comprised of a plurality of opposing and competing aggregates in a context of scarce resources, in this case land [4]. This, in their thinking, accounts for the high incidence of land conflicts in modern society. Simply put, land disputes occur over circumstances of land scarcity and plurality of groups requiring land. Hence, land disputes are explained by the clash of group interest articulated by some conflict theorists. In the thinking of Simmel, rivalry over scarce land creates the potential for a conflict of interests in situations where in two parties desire the same tract of land [5]. It is evident in land conflict literature that such opposing interests constantly occur in most societies when two or more parties compete over the same parcel of land [6].

In the thinking of McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, the central concepts of space, place, and conflicts has produced more illuminating understandings of how people perceive, shape and act upon grievances and opportunities [7]. They postulate that the issue of self-interest over space and the available natural resources ignite conflicts perpetrated by the individuals concerned. This is corroborated by scholars who demonstrate how historical circumstances and events shape episodes of contention over grazing lands. In Lefebvre's conceptualization of space, human and

economic activities (cattle rearing) in the environment are integrated. Yet space, it must be stressed, is more than a mere residual of economic and social action, with no independent influence of its own. As Massey argues, spatial distributions of natural resources (pasture) and geographical differentiation comes as a result of economic processes, but they also affect how those processes work.

It thus emerges that land is a fundamental factor of production in the agro-pastoral sector. It plays an essential role in increasing as well as sustaining livestock production. The extent to which this role is performed is determined in part by methods of land acquisition and the available natural resources such as pasture on which cattle depend. In Cameroon, the right to have access to grazing land can be through negotiations especially during periods of transhumance, inheritance, gift, purchase, loan and allocation by family head, local chief or any land custodian. However, inheritance is the most important and common way of acquiring grazing land in Cameroon. In the East Region of Cameroon where the Ndokayo ranch is located, it has been found that traditional breeders are consistently in need of grazing lands especially during the period of transhumance. This is because the fundamental rights given to these graziers by the ranch authorities have been abused and as a result, conflicts are bound to emanate within the ranch zone. In the Ondo State of Southwestern Nigeria, grazing land is acquired mainly by inheritance among the native farmers, while acquisition is mainly through sales and allocation to cattle graziers is an important feature of the customary tenure system.

In cattle rearing societies in general and in African rural communities in particular, sustainable use of grazing land has generated conflicts between ranch owners and cattle graziers from the traditional sector. Understandably, conflict is a state of clashing or opposing interests. It occurs when two or more people oppose one another because of differences in their needs, wants, goals or values. Conflict is an indicator of a changing society. Rapid changes due to new technologies, available natural resources and government policies are all contributing to the emergence of conflict. The procedure of having access to grazing land is not fixed. The notion of transhumance activities especially during the dry season has triggered conflict as spheres of influence have been carved out by individuals because of self-interest. As such, disputes over ownership and use of land tend to multiply.

This increasing assertion of individualized rights over the ranch land gives rise to numerous conflicts which become more difficult to resolve, with an ensuing costly burden on both the ranch administration and the traditional cattle rearers. Upreti

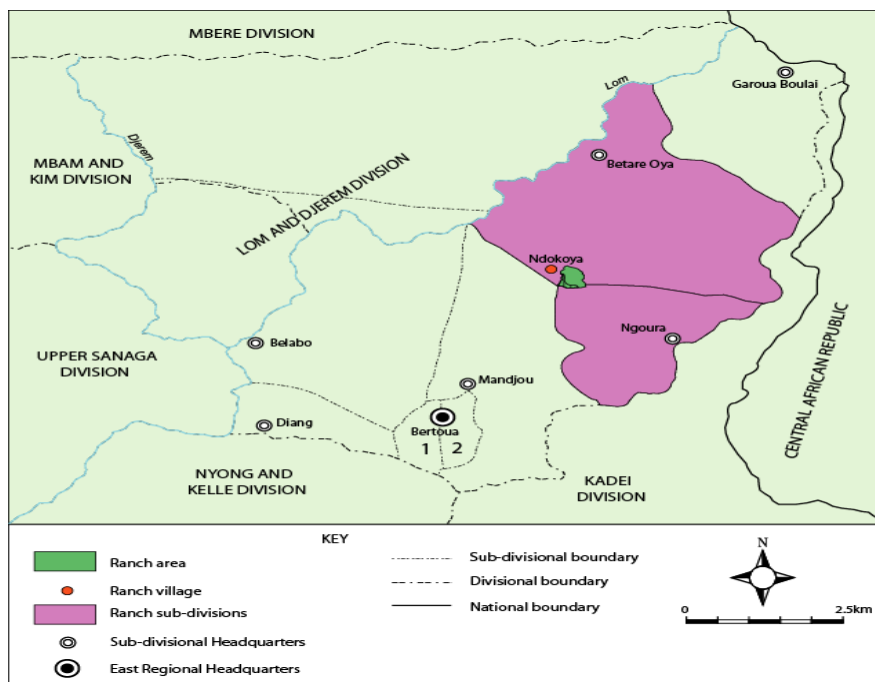
explains that conflicts in many parts of the developing world can be traced to disputes over land ownership and land use resources. For him, conflicts arise over land resources due to lack of respect of norms, inadequate legislation, and non-enforcement of legal and customary provisions where they exist as well as ignorance and/or disregard for other land users [8]. Thus, a myopic planning of development projects that utilize grazing lands may lead to conflicts among the major players in land resource use. Also, a survey carried out by Duadeline found that the root cause of all communal conflicts can be traced to the problem of types of access gained to productive opportunities in land and the control of such resources [9].

In light of the foregoing, the analytical framework in this paper incorporates the conflict theoretical contributions of the plurality of opposing interest groups school and engages Ndokayo Ranch land disputes between the ranch officials and local grazers with existing land conflict literature. The paper demonstrates the link between the scarcity of land, the presence of the Ndokayo Ranch and traditional breeders as opposing interest groups and land dispute in the ranch. This paper therefore contends that land scarcity and the plurality of interest groups interacted in Ndokayo to create conditions conducive of land disputes. In fact, it is suggested in this paper that the

context of land scarcity and interest group plurality interacted with maladministration of land to create the potential for land competition between the ranch officials and local cattle grazers. To support its suggestion, the paper discusses the underlying factors of these conflicts and analyses its dynamics and implications.

**The Study Area in Brief**

The Ndokayo Ranch is located in the Betare Oya and Ngoura sub-divisions in the Lom and Djerem Division of the East Region of Cameroon. The region occupies the south eastern portion of the Republic of Cameroon. It is bordered to the east by the Central African Republic, to the south by Congo, to the north by Adamawa and to the west by the Centre and South Regions [10]. The Ndokayo cattle ranch is located between the Betare Oya and the Ngoura sub-divisions, with a greater part of the ranch found in the Ngoura Sub Division. The ranch shares boundaries with three administrative divisions: to the north with Mberé Division, east with Kette Sub Division, and south with Manjou Sub Division. The Betare Oya and Ngoura sub divisions have many villages, with Betare Oya having an approximate population of 45,000 inhabitants while that of Ngoura Sub Division is estimated at 30,000 people according to the 1987 population census. The surface area is about 22000 km<sup>2</sup>.



**Fig-1: Ndokayo Cattle Ranch in the Lom and Djerem Division**

**Source:** Adapted from the administrative map of Cameroon, INC, Yaounde, 1992 and redrawn by Enchaw, G.B, 2015.

The Ndokayo ranch covers a surface area of about 140,000 hectares of land whereby only 50,000 hectares is under exploitation [11]. This is because the animal population is small to accommodate the entire

ranch during the period of the study. Ndokayo is found on a gentle sloping land lying between an altitude of 1000 meters below sea level and it is ranked among the most important grazing areas in Cameroon [12].

However, its geographical location combined with human factors certainly dictated the establishment of the cattle ranch in the region [13]. In fact, the geographical presentation of an environment is often instrumental in determining the kind of development projects it can attract. The choice of creating a cattle ranch in Ndokayo was not a mistake given that the area was endowed with natural features such as pastures, abundant land, hills, valleys, rivers of which when combined with the existing human resources served as a basis for the establishment of the ranch.

### **Ndokayo Ranch: Basis of Creation**

After the independence of Cameroon in 1961, efforts were made by the government to boost and develop both the livestock and agricultural sectors of the country. This was facilitated through the adoption of the policy of Planned Liberalism whose implementation took the form of successive Five Year Development Plans. The first and second plans were implemented in the 1960s with huge failure as a result of the inability to follow up most of the investments projects that ensued from them. The third plan which was christened as the "Plan of Production and Productivity" spanned from 1971 to 1976 [14]. Its heralding and potential of success were the handiwork of planning committees constituted by President Ahmadou Ahidjo. It was within this plan that both the agricultural and livestock sectors were prioritized as pathways to fostering growth and development.

Little wonder this period was characterized by the creation of many agricultural state corporations such as WADA (Wum Area and Development Authority), ZAPI (Priority Integrated Development Zones), OADA (Ombessa Area Development Authority), SODENKAM (Nkam Development Authority), and SODEPA (Livestock Development Corporation) [15]. The latter was created by decree No. 74/182 of 8<sup>th</sup> March 1974 by the Cameroon Government in collaboration with the World Bank. It was created alongside the Ndokayo cattle ranch in the East of Cameroon. In order to boost the livestock sector in Cameroon, SODEPA had as objective to develop and coordinate the activities of this ranch in order to improve productivity and increase cattle population. Prior to the establishment of the ranch, the initial settlers of the area were known as the Gbayas [16]. There existed other minority groups such as the Waden, Tikondi, Woumbou, who were involved in hunting, fishing, farming and gold excavation [17].

Initially, the basis for the creation of the Ndokayo cattle ranch was rooted in the presidential decree creating SODEPA. But it is worth mentioning that the objectives of the ranch evolved with time and circumstances. Whatever the case, the aims of the ranch were broad and directed towards the improvement of livestock breeding and the processing of their by-

products. Thus, the ranch was aimed at increasing animal production through the use of modern rearing techniques. Besides, it was also out to heighten the quantity and quality of beef production, by constantly supplying the various slaughtering houses with the required animals. This was in an attempt to meet up with the rising demand of beef expressed by Cameroonians.

Besides, SODEPA to which the ranch was administratively attached was charged with the purchase of animals, creation of livestock units as well as administration and development of all livestock projects under its jurisdiction. It also had as responsibilities to provide the necessary agricultural commodities for stock breeding and to process livestock products in particular. This had to be achieved through the establishment of slaughter houses, cold storage facilities and processing units. This corporation also sold finished and unfinished animal products such as horns, skin, and blood to different companies. For example, the skin of the animals were sold to the shoe producing company known as BATA [18], the button producing companies in Douala and to local farmers around the country. SODEPA also assisted farmers and stock breeders (traditional cattle breeders) during National Agro Pastoral shows and most often, this assistance was in the form of technical supervision and the introduction of new cattle breeds.

In light of SODEPA's goals, the Ndokayo Ranch had as duty to introduce new animal species through advanced cross breeding techniques. Also, it served as a demonstration center where local cattle rearers received training on advanced cattle rearing techniques. Thus, one of its aims was to improve cattle rearing production in the Betare Oya area in particular and the East Region in general. While the ranch administration raised funds, employed competent workers and engaged in an aura of activities in an effort to boost cattle production in view of influencing the socio-economic development of the Betare Oya area, the perennial land dispute it entered into with local grazers became a defining feature of most of the ranch's existence.

### **Establishment of the Ranch: A Trigger of Land Conflict**

The implantation phase of the ranch was the most crucial and difficult period witnessed by the local indigenes and the ranch administration. This was because it was a period characterized by the acquisition of land, displacement of the local population from the ranch zone, survey works and demarcation process, setting up of the infrastructure and the stocking of the ranch with animals. Besides, it was a period marked by conflicts due to the displacement of the people to far and nearby areas in order to effectively demarcate the



ranch zone. Before 1974, the initial settlers of the ranch were involved in activities like cattle grazing, fishing, hunting, mining of gold and the cultivation of both cash and food crops [19]. During this period, the people constructed thatched houses and established foot paths from their local settlements to the mining sites. This was intended to facilitate movement and transactions from one area to another. In an exclusive interview with Mbassi Janvier, he observed that:

The displacement process of the local inhabitants from the ranch zone was facilitated by Ndipola Mbassola and Ngong Soka, the chief administrators that corresponded on behalf of the local community and the ranch officials headed by Anthony R. Brunwell, pioneer Director of the ranch. The population by 1974 was estimated at 200 inhabitants who lived in thatched houses. After the agreement and negotiation procedure was effected, the people were asked to quit the area for the establishment of the ranch. As a result, some people migrated to far and nearby areas such as Garga Sarali, Petit Ngaoundere, Tongo Ngandima, Tikondi, Woumbou and to the Adamawa area. However, it is worth noting that no form of compensation was given to the displaced people [20].

By September 1974, the displacement of the people to different areas made land to be available for the establishment of the ranch. This certainly gave the opportunity for effective survey works and demarcation of the ranch zone. The presence of the local miners and the tobacco producing company facilitated the process as they had already established foot tracks within the ranch zone. The ranch covers a total land surface area of about 140 000 hectares, but the area under effective occupation is about 40.000 hectares [21].

Immediately after the survey and demarcation process was over, there was the necessity to create camps with each destined for a particular purpose. The different camps were named taking into consideration the name of the village or stream or river around the area. This could be exemplified with the cases of rivers Oudou, Moule and Mboko that were transformed into Oudou, Moule and Mboko camps. Equally, there existed the Gabong and the Ndanaga villages which later on took the names of Gabong and Ndanga camps. Hence the establishment of the various camps actually favored the smooth functioning of the activities of the ranch on one hand and on the other hand, it served a source of conflict.

### **Squabbles among Traditional Grazers Over Ranch Land**

Laxity in the management of the activities in the ranch has generated conflicts between traditional

graziers over the ranch land. The cattle population in the ranch has been on a gradual decrease over the years. This could be explained by mismanagement caused by the different authorities that have served the ranch since its creation. During its early years, the ranch which was under the control of World Bank experts experienced rapid growth in cattle population due to the deployment of high techniques and skilled methods in management and administration. Between 1975 and 1980, the ranch experienced an increase in cattle population from 393 to 5469 [22]. This tremendous increase was due to good managerial skills put in place by the first managers who were foreign experts with a lot of experience in the domain of cattle ranching.

In addition, the ranch witnessed a boom in the number of animals because of the monthly assistance and subvention given by the state geared towards improving cattle production and productivity. But from the 1990s, the ranch started experiencing a decrease in the cattle population due to the fact that the administration became too liberal, allowing some private individuals to rear animals within the ranch zone even after the period of transhumance. This was spearheaded by two traditional stock breeders, namely Alhadji Maliki and Alhadji Ahmed who constantly encroached into the ranch with their animals. Claiming grazing rights on the land, their animals have been permanently stationed in parts of the ranch since 2006.

Expectedly, this resulted in conflicts between Ahmed and Maliki over “their grazing land” and subsequently, Maliki reported the matter to the Divisional Officer (DO) for Ngoura Sub Division, claiming that Ahmed’s animals encroached into his land [23]. During the investigation process a delegation constituting the DO for Ngoura sub-division Thomboka Adams, Mbulav Musa (Ndokayo Ranch Chief of Production), Sambo Emmanuel (Chief of Minale camp), Mbappe (Chief of Livestock sector in Garga Sarali), Ardo Sajo (Chief of Vadobe Mbororo community), Ngommo Andre (Laborer in the ranch), Alhadji Maliki and Alhadji Ahmed (traditional cattle breeders within the ranch zone) paid an enquiry visit to the area of conflict. In the course of the investigation, Alhadji Ahmed observed that:

The Minale camp was the area given to me by the Manager of the ranch. But before occupying the area, I paid 200,000 franc CFA to the administration. Between the period from 2006 up till 2011, I have spent 5 Million franc CFA and have given about 200 herds of cattle as token to the ranch administration. So I am the rightful owner of the land [24].

Ahmed's claim of ownership over the land was refuted by Maliki who argued that he was the rightful owner of the land in these words:

From the Minale camp right up to the Tila area was under my control. This is because when I came here in 2006, I made concrete arrangements with the manager of the ranch to effectively occupy the area even after the period of transhumance. But to my greatest dismay, I realized that Ahmed's animals have encroached into my area and destroyed my reserved pasture land of which I have spent money to demarcate with the use of barb wires [25].

The foregoing opposing claims by the two traditional breeders bring to light some key issues. First, it emerges from both claims that the administration of the ranch, knowingly or unknowingly, were at the origin of the land dispute. In establishing the ranch, land on which traditional breeders depended was confiscated and carved out as ranch land. This was not immediately followed by measures to guarantee the sustenance of traditional cattle breeding by the officials of the ranch. As the quest for land heightened among traditional breeders, the urge to encroach into the ranch land grew. Second, the inability of the ranch administration to put the entire ranch land they had expropriated from the local population into full use yielded the temptation among local breeders to encroach into the land. Third, there is evident complicity of some officials of the ranch with the local breeders who occupied the ranch. Both Ahmed and Maliki claimed that their occupation of the ranch was approved by the administration of the ranch. These three issues put together, it is clear that the presence of the Ndokayo Ranch has favoured the emergence of land disputes among grazers and between grazers and the ranch administration.

The differences in opinion made the DO for Ngoura to resolve that all of the traditional stock breeders should quit the ranch land, threatening legal sanctions if his orders were flouted [26]. Furthermore, he made it clear that the ranch was not an individual's property, but that of the state. As such, nobody has the right to allow people to use the ranch for private adventures. However, the situation between Ahmed and Maliki was a clear indication that the ranch was poorly managed by the administration due to failure to implement and follow up the policy guiding the activities of the ranch. As a result of this, there were bound to be constant loss of animals orchestrated by some of these individuals and also the rampant spread of animal diseases, as most of the incoming animals were infected with diseases, with a majority of them not treated. This was evident of the fact that the ranch failed

to follow up and implement the cattle rearing policy of transhumance. Hence, Ahmed and Maliki were asked to leave the ranch zone while measures were being put in place to ensure that the ranch is effectively managed.

The land misunderstanding between the ranch authority and traditional graziers on one hand and ranch administration and the indigenous people on the other generated by the establishment of the Ndokayo Ranch is yet to be laid to rest. This has come with numerous impacts on cattle production, peaceful cohabitation and the general social and economic wellbeing of the population. The disputes have also stalled the ranch from achieving some of the objectives for which it was established in 1974. According to Jahnke, the effectiveness of cattle ranch operation must be guided by the notion of demarcating the land with the use of paddocks and barb wires [27]. This was not the case in Ndokayo and has consistently attracted encroachments into ranch land. Since the project was the first major attempt by the Cameroon Government sponsored by the World Bank, there is the need to bring in foreign experts to set up and manage the project. As a matter of fact, the displaced people needed to be compensated even though some of the local inhabitants were not remunerated since they were displaced to far off areas. Thus, this is evident in the fact that there was bound to be disgruntledness which made the people to start requesting for the return of their land.

## **CONCLUSION**

The creation of SODEPA in 1974 by Presidential Decree No. 74/182 of 8<sup>th</sup> March 1974 had as objectives to modernize, increase and improve the quality and quantity of cattle production. This was an initiative of the government to bring development in rural areas notably in the case of Ndokayo through the establishment of the cattle ranch. Before the advent of the ranch in Ndokayo, cattle rearing was virtually left in the hands of the traditional stock breeders and the indigenous population who were unable to meet up with the demands of meat and by-products of cattle due to the increase in population. Thus, the creation of the Ndokayo cattle ranch was intended to serve as a demonstration center for the implementation of modern techniques in cattle production and the introduction of new breeds of cattle. But in the course of setting up the ranch, there was the emergence of conflicts over geographical space perpetrated by both the ranch administration and some traditional stock breeders within the area. The paper reveals that the problematic acquisition of land for the establishment of the ranch laid the basis of a conflict over the grazing land, whose sustenance, stalled resolution and negative imprint rested on the lack of collective commitment to address the dispute. The study concludes that the solution to the conflict within the Ndokayo cattle ranch has to hinge on a multi-actor approach which should amount

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