

»WUAI, KESIAZHEH, NYENGUI:« HISTORY AND LIVELIHOOD CHALLENGES IN A CAMEROON'S MONTANE FOREST RESERVE

WUAI, KESIAZHEH, NYENGUI: POVIJEST I ŽIVOTNI IZAZOVI U ZAŠTIĆENOM ŠUMSKOM REZERVATU KAMERUNA

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Summary

This paper examines the challenges Laimbwe people face in utilizing resources in the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve in Cameroon for their livelihood. The reserve was created in 1951 and since then movement into and exploitation of resources therein was regulated by forest guards and those who went ahead to do so were punished. The increase in the population of the villages in and around the reserve has forced many to venture into the forest to sustain life. This illegal encroachment for food and shelter has led to rapid deforestation and created more conflicts between the users of the forest and officials of the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife in Cameroon. The government seeks sustainable use of the forest and its resources for the benefit of the nation, the local population, and other stakeholders in the forest sector.

Key words: Forest, Livelihood, Cameroon, Grassland, Sustainable

Ključne riječi: šuma, život, Kamerun, travnata stepa, održivi razvoj

INTRODUCTION

The international concern and awareness about the environment today is due to changing climatic conditions and global warming. Such has been accentuated by the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources and other human activities that harm planet earth. Considering the damage this has caused already, there is growing concern from different parts of the world about urgently preserving what is left of the environment. In many African countries south of the Sahara, areas that were once covered by natural evergreen forest with flowing rivers are bare and the rivers have dried up with untold consequences on the population, the architects of deforestation. Due to the alarming rate at which forest is 'chopped down' by foreign logging companies (Brown *et al* 2003:2) and the dilemma of governments of developing countries to raise revenue from forest exploitation while striving to protect it, there have been attempts to sustainably manage the forest by also engaging the community, the challenges notwithstanding.

Various efforts have been made by national governments, international organizations as well as the African Union and the United Nations Organization to bring the issue of sustainable management of the forest and other resources to the table. These attempts have met with acceptance and enthusiasm but also with resistance and criticisms. Those who have accepted forest regulation and protection argue that the rate at which environmental degradation takes place, if nothing is done to stop it, dooms the human race and future generations to disaster (Sieböck 2002: 2; Oyono 2005a: 1; Oyono *et al* 2005: 357). They have

invested money to support programs aimed at protecting the environment and its rich biodiversity for the good of the human race and also to promote tourism. Others have criticized calls for environmental protection on the basis that the communities located close to resources tend to be deprived of its use while other commercial groups elsewhere and a 'forestry elite' benefit (Ibid; Samndong and Vatn 2012:213). Many other reasons have been given in support or opposition to calls for environmental protection but it suffices to say that environmental issues are seriously taken into consideration by industry, civil societies and others who want to see a more rational use of the resources by avoiding wastage. Cameroon is one of the countries in West/Central Africa that has been actively involved in the sustainable management of forests and other natural resources.

RELEVANCE OF STUDY

Forests all over the world have become important sites for the conservation of biological diversity. People living around forest areas value the forest for several reasons. The forest is a reservoir for the supply of water, fuelwood, medicines, honey and other products with a cultural and spiritual importance (Gardner n.d.: 153). In fact, the forest means a lot to local communities in terms of its socio-cultural and economic importance.

Montane forests are rare and small when compared with the vast lowland forests of the Congo basin for example but recognized as globally important centers of endemism, containing significant numbers of birds, animals, and plants that are found nowhere else. The importance of these categories of forests like those of the Bamenda highlands in Cameroon¹ cannot be over-emphasized. Conservation experts believe they need to protect the montane forests like the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve that is the subject of this study. In this and other forest reserves of the grasslands of Cameroon are rare species of mammals, reptiles and amphibians that are still to be fully studied (Gardner n.d.: 154-155). These reserves provide opportunities to study and protect the many species of birds, animals and plants that are endemic, rare, or vulnerable. These are ecologically, socio-culturally and economically significant protected areas. Forests also act as watersheds for many water courses. Water is life in terms of fishing, regulation of climate, and other functions and if the forests that serve as watersheds are not preserved then these rivers eventually dry up and people suffer.

Forests in Cameroon like elsewhere also play an important social role in the livelihood of forest dependent people. Apart from the traditional use of non-wood forest products like fruits, bush meat and medicinal plants, community forestry has opened additional opportunities for forest dependent communities. Through this they have become involved in forest management and forest products processing (Amariel 2005: 6). Community forestry does not only build capacity, it offers additional value to forest products and make people to sustainably manage their own forest for the present and the future. With inadequate knowledge in forest management, the people in some rural communities destroy forests and in doing so mortgage the future of their offspring. The sustainable management of forests fosters the livelihoods of the people in several ways. It also provides protein in the form of bush meat and various edible plants and a job to the hunters who rely on the forest for sustenance (Amariel 2005: 7). Forest protection has also valorized conservation education, tourism and rural development in different ways (Bisong *et al* 2009: 166).

The timber and non-timber forest products have been of industrial significance. The wood obtained from logging has been used by the sawmilling, pulp, and paper manufacturers, and furniture and fixtures industries (Ogendo 1966: 509). Through this, employment has been provided to many people at the level of transportation of timber from the forest to the industries as well as those employed to work in various

¹ The forest reserves of the North West Region of Cameroon which have however come under illegal exploitation include the Mbembe Forest Reserve created in 1934, Fungom Forest Reserve created in 1951, Kom / Wum Forest Reserve created in 1951, Bafut Ngemba Forest Reserve created in 1953 and the Bali Ngemba Forest Reserve established in 1961. All these forest reserves but for one were created in the colonial period. Only the Bali Ngemba Forest Reserve was created in 1961, the year of the reunification of British Southern Cameroons with the Republic of Cameroon.

related industries. Even sawdust from the sawmill industry is used as additional fuel to the one that is harvested directly from the forest. Other non-timber products obtained from the forest have been used in pharmaceutical and other industries providing employment to many people and saving lives through the medicines produced.

CAMEROON'S FORESTRY POLICY AND HISTORY

Cameroon as a country is located within West and Central Africa with a population of over 20 million people. The country lies between latitudes 2° and 13° N and between longitudes 8° and 16° E. It has been described as all of Africa in one triangle or »Africa in miniature« because of its wide range of climates and ecosystems stretching from the Sahelian through the Afro-montane region of the Savannah to the coastal forested region of the South. This bilingual country has four principal types of forests including the Atlantic, pluvial, high altitude and the Guinea-Congolese forests. Other scholars like Amariel (2005: 5) classify the Cameroon forests into three: plain evergreen, plain semi-deciduous, and mountain forests. There are however protected areas covering about 8.4% of the land area. Of these protected areas, there are approximately 125 forest reserves, which represent about 4% of the total area.

The reserves vary in sizes from a few hectares to 300,000 hectares and cover an area of around 18,600 square kilometers. These reserves, production and protection forests are the property of the state of Cameroon but most of them are in very poor condition. Farming activities in many of them have destroyed these reserves. The guards are few in number and ill-equipped to protect these forests from degradation. Above all, forest reserves in Cameroon receive low budgetary and infrastructure priority, which helps explain why they are in a poor state (Benhin and Barbier 1999: 6-10).

When Germany colonized Cameroon on July 14 1884, the country's ethnic groups living in the forest zone had established territories. They managed natural resources according to family law and the village chiefs were the main managers of these resources. Those who went hunting in the forest returned and presented their catch to the chief who distributed it to the villagers. Hunters who went out of the village hunting zone obtained permission from the chief and those who went ahead without permission were punished accordingly. The communal management of the forest and its resources gave way to German legal ownership. The cohabitation of the new version of the state introduced by the Germans and customary systems created problems that continued after independence and the reunification of Cameroon in 1960/61. Villagers were prevented from killing animals without obtaining hunting permits (Oyono 2005: 115; Mengang n.d.: 239-241) and those caught without permits were sanctioned. When Cameroon was divided into British and French Cameroon after the First World War, France took control of French Cameroon as a Mandated Territory of the League of Nations in 1922 and in 1930 began to create hunting reserves. The French colonial administration also educated the local population about the need to plant exotic plants. Game guards were put in place to protect forests and wildlife (Mengang n.d.: 241). With regards to British Southern Cameroons, which came under the control of the British during the same period, a forest conservator was appointed to assist the government in the management of the forest (Njoh 2007: 113).

The laws that governed exploitation of the forest and its products during the colonial period were tailored to benefit the colonial state. The conservator in British Africa was more or less a watchdog of the colonial state over the forest and its precious resources. The introduction of exotic plants using local labor was to serve the economic interests of the state. These exotic plants possessed enormous commercial value within the global capitalist system (Njoh 2007: 113; Community Forest 1). Such a forestry policy, which was intended to benefit the state to the detriment of local communities continued in the post-independence era in Cameroon Amungwa 2011: 53). In the 1974 Land Ordinances all forest areas without statutory titles are »communal« and therefore subject to local traditional resource rights regimes. Such forests fall under the recognized sovereignty of community chiefs. These chiefs have certain political and legal rights over these lands as attested by their ritual powers over them. The state however maintained limitless power over land and related resources (Minang and McCall 2006: 87; Njoh 2007: 113). In 1976

following the Fourth Five Year Development Plan (1976-1981) all forest within the national territory was to be the property of the state. Such a policy gave an opportunity for the state and by extension political bureaucrats, military and entrepreneurial elite and logging companies to benefit from forest development (Njoh 2007: 113).

Eighteen years after the 1976 law relating to ownership of forests in Cameroon a forestry law was enacted. The 1994 Forestry Law No. 94/1 of 20th January led to the introduction of »community forests« managed by the neighboring community based on a management plan agreed to with the state. It considers that all benefits accruing from the management of the forest go to the community in which the forest is located (Gardner n.d.: 154; Alemagi 2011: 65). According to this policy the Mount Cameroon Project for example has initiated a participatory biodiversity conservation approach to wildlife management to ensure sustainability and appropriateness to the local needs of the people in terms of use, capacity and resources. This local wildlife management scheme has led to the issue of hunting licenses, the development and allocation of sustainable quotas, sanctions, monitoring and control of wildlife activities. Similarly, in the Bamenda highlands community forestry has developed as a partnership between the conservation community, which is interested in the conservation of biological diversity, and the local population which is interested in the benefits derived from the forest (Olsen *et al* 2001: 13; Gardner n.d.: 153). The introduction of the community based management options was the outcome of a poor management of government reserves. In spite of this, there are many forests which are not under community management because the communities are not interested in them and in some cases, forests already designated as government reserves need to be managed by the government (Gardner n.d.: 158). There are therefore numerous problems associated with forest conservation and management as a whole in Cameroon and other African countries.

PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH FOREST CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

The conservation of the forest nowadays notwithstanding, there are still problems associated with conservation. This is usually because no society embraces nature, landscape or forest in a harmonious manner (Klanovicz *et al* 2008: 94) but often with conflict. Human activities like farming and the establishment of large-scale plantations often lead to forest encroachment and degradation. The bush meat trade also leads to the depletion of wildlife. It is estimated that 78,000 metric tons of bush meat is harvested annually in Cameroon. In spite of the law on protected or endangered species, poachers continue with bush meat trade, the risks notwithstanding (Olsen *et al* 2001: 13; Amariel 2005: 7 and 17). Other recurrent problems are conflicts between elephants and farmers. Farmers' livelihoods are affected by crop damage from subsistence cultivation around the forest reserves or other community protected forests. In Central and West Africa over 408 lives were lost in 2012 alone due to human-elephant encounters with enormous property damage. In this same year, over 1017 elephants were estimated killed in the forest zones of the North West, South West and Littoral Regions of Cameroon alone due to the international ivory trade. (Nkwatoh and Fosah 2012: 266-268; Tchamba and Foguekem 2012: 79).

Rapid deforestation for small-scale agriculture has been a problem. Shifting cultivation is responsible for about 79-95% of all deforestation in Cameroon and other parts of Africa like Tanzania. The practice of slash and burn in cultivation has led to a high dependence on the forest. Another problem is the logging of timber for export and this depletes the forest at an alarming rate in Africa (Alemagi 2011: 65; Kihyo 1995: 164; Boateng 2013: 21; Cáceres *et al* 2013: 91; <http://usaidlandtenure.net/cameroon>). The production of timber has also opened up the forest for agricultural activities by farmers further depleting the forest of its rich biodiversity (Benhin and Barbier 1999: 5-12). In the highlands of Bamenda in Cameroon for example, there is a progressive destruction of the forest through farming and grazing for sustainable livelihood. What is left is small patches of forest (Gardner n.d.: 153) that cannot support the needs of the population at the present and in the future. Besides, the lack of appropriate forest management and use has kept rural communities poor because they have often misused the forest without consideration for the future. The introduction of community forestry was a result of the poor management of the forest reserves

created by the government before and after independence such as the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve created in 1951 (Saving the Natural Heritage 2009). Yet, there is self-seeking behavior among members of village management committees like in the southern part of Cameroon. This has resulted in the absence of an effective environmental representation and rural democracy because many of the committees are unaccountable to the people. Disputes between villages neighboring forest reserves over some forest resources which have led to their depletion have also been difficult to overcome (Amariel 2005: 6; Gardner n.d.: 158; Phil and Efoa 2006: 147-148).

The governments of post-independence African countries have created problems for the local populations, who are the greatest beneficiaries of the forest. There is in Cameroon for example, a *conflit de langage* between the state and local communities on land and forests ownership as well as on the regulation of access to natural resources. This situation has been compounded by the creation of concessions on customary lands, the creation of protected areas, the sharing of revenues from commercial logging, the establishment of agro-industries and oil compensation (Phil 2005: 115). There is also a continuous degradation of the forest in the African continent due to the persistence of conflicts between agriculturists and forest guards who are charged with the responsibility of preserving the forest from destruction. It is also because the resources of the forests are exploited without consideration for regeneration or sustainability (Nemb 2011: 1). Since governments are keen on playing down on unemployment figures and also in raising money for development, they have found it difficult to achieve these without conflicts.

Other problems include the extraction of fuelwood for commercial fish smoking in the mangrove ecosystems such as in the Douala-Edea Wildlife Reserve (DEWR) and most of the West/Central African coastal systems. The destruction of the mangrove forest has a multiplier effect because fish, shrimps and Non Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) have become scarce around these ecosystems (Feka *et al* 2009: 450-451). In addition, major provisions of Cameroon's forestry and environmental policy serve the interests of powerful domestic and international stakeholders rather than the country's national goals. This policy also serves the interests of the elite and other powerful members of the country's forest and environmental stakeholder pool. Through it, strangers in areas of community forests have been excluded and this has created tension between indigenous and non-indigenous populations (Njoh 2007: 109-118). Even in districts such as Mwenezi in Zimbabwe where various communication systems and networks have been used to influence the behavior of target groups, there are still lapses due to favoritism, bribery, gender, age and status (Mudege 2003). Forest exploitation is generally advancing at an unsustainable pace and forestry rights have become increasingly complex and subject to active disputes (<http://usaidlandtenure.net/cameroon>). The Kom/Wum Forest Reserve of the grasslands of Cameroon has known its own fair share of problems although it remains important for the sustainable livelihood of the people.

KOM/WUM FOREST RESERVE: REGULATION, CONFLICT AND LIVELIHOOD CHALLENGES

In the North West Region of Cameroon is the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve, which covered a total surface area of about 13,440 acres in 1932.² It was officially surveyed and demarcated into the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve by the British colonial administration in 1950/51 (Kah, 2001).³ This forest reserve was regulated by the Forestry Ordinance of Nigeria established in 1916. In section 24 of the Ordinance it was considered lawful for a Native Authority with the sanction of a Lieutenant Governor to fell protected trees without payment of fees or royalties when the timber thereof was required for public purposes. The general provisions of the Forestry Ordinance prevented any person from taking any protected timber or protected minor forest produce, uproot, destroy or injure any oil palm or any protected tree or protected minor forest produce or any tree or plant from which any protected minor forest produce was obtainable.

² File No. 4583A, Ad 17, Assessment Report on the Wum Native Authority Area of Bamenda Division 1932, National Archives Buea henceforth cited as NAB.

³ File No. 106, Ci (1950)1, Annual Reports (Report of 1952 enclosed). Also 1951, 1953 and 1954, Wum Division, NAB.

Also, people could not tap any oil palm for palm wine. People could only do this through a licence or permit issued under these regulations. People who wanted to fell trees paid fees before doing so.⁴

The Kom/Wum Forest Reserve is rich in different species of animals, trees and fruits and extends from around River Mughom in the North East of Bu northwards to Mbengkas and Baisso village settlements. The North West section of the forest is sacred and locally called *ngekang* or *ngulekang*, meaning the Nduokang lineage 'bush.' The forest cover is thick, the trees tall and many of them hundreds of years old. On the western section of the reserve is a gallery forest through which flow the rivers Meteh, Menchum (Metschem), Tschuh Akooghe and Mughom. Along these river valleys are intensive rice, maize and cocoyam cultivation for domestic consumption and commercialization to Wum and Bamenda. A greater portion of the reserve descends into the River Meteh valley towards the east and the Tschuh Akooghe, a tributary of Meteh, which takes its rise from the Kom hills. In the past elephants and gorillas were hunted for food in this section of the forest (Andreas Kom Personal Communication 2008; Jacob Bah Personal Communication 2009). The forest cover from east to west of Laimbwe country occupies a stretch of undulating terrain within an altitude of between 680-1040 meters above sea level. The forest is estimated at about 210 hectares in size containing 22 types of animals, 57 types of trees, shrubs and ground plants and over 160 different types of birds (Mbengkas Community; Lah 2005: 1). The altitude of the forest rises further after Baisso into the Kom hills. This is an extension of the range of hills constituting the Bamenda highlands of Cameroon.

The Laimbwe people who are the occupants of the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve are a very hardworking people. Their major economic activities are agriculture, fishing, lumbering, hunting and small businesses that involve buying and selling agricultural products. They cultivate food and cash crops like maize, cocoyams, rice, groundnuts and coffee. The men and recently women also keep livestock such as goats and pigs for sale and also for funeral celebrations (Kah 2011, 2012 and 2013). Cattle herding is a preoccupation of the Fulani people locally known as Akus. To gain respect in the community, a Laimbwe person is expected to give birth to a child and be able to care for this child through the provision of his or her basic needs such as food and bush meat. This philosophy of life and sustainability is summed up in what the people proudly refer to as *Wuai*, *Kesiazheh* and *Nyengui*. When literally translated this means child, food and bush meat. It is represented by three straight white lines and better valorized by masquerade societies like the *Libah* and others when they are performing. Three within the Laimbwe system of belief is therefore as important as the trinity to the Christians who talk about God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Kom/Wum Forest Reserve with all its resources has remained important in the realization of the dream of the Laimbwe people who rely on it for their daily bread or livelihood. The restriction of people from using its resources for sustaining life became a source of conflict between the people on one hand and the Germans and British on the other.

At the beginning, the German and British presence in Laimbwe land between 1900 and 1961 accelerated the exploitation of its natural and human resources. The tracing of the Bamenda -Wum road by the German colonial administration to facilitate administration and promote commerce opened up what was to be later gazetted by the British as the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve. The construction of the road through the forest led to the destruction of shrines belonging to lineages within and around the reserve. Even the rights of the people to these shrines when the reserve was established were systematically forfeited. Forest guards restrained Laimbwe people from the exploitation of certain resources like the iroko and mahogany trees in the Reserve. Those who defied forestry rules were sanctioned by officials of the forestry department. From this period onwards the Laimbwe people who are located around the forest reserve have been at conflict with the forestry officials (Chief Chu 2 February 1978; Welcome Address to D.O. Wum 22 November 1985; Address to S.D.O. 2 April 1986; Muam 2001; Confidential Findings

⁴ File No. Qh/a, 1916/2. Forestry Ordinance-Regulations made under the Forestry Ordinance Nigeria 1916, NAB; File No. 242/17, Qh/a, 1917/3, Timber-Report on System of Felling-Calls for, NAB.

27 October 2004; Letter of Fon Mpai n.d.; Memorandum Divisional Delegate undated; Letter Divisional Delegate 2 February 2005; Simon Muam Asang Personal Communication 2008).⁵

When rice was introduced into Laimbwe land as a cash crop in the early 1950s from Nigeria by the British,⁶ the Laimbwe people needed more land for its cultivation and commercialization. This was only possible through encroachment into portions of the forest reserve. The people of Bu village were the first to do so against opposition from officials of the forestry department. After repeated conflicts with forest guards over the destruction of forest in many areas for rice plots, agreement was reached between the two parties between the late 1970s and early 1980s. A portion of land was then handed over to the village for rice farms. This was however not enough and before long the Bu people occupied more land in what is today a temporary settlement, Nduneei. From Nduneei, the people have destroyed more forest through slash and burn during the dry season (Akemwa Personal Communication August 27 2008). A few of them have seen reason to plant cocoa and bananas in the forest without necessarily destroying it. Across the other side of the Meteh River valley, the inhabitants of Mbengkas since the start of the 21st century have destroyed the forest for rice farms. The commercial value of rice is high because of its high demand in the towns of Wum, Fundong and Bamenda to complement the quantity imported from South East Asia into Cameroon and that produced on the Ndop plain. The inhabitants use the proceeds to construct modern houses and also to educate their children.

The forest reserve has not been taken proper care of by the forestry department although there are threats of sanctions to people who clandestinely exploit its resources (Confidential Findings 27 October 2004; Welcome Address to D.O. Wum, 22 November 1985; Address to S.D.O. 2 April 1986; Letter Fon Mpai undated; Memo Divisional Delegate undated; Memo Divisional Delegate 2 February 2005).⁷ The Laimbwe people argue (and rightly so) that the Reserve is their property and serves as home for ancestral shrines of their lineages and other socio-economic purposes. This sharply contrasts with the position of the government represented by officials of the Divisional Delegation of Environment and Forestry Wum and Fundong who are opposed to claims of ownership of land within the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve (Letter Divisional Delegate 2 February 2005). Illegal logging in the forest reserve has attracted a flurry of petitions to Wum and Fundong administrations but this has not deterred those involved in illegal exploitation from ending it (Welcome Address to D.O. 22 November 1985; Address to S.D.O. 2 April 1986).⁸

The Laimbwe people and some government officials believe in exploitation without replacement and some forest guards collect money from illegal exploiters who devastate the remaining forest with impunity. The sawing and transportation of timber for money became big business in Laimbwe land after the independence and reunification of Cameroon in 1960/61 because of the introduction of the machine chain saw in replacement of the handsaw. Its introduction led to rapid deforestation of the savannah Kom/Wum Forest Reserve without immediate attempts made at its regeneration to this century. These problems over the use of the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve explain why there is need to put in place a better management policy.

TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF THE FOREST

Considering the importance of the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve to the livelihood of the Laimbwe people and to the government in terms of regulating the rich biodiversity, it is important to find a middle ground to end the conflicts over the use of the forest since the colonial period. Continuous conflicts between Laimbwe people and forestry officials, the rapid depletion of the reserve due to human activities and inter-community conflicts over the exploitation of the resources will not lead to a more efficient

⁵ NW/Qb/a. 1982/6/Bk, Annual Report on the Situation of Economic and Social Development Menchum, 1st July 1981- 30th June 1982, Regional Archives Bamenda;

⁶ File No. Ci (1957)3, Annual Reports Wum Division, 1955, 1956 and 1957.

⁷ NW/Qb/a. 1982/6/Bk, Annual Report on the Situation of Economic and Social Development Menchum, 1st July 1981- 30 June 1982 Regional Archives Bamenda henceforth cited a RAB.

⁸ Ibid.

and sustainable management of the forest and its resources for the present and future generations of Cameroonians. Rather, it would only complicate issues further.

An important step towards sustainable management and preservation of this montane forest reserve is for the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife to incorporate indigenous initiatives in agro-forestry. This will give the people confidence and a sense of belonging as far as proper and sustainable management of the forest is concerned. Indigenous initiatives have been incorporated into the management of protected areas in other places like the Cross River National Park in Nigeria and within areas covered by forest among the Shona of Zimbabwe. Prohibitions and restrictions through taboos on unsustainable use of certain plant species, forests, mountains, rivers, pools and non-human animals, among other ecological species in the ecosystem, is not a new epistemology among the Shona people but reflect a long tradition from time of old.

There are similar calls for indigenous methods of forest preservation to be made part of the sustainable management of the forest in southern Brazil (Bisong *et al* 2009: 165; Klanovicz *et al* 2008: 94; Chemburu and Masaka 2010: 121; Tanyanyiwa and Chikwanha. 2011). The failure of the local population to collaborate with forestry officials or those exploiting the forest is usually because of the non-involvement of the people in designing programs for sustainable management of their forest resources. Even when efforts are made to devolve decision-making and resource control to local populations the conflict of interests and marginalization of traditional authorities has marred its successful execution (Egbe 2001:1; Oyono 2005a; Dupuy and Bakia 2013). If conscious efforts are made to incorporate their perception of sustainable forest management they are more likely to contribute to the process of managing and protecting the forest reserve which also benefits them.

Since a lot of the pressure on the forest is a result of the farming methods adopted by peasant farmers, it is important that the Cameroon government through the Ministry of Agriculture introduce more sustainable farming methods that will reduce the pressure on the forest in this and other areas. Such measures should be harmonious with the culture of farming among the Laimbwe people. Other methods could be introduced and made popular among the people through education and provision of necessary tools. This can reduce the practice of shifting cultivation and slash and burn which has destroyed the flora and fauna and rich and scarce biodiversity of the reserve. This is crucial not only for the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve but also the other forest reserves of the grasslands of Cameroon created mostly during the colonial period. Other West African communities are adapting to new farming methods which do not necessarily involve huge capital and technology. This is to avoid conflict between forestry officials and the local communities over the exploitation of forest reserves and also to sustain lives (Boateng 2013: 21).

Massive education campaigns in schools, churches, social groups, family meetings, traditional institutions within the Laimbwe villages of Baisso, Bu and Mbengkas should be embarked upon to show the importance of having a forest and sustainably managing it to fight poverty and handle the needs of a growing population. Continuous education in the Laimbwe language will likely lessen tensions between the people, forest officials and illegal exploiters of timber and other plants highly demanded in big towns and cities like Bamenda and Douala (Brown *et al* 2003:2). The over-riding aim of such planned education campaigns should be geared towards instilling in the people a sense of sustainable management of the forest reserve. One of the campaign strategies should be to invite elders to talk to the younger generation about the ways of preserving the environment in general and the forest and its resources in particular. These elders should also explain to the population the dangers of losing important plant species used for treatment of diseases through reckless exploitation of the forest. For the young who are still to build their own houses and to give birth to children and nurture them, education campaigns will make them see reason to use the forest wisely and preserve it so that when they grow up they will use its resources to build houses and to feed their own children.

The government of Cameroon should also learn from the British policy of forest regeneration, which was introduced during the colonial era. Timber exploitation in the reserve was carried out in organized groups and regulated by the Provincial Forest Officer for Bamenda Province through a pit saw-

ing scheme.⁹ The lumbermen used the handsaw and fell trees over a dug hole, which was physically demanding and exhausting. There were four gangs of sawyers one of which was composed of sawyers entirely from Bu, a village located in the forest reserve.¹⁰ Between 1952 and 1956 alone over 37,616 cubic feet were felled.¹¹ During the colonial period there was a simultaneous effort at the regeneration of the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve by the Native Authority (NA). Nursery men of the NA grew seedlings of trees of economic value for regeneration using abandoned pits. The *khaya* and *entandrophrama* plants were planted on these disused pits. Forest guards regularly patrolled the boundaries of this Reserve to carry out maintenance work and also watch out for illegal deforestation by Laimbwe and other neighboring people. This has long been abandoned by the Cameroon government. Besides, the Wum and Fundong councils should copy the good practice of the NAs and invest in the forest reserve considering its importance to the livelihood of the people.

The divisional services in charge of forestry and wildlife in Menchum and Boyo Divisions of the North West Region of Cameroon should do a lot more to create a partnership with the local population in both divisions to manage this forest sustainably. At the moment a lot of illegal timber exploitation is carried out by people from the neighboring Bafut sub-division who come at night and before it is dawn they have sawn and transported timber across the River Menchum. Other illegal hunters also come in from other areas and exploit resources in the reserve with impunity while the local population is prevented from doing so. The Laimbwe people like other communities in Cameroon have on several occasions petitioned for total declassification of reserves to be registered to the communities since they consider the reserve as their territory (Oyono *et al* 2010: 157) The social impact of this like elsewhere in Cameroon is environmental degradation and marginalization of indigenous communities (Cameroon's Troubled Timber Industry 2007:1) There is therefore need for more trained forest guards who should be able to save the forest reserve from extinction and cause the waters of the Rivers Meteh and Menchum to dry up with negative consequences on the population.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to discuss the importance of sustainable management of forests so that the people located around it can benefit from shelter, food and clothing. The Kom/Wum Forest Reserve, one of the reserves in the grasslands of Cameroon is very important to thousands of people for its rich biodiversity. It is more or less a source of livelihood for the people of the Laimbwe community and other towns and cities of Cameroon. Its importance in a savannah region of Cameroon cannot be over-emphasized. People with montane forest need to be more careful in its exploitation because failure to manage the forest well will lead to the emergence of a desert, the drying up of water catchment areas and the multiplier effect of all of this on climate, on livelihood and the security of the population.

The livelihood of the Laimbwe people of Cameroon was tied to the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve even before the British declared it a reserve in 1951. Its establishment as a reserve laid a foundation for inter-necine conflicts over the use of the resources in this forest by the people. When the forest was designated a government reserve, movement into it to exploit resources came under the control of the forestry department. This rigid control and limitation of farmland from the reserve contributed to the Laimbwe women's revolt against the colonial administration between 1957 and 1959. The women questioned the demarcation between farmland and the reserve and in protest destroyed the boundary stones or cairns planted by the government. The result was the arrest of the leaders and not long after women were to come to terms with the reality that access into the forest was no longer as free as before.

After independence and following an increase in population and in the demand for material to build houses, many more conflicts were registered between the people who needed forest resources and offi-

⁹ File No. 106, Ci (1950)1, Annual Reports (Report of 1952 enclosed) Also, 1951, 1953 and 1954, Wum Division, NAB.

¹⁰ Annual Report 31 August 1950- 31 September 1951, NAB.

¹¹ File No. Ci (1957)3, Annual Reports Wum Division 1955, 1956 and 1957, NAB.

cial of the forestry sector who wanted a regulated exploitation of these resources. There were other conflicts within and between the communities over the illegal exploitation of highly prized plant species like the *prunus Africana*. To handle these conflicts and to continue to preserve the forest for socio-economic and cultural significance, it is important for all the stakeholders in the forest sector to work in synergy towards managing this montane natural ecotone for many more generations to come. Young Laimbwe boys and girls could be selected trained in sustainable management of the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve. From the training, they can lead other youths in planting economically rewarding trees in areas that have already been destroyed. At the level of the Laimbwe villages it will be important to set up a forest management committee consisting of farmers, hunters, herbalists and the chiefs who will each make suggestions on the proper use of the forest and its resources.

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SAŽETAK

Ovaj rad istražuje izazove s kojima se ljude plemena Laimbwe susreću u korištenju životnih resursa u prašumskom rezervatu Kom/Wum u Kamerunu. Rezervat je nastao 1951. godine i od tada iskorištavanje njegovih resursa reguliraju i čuvaju rendžeri, koji kažnjavaju prekršitelje. Porast populacije u selima oko rezervata prisilio je mnoge stanovnike da hranu i druge resurse potraže ovdje. Protuzakonito korištenje rezervata za hranu i sklonište dovodi do naglog krčenja šuma i sve više sukoba između korisnika šume i službenika Ministarstva za očuvanje šuma i divljih životinja. Vlada traži održivo korištenje šuma i njezinih resursa za dobrobit nacije, lokalnog stanovništva, te drugih čimbenika u sektoru šuma.

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