



Mbororo pastoralists face increasing challenges as rich individuals encroach on their grazing spaces in the North West Region of Cameroon. PHOTO CREDIT: ELIAS NGALAME

Cameroon mulls land reforms to secure pastoralists' grazing rights

By Ngalame Elias

A clash of lifestyles is at the heart of a tense land dispute in Cameroon, pitting indigenous nomadic Mbororo cattle herders against crop farmers settling in the traditional grazing lands.

In Santa, Northwest of Cameroon, cattle herders are also complaining about land grabs, which have seen traditional land gradually being transformed into farmland.

Musa Julie, 60, says her cattle used to graze unperturbed on the vast, lush vegetation in Santa. But not anymore. Over seven acres of her grazing land

are now owned by a top government official.

"We have lived here for over 80 years. All our grandfathers died here, all their graves are here. It's here that our cattle are grazing; our entire livelihood depends on that land," she says.

While land grabbing by the rich and the powerful has become a rising concern for the Mbororos, they also face perennial conflicts with farmers who say the free-range cattle damage their crops.

Aisha Bouba, coordinator of the Cameroon Indigenous Women's Forum,

says land grabs are becoming a big problem for the pastoralist lifestyle in the country's North West Region.

"The Mbororo pastoralists need a lot of land and space to live with their cattle which is their principal activity and this issue of land grabbing has become a very frequent issue especially in the North West Region where rich people come and grab the grazing land of these Mbororo people," says Aisha.

"We have this problem too of farmer-grazer conflict. You know, the Mbororo too are living besides the non-indigenous people, and those non-indigenous people are farmers and so





most of the time when they come and farm besides grazing land, the cattle will go and destroy their crops and so that generates a lot of conflict between the Mbororos and the farmers”.

Mbororo territory spans the borders of Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and the Central African Republic and the pastoralists shift according the grazing season.

Aisha says there is also a wrong notion that Mbororos don't own any land,

which she notes violates the 1974 land tenure ordinance.

The ordinance categorised land into public, private, and national lands, with the latter encompassing all untitled customary land.

Communities and individuals could title lands effectively occupied before 1974, but not those occupied or used after that date or deemed "vacant," which the state could allocate for public projects.

“They have been living there for centuries to date,” Aisha says. “They have their grazing permits and they have occupied that land before 1976 and it means that if you have occupied a land for that very long period, it means that that land belongs to you.”

Aisha and other land rights advocates want a reform of the country's pastoral code to clarify indigenous land ownership.

The government says it will soon begin consultations with various stakeholders with a view of revising the 1974 land tenure ordinance.

The outdated Ordinance indicates that all unregistered land belongs to the state. It also requires long, complicated procedures for obtaining title deeds, making it extremely difficult for groups with low literacy rates, as is the case with the Mbororos.

Fritze Gerald Nasako, the Secretary General in the Ministry of State Property, Surveys and Land Tenure, says land reform legislation is already in motion.

“There is a draft text which is being examined at the highest level of the government to see that land transactions, whether executed by territorial services or our technical services are given the minimum costs possible for the fastest track to be applied on these documents,” says Nasako.

Cameroon is also working on a new Pastoral Code, which among other things, aims to clarify the demarcation of boundaries between pastureland and farmland.

The Pastoral Code legislation calls for the creation of corridors for cattle in the case of nomadic herding.

However, both the land reform and pastoral code bills are moving very slowly through the halls of government. And cattle-herders like Musa Julie can't afford to wait ■



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