

Polemics and Implications of the Bamali Chieftaincy Dispute in The Bamenda Grassfields Region of Cameroon, 1980 To 2018

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Abstract

At a time when democracy and universal enlightenment are the order of the day, chieftaincy institutions are expected to complement the current structure of control to uphold peace and foster economic development. On the contrary, chieftaincy institutions are relatively seen as major avenues of instigating precariousness and hostility in some societies. Consequently, this study traces the origin and causes of chieftaincy disputes in the Bamenda Grassfields, and also scrutinizes the polemics and implications of the Bamali chieftaincy dispute specifically. The paper equally examine measures put in place to mitigate the Bamali chieftaincy dispute by state administrators. The study makes use of qualitative research techniques such as interviews and observations. The theoretical underpinning for this study is that of the relative deprivation theory whilst findings were analysed using the analytical approach. From the findings, some basis for chieftaincy disputes were revealed: interference from the political elite and egocentricity of village notables. Equally, the Socio-economic implications included: weakening of the sense of family and unity, vacuum in traditional authority and disruption in agricultural (rice) production. Based on the assessment made on the implications of the Bamali chieftaincy dispute, the study underscores the need for mitigating measures to be reinforced by stakeholders and the affected population in order to arrive at a lasting solution.

Keywords: *Chieftaincy, Bamenda Grassland, Development, Dispute, Bamali.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the dispensation of governance in Africa, no matter what function a chief or a traditional ruler was permitted to play in administration, everything most often depended on the attitude of the government towards chieftaincy institutions. Chieftaincy institutions remained a reliable institution of governance in most communities in Cameroon. Contrary to modern political institutions, chieftaincy institutions were not a colonial creation but survived the colonial and post-colonial dispensations and retained authority and respect in the traditional society. Despite the fact that chieftaincy institutions operated smoothly in other parts of Cameroon, it was subjected to some harsh and disturbing circumstances in the Bamenda Grassfields. Before the colonization of Cameroon by the Europeans, the various indigenous groups had well organised systems of governance constituted by chiefs and their councils of elders. Chieftaincy was among one of the longest surviving traditional institutions of Cameroon.¹ The importance of the chieftaincy institutions in the History of Cameroon cannot be overemphasized. Chiefs in Cameroon performed a number of roles such as military leaders and defenders of their people, as chief priests who perform religious roles within their jurisdictions, as symbols of identity, as founts of honour, and as sole custodians of stool lands and unifiers.² Indeed, it should be noted that chiefs played an important role in the struggle against colonial rule in the Bamenda Grassfields. Chieftaincy institutions will forever remain a distinct entity with distinct protocols in the traditional system of governance in the Bamenda Grassfields.³ Therefore, it is observed that the relevance of the chieftaincy institution in the present day cannot be overstated.

¹ M, CHILVER and K, Phyllis, *Traditional Bamenda: The Precolonial History and Ethnography of the Bamenda Grassfields*. Buea: Ministry of Primary Education and Social Welfare a West Cameroon Antiquities Commission, 1967, 34.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

2. BACKGROUND STUDY

When the Germans annexed Cameroon in 1884 and subsequently moved into the Western Grassfields, they established their headquarters in Bali and the Western Grassfields was administered from this administrative headquarters.⁴ However, the headquarters was later transferred to Bamenda with a Military Station. With the demise of the Germans in Kamerun during World War I, the British and French who expelled them from the territory in 1916 established a condominium which lasted up to 1918.⁵ Due to a failure in the joint administration of the territory by the two powers, the territory was divided into two with the British taking one fifth and the French four Fifth of the territory. The British territory was attached to the Nigerian Protectorate and ruled as part of that colonial territory. As a means to effectively administer her own portion of the Cameroons, the British policy of Indirect Rule was introduced in the British portion of Cameroon, which made it possible for the creation of Native Authorities (Council of Chiefs and elders in or Chiefs in Council) in order to effectively manage their territory.⁶ It was as a result of this that Chiefs were used in the day to day administration of their chiefdoms. They became auxiliaries of the administration and had to collect taxes for the British, administered justice and animate local development. This therefore made the institution of chieftain very important instruments of administration and efforts were put in place to preserve and protect them by the colonial authorities. The chiefs were to operate within colonial policies and also the dictates of their customs and traditions which were guiding principles to good governance.⁷ Nevertheless, many of the chiefs acted contrary and had to face the wrath of the colonial authorities or their people. In this respect, while performing his functions, the chief in Bamali was seen as an embodiment of the beliefs, hopes, fears and aspirations of his people and for that matter, the mode of succession of one chief to another desired much to be looked at in order to promote sustainable peace and development in the Bamali Chiefdom.⁸ Upon the death of a chief, the *Ngumba* was to act as regent until the final funeral rites of the late chief were performed and a new one disclosed. However, the selection of the new chief often led to a lot of controversies as such leading to conflicts and disagreements. Besides this, the manner in which a Fon ruled his people had a great role to play as far as safeguarding his throne was concern.

3. PROFILE OF STUDY AREA

The Bamenda Grassfields covers the present North West Region of Cameroon. It lies between Latitudes 5° 40 and 7° to the North of the Equator, and between Longitudes 9° 45 and 11° to the East of the Meridian. It is bordered to the South West by the South West Region, to the South by West Region, to the east by the Adamawa Region and to the North by the Federal Republic of Nigeria.⁹ The Bamenda Grassfields which is today the North West Region is one of the most populated Regions in Cameroon. It has one major metropolitan city: Bamenda. The Region saw an increase in population from about 1.2 million in 1987, to an estimated 1.8 million people in 2001. The population density, at 99.12 people per square Kilometres is higher than the national average of 22.6 people per square kilometre. The region urban growth rate is 7.95%, while the rural growth rate at 1.16%. The North West Region is made up of administrative divisions; the region formally known as province was created in 1972 with five divisions. These were Mezam, Momo, Bui, Menchum and Donga and Mantung Divisions. Today it has seven divisions, Boyo carved out of Donga-Mantung and Menchum and Ngo ketunjia carved out of Mezam.¹⁰ Bamali village is one of the four villages that make up Ndop central sub division and one of the thirteen villages of Ngoketunjia Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. From its origin, Bamali belong to the Mangeh villages which was believed that Mangeh had five children, two sons (Tuningmungwa and Chengfong) and three daughters (Byiae, Vhenji and Mekheng). The eldest Tunigmungwa succeeded their father and formed Bambalang while his brother Chengfong established the Bamunka village, whereas Byiae formed Bamali, Vhenji formed Bafanji and Mekheng the Bamunkumbit village. Bambalang and Bamunka were descendants of the male (sons of Mangeh) while Bafanji,

⁴ V.J, Ngoh, *History of Cameroon Since 1800*. Limbe: Pressprint. 1996, p.23.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ V. J, Ngoh, *Southern Cameroons, 1922 –1961: A Constitutional History*, Hampshire, Ashgate Publishing Limited. 2001, p. 37.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ N.N. Emmanuel, "Settlement, Grazier or Agricultural land: A Confrontation of Interest in the North West Province of Cameroon", *Annals of the Faculty of letters and Social Sciences*, University of Yaounde, No 10, 1981, 175.

¹⁰ A, Neba, *Modern Geography*, 171.

Bamunkumbit and Bamali were the descendants of the daughters. These five villages formed the Mangeh family association to maintain peace and unity amongst themselves to ensure progress of all. These villages had no defined boundary between them because they knew that they were one.¹¹

4. ROOTS OF CHIEFTAINCY DISPUTES IN THE BAMENDA GRASSFIELDS

Although chieftaincy conflicts were found throughout Cameroon, there was a widespread perception that the Bamenda Grassfields was particularly prone to such conflicts. This was probably because some conflicts in the Bamenda Grassfields were very violent and protracted, involving several ethnic groups living over a wide geographical area.¹² Most of the conflicts were typically chieftaincy succession disputes, involving two or more princes laying claim to a chieftaincy position or title.¹³ Such conflicts usually involved the quest to determine the person that was qualified to occupy a particular position and whether the individual selected went through the appropriate rituals administered by the traditionally designated persons.¹⁴ In many instances, chieftaincy disputes erupted in the Bamenda Grassfields when there were two or more rival claimants to a vacant throne. The rival claimants to such traditional authority either belonged to different ethnic groups or to different lineages of the founding family. This was exacerbated by direct as well as discreet political interventions in chieftaincy affairs.¹⁵ The violent nature of chieftaincy and other conflicts in the Bamenda Grassfields was explained by the long period of colonial and postcolonial exploitation and neglect of the region, the widespread poverty and low levels of education and the dearth of socio-economic infrastructure in the area.¹⁶ Several succession disputes had daunted the image of chieftaincy institutions branding the institutions as volatile. The Bamenda Grassfields experienced a good number of chieftaincy disputes in this respect, for instance the Bamessing, Bangolan, Babanki, and Balikumbat chieftaincy disputes, just to name but this.

Chieftaincy disputes equally emanated from situations wherein the historical, political, economic and social circumstances around the establishment of the chieftaincy institution in a traditional state became contested, when the rules of succession became unclear or when political elites supported one group against the other in a bid to serve their own parochial political interest.¹⁷ Incidents of conflict in the Bamenda Grassfields were sometimes political in nature, arising from elites who associated local issues with national politics.¹⁸ As such, political change at the national level had ripple effect in local politics leading to violent confrontations. These political alliances and disagreements manifested in the polarization of the people resulting in conflict.¹⁹ Conflicts were experienced among indigenous ethnic groups who were recurrent, involving the same ethnic groups, clans or families in different ways. Studies revealed that the likelihood of ethnic groups or clan engaging in conflict was high when they were excluded from access to power and economic resources by the structures and systems of chieftaincy institution.²⁰

The high concentrations of unemployed youths, and limited access to complete, accurate and timely information from credible sources were important push factors for the eruption of conflict. Apart from support for acquisition and maintenance of traditional leadership position, some chiefs were into politics because of their role as development agents. The role of chiefs was like a government appointee expected to lobby for development for the

¹¹V. G Fanso, *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges, Vol. 2, The Colonial and Post-Colonial Experience*. Limbe: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1989, p. 45.

¹² Tambi M. Eyongetah, Robert Brain and Robin Palmer, *A History of Cameroon*, London: Longman, 1987, 36.

¹³M. Pelican, *Getting Along In The Grassfields: Interethnic Relations And Identity Politics In North West Cameroon*, Ph.D Thesis, Hallewittengerg, Martin Luther Universität, 2006, 34.

¹⁴ P.N. Nkwi and J.P. Warnier, *Elements For A History Of The Western Grassfields, Yaounde*, Publication Of The Department Of Sociology 1982, Pp. 80-85.

¹⁵H.R Rudin, *Germans in The Cameroons 1884-1914, A Case Study of Modern Imperialism*, New York, Greenwood Press Publishers, 1938, 76.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Protus, Mebum, *Chieftaincy Crisis in the North West Region of Cameroon: The Case of Zhoa 1910-2008*, SEPHIS E Magazine, Vol. 9, January 2013, pp. 25 – 36.

¹⁹ H.A.S. Johnson, *A Selection of Hausa Stories*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966, Pp. 9-10.

²⁰ E.M. Chilver and P.M. Kaberry, *Traditional Bamenda: The Pre-colonial History and Ethnography of Bamenda*, Buea, Government Printers, 1967, pp. 10-135.

impoverished rural communities in his traditional area since most of the subject no longer wanted to contribute towards development projects.²¹

Another major contributing factor to chieftaincy disputes in the Bamenda Grassfields resulted from the fact that affluent personalities in society with ambiguous claims to royal stools and skins fiercely contesting the position with the poorer royals who refused to succumb to the illegitimate contenders, thereby generating perpetual litigation in the selection of occupant to the stool.²² Legitimate royals had increased in number over the years, as well. Hence the competitive-claims became highly intense among the families and lineages. Consequently, some royal members were prepared to use fire arms in the settling of disputes regarding occupation of stools. The tenure of a chief terminated only at death and this generated a lot of anxiety among legitimate royals who were potential candidates to the stools.²³ This led to frivolous and wasteful litigations and strife in the communities. Chieftaincy was associated with political power, which also translated into the control of economic wealth in the form of properties such as land.²⁴ The pomp and pageantry that accompanied the position of the chief made the institution so attractive that, both royals and non-royals desired to use every means to ascend to the throne, thus leading to conflict. Misappropriation of communal resources, such as royalties paid to the royal house by incumbents was also a cause of chieftaincy disputes.²⁵

5. POLEMICS OF THE BAMALI CHIEFTAINCY DISPUTE

Ever since 2003, the Bamali Fondom has been faced with a chieftaincy problem following the passing away (missing) of Fon Safua II and the subsequent enthronement of Fon Idriss Nopu Ndouafoua II. A few years after the enthronement of Fon Ndouafoua II, there was steady opposition from the villagers who claimed that Fon Ndouafoua II was responsible for a number of unacceptable practices that did not comply with the role of a Fon. According to Tekuketang Thomas, he was accused of land grabbing and violation of aspects of the Bamali culture which included disrespect for notables. More so, it was noted that the Fon ruled the village like a dictator with instances of corporal punishment on villagers also noted.²⁶ Tekuketang further posited that the immediate cause of the Fon's dethronement was the mysterious death of five primary school children at Government School Mbetpaw, Bamali, who were stroke by lightning. Many villagers pointed accusing fingers at the Fon for sacrificing the five children by mystical means. Bearing in mind this regrettable attitude portrayed by Fon Idriss Nopu Ndouafoua II, in 2009 a decision to dethrone him was taken by the *ngumba* secret society and the coronation of a new Fon was announced scheduled to take place after a period of seven days.²⁷ The identity of the new Fon was not disclosed at the moment and it remained a secret until the 7th day previewed when a new Fon was presented to the public in this respect. It should be noted that easy access to locally fabricated arms was a major strength in enforcing the dethronement of Fon Ndouafoua II, leading to the enthronement of Chenefua W. II. Due to his summary dethronement, administrative authorities refused to recognize the newly enthroned Fon Chenefua II, thereby leaving Bamali village without a Fon or in other words with two Fons, the new Fon who lived in the palace with the population in the village and another who was dethroned, and lived out of the village but was still recognized by the administration.²⁸

In December 2014 the Bamali chieftaincy crisis took a dramatic twist with the furious outburst of violence evident in a clash between security forces and armed villagers. Blood bath ensued with many sustaining major and minor

²¹ Ibid.

²² Protus Mbeum Tem, *Bad Governance As Basis For Chieftaincy Conflict And The Transposition Of Customs And Traditions Governing Chieftaincy Succession In Bamessing, Southern Cameroons, 1953 – 1961*

²³ J. Amadou, *Origin And Evolution Of Praise Singers (Griots) In The Bamenda Grassfields, A Historical Investigation*, International Journal Of Scientific Engineering And Applied Science (Ijseas) – Volume-4, Issue-5, May 2018, pp. 25-35.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ G, Aghanah, *The Effects Of Chieftaincy Conflicts On Local Development: The Case Of The Bawku East Municipality*, Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Master of Philosophy in Peace and Conflict Transformation, University of Tromso, 2008, 32.

²⁶ Thomas Tekuketang, *Bamali Elite*, interviewed by the press, 2014.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ T. Mathias, retired teacher, interviewed, May 2019.

injuries.²⁹ This incident exhibited the ugliest side of the Bamenda grassland gun culture as well as the administrative licking lapses. This incident led to a halt in transportation as commuters and travelers were caught up in the web of road blocks. It should be noted that over 71 persons sustained injuries in the scuffle including security officials. The incident made the administration to realize that so long as guns were allowed in the hands of non-experts in arms usage, it could lead to uncomfortable situations as such a ban was placed on the use of arms.³⁰ According press reports at the time, the escalation of the Bamali chieftaincy crisis in 2014 was attributed to the fact that the villagers had summoned an end of year fund raising event to raise funds for developmental projects and during this event, it was rumoured that someone had masterminded an obnoxious plan to set in confusion for the newly enthroned Fon Chenefua II to be kidnapped. This made the villagers to be furious in anger and determined to protect their chief.³¹ It should be noted that this was the escalation stage of the Bamali chieftaincy crisis and ever since then, efforts had been made by the administrative officials of Ndop central to maintain peace in the Bamali community in order to avoid future outburst. Some of these measures employed by the administration included the summoning of a crisis meeting which was chaired by the governor of the North West Region himself.³² During this meeting all attempts were made to reinstate the dethrone chief which ended up in futility. Right up till the moment of this research study, Bamali remains without a chief or in order words with two chiefs, one living in the palace with his people, and the dethroned chief living out of the village and recognized by the administration. While hoping that the present chief at the palace be recognized by the administration, the Bamali people remained resolute and determined to maintain the present chief in power.

6. IMPLICATIONS OF THE BAMALI CHIEFTAINCY DISPUTE

The Bamali chieftaincy had far reaching consequences on the life of the people and their activities. A major concern was the weakening of the sense of family unity which was a fundamental social implication. After the chieftaincy succession discrepancy that erupted, some families started living in isolation and assumed other parties as enemies who could cause harm if they got close to them.³³ This was due to the fact that the dethroned Fon had his on followers even though in a minority, thus this created a situation of division among families who held different positions as far as the dethronement of the Fon was concern. According to two informants from the Bamali village, they revealed that the dispute created a situation wherein they couldn't even meet in their family houses again to hold meetings or sit together to organise funerals and other social functions without factions.³⁴ The Bamali chieftaincy dispute was equally a potential for violence given that as the issue prolonged, it promoted greater enmity among the people which had a potential of sparking violence with the little provocation. These conditions created an atmosphere of anxiety, insecurity and distrust, posing a threat to the peace and stability of the entire community. Most villagers lamented that the community was tensed and that there was fear and disquiet in the people which had pushed some parents to move their children outside the village for fear of retaliation. Some elders who had close ties with the new Fon were threatened and promised hell. This scared them to send their children out of the village.³⁵

Vacuum in traditional authority was a major setback created by the chieftaincy dispute in Bamali village. Given the fact that Fon Ndouafua II who was dethroned and expelled by the villagers and had no powers over the people any longer was still recognized by the state administration, and Fon Chenefua II was living in the palace and controlling affairs but not recognized by the state administration, it became complicated for the Bamali community to say whether they had a Fon or not. Among the numerous chieftaincy disputes that marked the Bamenda grassland, the Bamali experience till the time of this research remained the most complex and complicated to address. It should also be noted that at the time of this research, the Bamali chieftaincy dispute still remained unresolved.³⁶ This was made complicated by the fact that according to most traditions of the Bamenda grassland with that of the Bamali village inclusive, a Fon could only be replaced upon his death. It was for this simple reason that even though a knew

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Press Report, 2014.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ A. Ngongpan, teacher, interviewed, December 2019.

³⁴ N. Amidou, Business man, interviewed, November 2019.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Fon was enthroned, the state administration still recognized but the dethroned Fon as the main chief and representative of the Bamali people.

The undermining of the traditional authority of the Bamali people was a more serious consequence of this chieftaincy dispute. Considering that this dispute left the village in two fractions, those who remained loyal to the former Fon did not pay allegiance to the new Fon. Some went as far as violating orders from the enthroned Fon and further making a mockery of him as to the fact that he was only recognized by the villagers but not by the state administration. On the other hand, the dethroned Fon even though well recognized by the state administration as the sole representative of the Bamali people, he had no respect what so ever from his subjects despite the fact that he was duly enthroned following all traditional norms. Even though both parties may have had tangible reasons for this attitudes, it had undermined the authority and integrity of the Bamali Fondom.³⁷ These devastating effects of conflict also let to loss of lives, the displacement of people, loss of property, and outright lawlessness. Disruption in agricultural production was one of the most challenging economic implications of the Bamali chieftaincy dispute. The people of Bamali depended solely on agricultural productivity as their main economic activity. Common crops cultivated include maize, groundnuts, rice, coco yams and other activities like fishing. Following the outbreak of this chieftaincy dispute, it was difficult for villagers to go about their farming activities normally. Among the working days in a week, at times they were compelled to absent work in their farms in favour of public gatherings relating to the chieftaincy dispute. In other circumstances, villagers were equally called upon to match up to the administrative authorities to show their disapproval on any attempts to re-enthroned the dethroned Fon. These occurrences greatly affected agricultural productivity leading to a low living standard. N. Amidou, a native of the community and a large scale rice producer lamented that he was not consistent with the monitoring of his farms since the issue first began, and that his yield had reduced drastically which almost made him lay off some of his workers.³⁸

Low sales were also recorded by farmers as majority of them complained about their sales decreasing which was attributable to the limited number of buyers who came in from towns like Bamenda, Bambili, Bambui and even Baffousam. In relation to the above, they indicated that the limited number of buyers compelled them to go to the market late and go home early on like when things were normal. The research revealed that some of the petty traders were also compelled to cut down on the quantity which invariably affected their sales as well as their suppliers. Businesses collapsed because most customers abandoned the area for other markets resulting in low sales.³⁹ One farmer noted that she used to supply groundnut products but since her customers stopped coming she had to stop. Leh Micheal a rice processor revealed that at one point he could not get enough rice to process for his customers thus affecting his sales margin. Women in particular earned their living from rice and groundnut cultivation and petty trading. The women's level of economic contribution was measured according to the type of household activities, not the cash value of women's production. Some of the women rice and groundnut farmers indicated that they normally attended weekly village markets for their supply of materials but due to the limitation of working days by the chieftaincy dispute, the majority of them suspended their activities. Women usually conducted income generating activities of one kind or another during the rainy season. The large majority of these were traditional and labour intensive activities with low capital input.⁴⁰ The activities included household food processing, vegetable cultivation and cloth weaving, cola nut and bamboo craft. They however, switch from one activity to another based on what was most likely to be profitable at a given time. However, there were marked disparities in women's access to economic resource that enable them to achieve their economic and social goals as a result of emerging new form of economic relationship during the chieftaincy dispute.

7. MITIGATING THE BAMALI CHIEFTAINCY DISPUTE

In response to the allegations made by the Bamali villagers against Fon Ndouafua II, investigations were carried out by the Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) for Ngoketunja Division and at the end of his findings, a meeting was convened to discuss on a possible peaceful resolution of the problem. Even though the findings justified some of these allegations, the administration did not solicit dethronement as an option. In this respect, the meeting ended in a deadlock making way for more violent measures by the villagers. Haven't failed to address this situation, the

³⁷ M, Micheal, retired police, interviewed, November 2019.

³⁸ N, Amidou, 2019.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ C, Mbomboh, farmer, interviewed, December 2019.

attention of the governor was pursued and further negotiations were underway. In this light, the governor convened a meeting at the heard quarters of the division, but yet its outcome was still futile. Consequently, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation was notified.⁴¹ On this note, another meeting was convened with the governor and the final verdict was that the current Fon be maintained despite numerous charges levied against him by his own subjects. Irrespective of this, Fon Ndouafua II pleaded not guilty and to him, he was still the ideal person to seat as Fon and representative of the Bamali people. This therefore meant that he was still determined to retain his position against the will of the Bamali people. This met with resistance from the villagers who went ahead to declare to the authorities that they had already enthroned a new Fon and no longer recognized the former as their leader. They went further to declare that the former will be the Fon of the state and not theirs. In the course of all these, tension was rising and dead threats were made on the Fon Ndouafua II in case he tried to force himself on the people.

It should be noted that the palace was already taken over and he had no access in again. However, the administration was left with no choice than to allow the people enthrone their new Fon even though officially he was not recognized. No district administrative official attended the event as a sign of their disapproval and the new Fon was not recognized by his peers from neighboring villages.⁴² At the time of the study, the people of Bamali still remained with an unrecognized Fon, meanwhile the dethroned Fon Ndouafua II still enjoyed his privileges as the only person representing the Bamali community in strategic developmental plan as far as the community is concern. Non the less, pressure have been mounted at various angles by the Bamali elites for an official recognition of their Fon by the state. On the basis of the above analysis, this paper puts forward the following recommendations:

A commission should be created including the Bamali elites and administrative officials, aimed at making further investigations in order to provide a lasting solution to the dispute.

The administration should create a platform wherein the people of Bamali village can express their opinions as far as the state of affairs is concern.

Furthermore, the Bamali elites should create an avenue wherein they can meet and discuss to look for a way forward regarding the dispute.

The ministry of territorial administration should intervene directly in the dispute and decide on who remains the official Fon of the Bamali village, considering that the two Fons still represent the Bamali people in diverse contexts.

The North West Fons Association should intervene and address the issue directly.

A permanent bureau should be created in the northwest region in charge of chieftaincy matters, especially in times of disputes.

8. CONCLUSION

The study has demonstrated that chieftaincy disputes had far reaching effects on the people of the Bamali community and also proven that chieftaincy disputes in the Bamenda Grassfields traditional area were eventually excavating deep into long standing difficulty in peaceful coexistence. The causes and solutions of these disputes may differ, but all the same they had some common underpinnings which made them similar. Judging from the existing stalemate in the Bamali community, one can conclude by saying that the Bamali community is sitting on a timed bomb and if the state and non-state actors do not act fast, the peace in the Bamali traditional area may be a thing of the past. It is therefore incumbent on the chieftaincy institution to find its relevance in the midst of modern day democracy.

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⁴¹ Minutes of Emergency meeting at the SDOs office.

⁴² Press report, 2014.

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