



# **The Role of Institutions in Land Administration and Its Implications for Local Development: Case Study in the Nkambe Plateau, Northwest Cameroon**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

With the growing diversification in land uses, land administration faces numerous challenges in the Nkambe Plateau. Moreover, as a result of population growth, land scarcity, land cover change and competition between farmers for suitable arable farmland and grazing land, the ineffective implementation of land statutes impedes local development in the Nkambe Plateau. The early migratory movement and resettlement of communities in the Nkambe Plateau, globalization, liberalization and climate change are the key factors that drive ineffective implementation of land statutes. The main aim of this study is to investigate challenges faced by institutions in land administration and implications on local development in the Nkambe Plateau, Northwest Cameroon.

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The study was based on a survey conducted among 200 participants using stratified random sampling technique. Data is analysed qualitatively and the findings suggest that proper land administration and development in Nkambe Plateau cannot be separated. Furthermore, the study holds that, the way forward in proper land administration is for the Government and its development partners to seek means by which the relevant aspects of land administration of the indigenous traditional institutions can be synthesised with those of the administrative institutions in order to harness their potentials. This is because any state intervention in proper land administration which is not firmly rooted in the people's culture will not be sustainable. Thus, involving indigenous traditional institutions in the process of land administration offer greater prospects for social cohesion and sustainable development.

*Keywords: Institutions; land administration; local development; Nkambe Plateau.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Before colonization, Africans regarded land as an element of nature, just like water, air and fire, incapable of private ownership. People's rights to land were mostly governed by the customary laws. African agrarian communities believed that land was a deity, an identity and an ancestral gift to the whole community. This was contingent upon membership of social groups and on allegiance to traditional authorities, by clearing virgin land or by inheritance, through conquest or first settlement [1,2]. Almost all communities in Africa have their Traditional Institutional Systems of land administration, a position that they have maintained up to today [3]. This was the land tenure system that the colonial powers met before introducing new arrangements, which altered the Pre-colonial notions of physical space, political power and even the structures of economic opportunities [4,5]. These new arrangements package included land registration against a fee, which has remained foreign to the agrarian communities of Africans. Again, this disregarded some African practices such as shifting cultivation and their nomadic ways of life, depriving them of their rights to hunt or collect wild fruits (Okoth-Ogendo, 2006). Furthermore, the colonial powers appropriated broad administrative powers over African land, in their quest to colonize overseas territories for balance of power and to meet up with the raw material needs of their home industries. This in turn disrupted the livelihoods system of the Africans [6], as the collective rights of the communities to 'unused' land were not recognized and Africans possessed land only if they settled on or cultivated it [7-10].

At independence (on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1960 for the French Cameroon and on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1961 for the British Cameroon), three land tenure laws tailored after the German *Kronland* Act of 1896

and French 1921 land tenure laws, (Ordinance No. 74-1 of 6<sup>th</sup> July [11], Ordinance No. 74-2 of 6<sup>th</sup> July [12] and Ordinance No. 74-3 of 6<sup>th</sup> July 1974, supplemented in 1976 with three decrees of application) were passed.

The Federal Republic of Cameroon repealed the statutory recognition of the indigenous traditional land tenure in 1974, passed the Land Ordinance-laws 74-1 and 74-2. The new Ordinance-Laws unified the land tenure systems of the two territories but maintain land title/land certificate at the centre of new national tenure system (Section 1(1) of Decree No. 76/165/76). Land titles and leases, were perceived as more modern than the local systems and became the only legal means of land ownership rights in Cameroon. These two Ordinance-Laws are now complemented by large number of Decrees and Executive Decisions or Orders. Ordinance-Law 74-1 established the State as "guardian of all lands" to ensure "the rational use of land in the imperative interest of national defence or economic policies of the nation". Cameroon Land Ordinances recognise three different types of land which are regulated differently. These are National, State and Private Lands.

- 1) Private Property, Ordinance No. 74-1 of 6<sup>th</sup> July 1974, to establish rules governing land tenure Part II, Section 2. The following categories of lands shall be subject to the right of private property:
  - a. Registered land;
  - b. Freehold lands;
  - c. Lands acquired under the transcription system;
  - d. Lands covered by a final concession;
  - e. Lands entered in the *Grundbuch*.
- 2) Public Lands, which consist of privately-held State lands ("*domaine prive' de l'Etat*"). This included lands acquired by the State for

example supporting public buildings, degazetted land and rural land left "unexploited or abandoned" (Article 10 of Ordinance-Law 74-2);

- 3) National Lands, which is a residual category and consists of land that is neither private nor public, and is considered as land reserves. This land is administered by the State "for the public good", the law explicitly includes untitled lands occupied or used by the rural communities as National lands (Article 14 of Ordinance-Law 74-1). To advise the State in this mission, Land Consultative Committees (LCCs) to be presided by the DO and SDO were established at the Sub-Divisional and Divisional levels respectively.

On the other hand the indigenous traditional communities classify land differently, regrouping it mostly into family and village lands. Whatever the case, and by law, all Cameroonian customary communities living on national land, no matter for how long they have lived on and exploited the land without formal titles, have no secured tenure [13,14].

The reunification of former British and French Cameroons marked the establishments of Land Commissions which presides over cases on untitled lands (Land Consultative Board which presides over cases on national land, and Site Board Commission which presides over cases on State land), and the legal system (courts presides over cases on titled lands) at the Sub-Divisional and Divisional levels. The decisions of the different boards have to be ratified by the Ministry of Territorial Administration, a process that takes years [15]. Although, in Cameroon land certificates are the only legal means of land ownership rights, most land access rights are managed informally through the local land tenure system. In this regard, the government in 2005 initiated decentralization and simplified land-titling procedures to encourage Cameroonians to have land ownership rights. However, recent studies depicts that, in practice, land-titling procedures remain long and complicated [16], implying that there is ineffective implementation of the new land-titling procedures [17-20]. Thus, since the colonial times land registration and land-titling rates have not significantly increased.

The liberalization period falls within the period after independence. Its uniqueness stemmed from the fact that it is driven by economic liberation that opens the Cameroon to foreign investors beyond those from its former colonial

powers of Germany, Britain and France. New investors from the United States, China and other Asian countries emerged in plantation agriculture [21-26]. Under the present dispensation of high population growth, globalization, climate change, natural disasters and migration caused by land degradation, and pollution particularly in the countries marked by fragile institutions, weak governance as well as socio-economic and gender gaps [27,28,5], good land administration is imperative.

### 1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

Although, institutions have played a credible role in the economic development of several East Asian countries (Acemoglu et al. 2001), in Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and particularly in Cameroon their role is rather weak and ineffective because of the poor enforcement of the rule of law and regulations in force, corruption, mismanagement, the absence of a strong civil society and political interference [29]. The nature of land institutionalization has rendered its access and ownership rights difficult. The indigenous traditional communities continue to hold claim of ownership on national land on the basis of customary ties and acquisition through first settlement or conquest. Furthermore, the approach adopted by the modern administrative institutions has been reactive, highly-centralised and mostly top-down without due consideration to the historical, cultural systems and values of the indigenous traditional communities. Improper land management is associated with devastating consequences and represent an increasingly serious social problem that undermines both the faith of the people in these institutions and their ability to achieve sustainable livelihoods [30] which have stagnated local development in the Nkambe Plateau. These creates situations that undermine social cohesion and local development leading to the suspension and destruction of income opportunities, food security, environmental protection and economic power, as the communities are unable to negotiate and protect local interests, livelihoods and welfare leading to land scarcity and rural exodus. The out-migration who is mostly the youthful population, who are the future of development in the Nkambe Plateau, challenges the adage that '*Today's youths are tomorrow's leaders*'. The *raison d'être* is to highlight good practices in proper land administration while addressing structural disconnection between the indigenous traditional and modern administration.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The Nkambe Plateau lies between Longitudes 10°50'48'' east of the Greenwich Meridian and Latitudes 6°20'02'' and 6°41'25'' north of the Equator, and Longitudes 10°23'03'' and 11°55'48'' east of the Greenwich Meridian. It constitutes the area covered by the Nkambe Central (which doubles as the Divisional headquarter for Donga-Mantung) and Ndu Sub-Divisions. Nkambe Plateau shares common borders to the West with Misaje Sub-Division, to the North Ako Sub-Division, to the North-East Nwa Sub-Division, and to the South, South-East/South-West Bui Division (Map 1).

The principal tribal group in the Nkambe Plateau is the Mbum, whose ancestors are believed to have hailed from Tikari in Adamawa, Cameroon. Their local dialect is Limbum. Nkambe Plateau is made up of forty-one (41) communities, with a population of 120.781 inhabitants covering a total surface area of 2112.4km<sup>2</sup> (United Councils & Cities of Cameroon (CVUC)-visited, 2019), and has a population density of 57.2 persons per km<sup>2</sup>. Most inhabitants in the Nkambe Plateau are peasants with land as the lone source of livelihood.

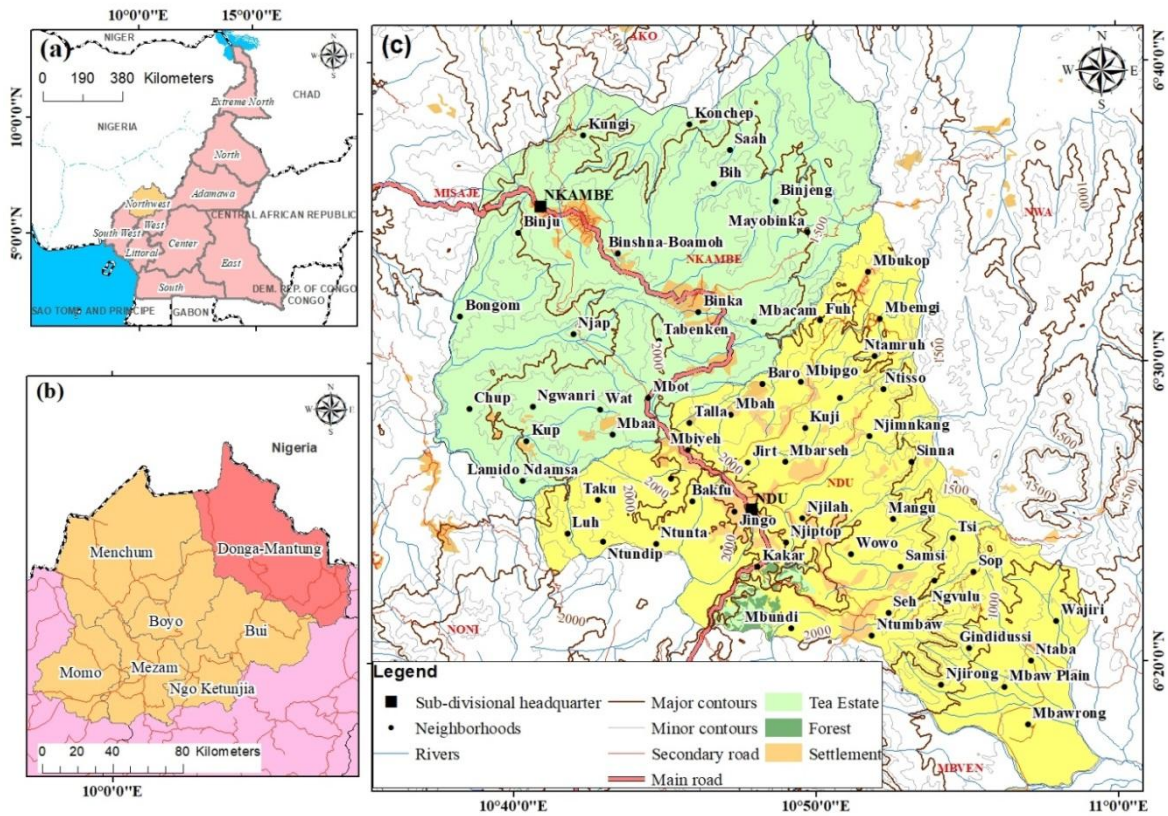
A multi-disciplinary approach for data collection has been employed for this study. Nkambe Plateau might be divided into three clans (Wat, Tang and Wiya) as often claimed, their customs and traditions are homogenous. This necessitates a simple random sampling technique. The sample size was estimated using sample calculation for population using Epi Info 6.04d software (Nana, 2018) to be 200 to achieve the aim of this study. Field surveys constituted the main technique of data collection. It provided a huge amount of raw data source collected with the help of observation, interviews guides and focus group discussions. These instruments were deemed useful in this study because they provided adequate data for the study which could not have been possible using a single type instrument. The key informant included administrative and traditional authorities and the local population. Some official documents were consulted from the secretariats of the Senior Divisional Officer (SDO), Sub-Divisional Officer (DO), Divisional and Sub-Divisional Delegations. Population statistics were obtained from the Northwest Regional Delegation of the Economy and Planning, and some files from archival materials, the Land Management Authority, State inspection Office (both at the

Division and the Sub-Divisional levels) and National Assembly. Various historical and legal documents were important in verifying and complementing the views of the informants. The research was a descriptive and an exploratory study. These approaches were adopted in order to investigate challenges faced by institutions in land administration and implications on local development in the Nkambe Plateau. Data collected were analyzed through the qualitative statistical techniques and the results of the analysis were visualized on figure, tables and pie-charts.

### 2.1 Current Institutions in Land Administration in the Nkambe Plateau

According to North [31], institutions are 'the underlying rules of the game'. He further classifies institutions into formal and informal. Formal institutions include the written constitution, laws, policies, rights and regulations enforced by official authorities. Informal institutions are (usually unwritten) social norms, customs and traditions that shape thought and behaviour (Leftwich and Sen, 2010; Berman, 2013). Although, the institutions of land administration in the Nkambe Plateau are both the informal institutions (indigenous traditional institutions) and formal institutions (administrative institutions) with the latter gaining jurisdiction, more than 80% of the local population still holds ancestral claims to their family and village lands. This implies that land administration in the Nkambe Plateau still hinged so much to the customs and traditions of the indigenous population.

The informal institutions of land administration are not legally recognized or authorized by the government. Different mechanisms enforced the informal institutions, such as; Traditional council: this council is found at the village level, with a president as the chairperson and a secretary who is elected, whose duty is managing land cases; Quarter meeting: Presided by a Quarter Head to help manage land cases at the level of the quarter; and Family meeting: Presided by a family head to help manage land cases within the family (Fig. 1). According to Choudree (1999), informal institutions are deeply rooted in the customs and traditions of the indigenous people, and are the most preferred when it comes to land administration by the local population in the Nkambe Plateau. Field evidence revealed that the local population sees these institutions as less intimidating, less time consuming and



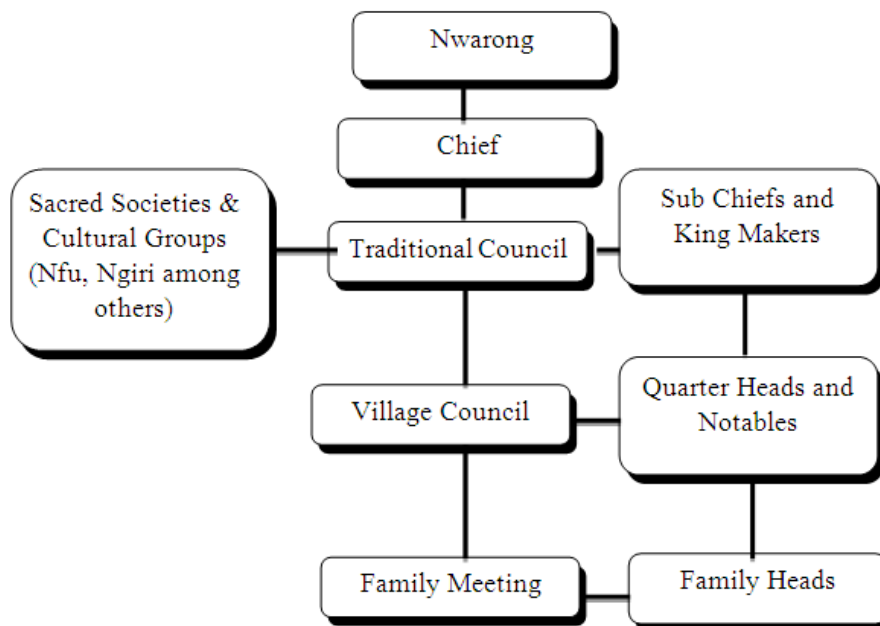
**Map 1. Location of the Nkambe Plateau**

a=Northwest Region in Cameroon

b= Nkambe Plateau in the Northwest Region

c=A Layout of Nkambe Plateau

Source: Adapted from the Shuttle Topography Mission, <http://www2.jpl.nasa.gov/srtm-visited>, 2019



**Fig. 1. Indigenous Institutional Institutions in Land Administration in the Nkambe Plateau**

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

guarantor of greater outcome and emphasis is placed on social relationships. Section 16 (2) Land Ordinance No. 74-1/74 and 12 of decree No. 76/166/76 empowers chiefs and their two notables at any time to represent their communities on the LCB. As members of the LCB, they provided vital information, including information relating to boundaries of their communities and cultural and sacred sites during Environmental Socio-cultural Impact Assessment (ESCIA). Where the chief and two notables are absent during deliberations, any decision taken will not be binding. The Fon (*'Nkfu'*) upon enthronement was bestowed with all the spiritual powers, which the throne deserved, through initiation into all the sacred societies of the village. This gave him the status of a divine figure with divine powers to communicate with the gods and ancestors of the land who were believed to guide him on how best to administer his people. He was assisted in the administration of his community by a traditional council of elders or wise men and various secret societies such as *'Nwarong'*, which was charged amongst others, with making and enforcing the laws of the land. In addition to these, were also the *'Ngiri'*, an assembly *Nwarong* war lodges like the *Nfu* and *Samba* (Manjong) secret societies, whose membership were healthy men responsible for the security of the society especially in times of war. Their origins date to the times of migration and early settlement when they fought several wars to defend their territory from invaders. Shrines existed within the confines of most palaces to cater for these secret societies and the gods of the land.

A good number of communities in Mbum land are controlled by absentee chiefs who live and work as civil servants in the cities. They only come home occasionally; some of them have even gone to the extent of constructing new palaces in the city or transferring the palace from its original site to new sites, on the pretext that, the original site was inaccessible. This abandoned original palaces and their cultural sites, features and artefacts, unattended to be exposed to the destructive natural forces of decay and the looting activities of local thieves. Again, Christianity which was introduced into Mbum land in the early 1920s, has over the years, gradually, caused a lot of harm to the culture of the area as elsewhere on the African continent. Some of the local converts, who were village priests and guardians of shrines, ceased to perform the responsibilities the indigenous society bestowed on them because of their new

status as Christians. They began to despise not only those local people who still valued their culture but also, the venerated cultural materials which were preserved in the shrines, palace museums and cultural reserves (or archaeological/historical sites).

## 2.2 Formal Institutions in Land Administration

These are institutions defined by law and other administrative practices. The formal processes on the face value may be gender and community neutral, they end up marginalizing and neglecting vulnerable communities and women during implementation. Generally, the government ministerial and department champion the formal process (Section 1 of the Land Ordinance No 74-1 of 5<sup>th</sup> July 1974 stipulates that the State is the guardian of all lands in Cameroon). As a major player, the activities of the central government are executed by administrative officials who ensure that the directives are strictly implemented at the local level as confirmed by some of the senior public officials interviewed. The formal Institutions are enforced by state. The state mechanisms that enforces formal institution are the Ministry of State property, Surveys and Land Tenure; Land Commissions (with Land Consultative Board at the Sub-Divisional level and Site Board Commission at the Divisional level); and the Courts (the High Court, Court of First Instance and Customary courts). The formal institutions continue promote *'Land Title'* as the ultimate claim over private land ownership. Articles 11 to 21 of Law No. 76/165 of 27<sup>th</sup> April 1976 and Articles 11, 12-15 (1) (2) (3) of Law No. 76/166 27<sup>th</sup> April 1976 and other related land tenure makes administrative officials (Sub-Divisional Officers, and Senior Divisional Officers, Regional Governors and the Minister in charge of Lands) central actors in land administration in Cameroon. The DOs by virtue of article (12) of Decree No. 76/166 of 27<sup>th</sup> April 1976, who establishes the terms and conditions of national lands, is the chairman of the LCB. By virtue of Decree No. 77/245 of 15<sup>th</sup> July 1977 and as modified and completed by Decree no. 82/241 of 24<sup>th</sup> June 1982, are considered auxiliaries of the administration, acting as liaisons between the state and the respective communities. This administrative function is supplementary to their traditional roles as custodians of communal land. Article 15 (1) of Decree No. 76/166 of 27<sup>th</sup> April 1976 is instrumental since it states that the recommendation shall be adopted by a simple majority of members present and shall be valid if



the chief and one notable participated in the proceedings. Although statutorily the Cameroonian woman has the right to acquire and own land, in practice it remains a huge challenge due to gender inequality in decision making positions and the strong and domineering influence of customary practice in a patriarchal setting. In the Nkambe plateau there are no female traditional leaders, the designated village notables assigned to sit in the LCBs are all men. These leaders and notables adhere to indigenous traditional practices, some of which are repugnant to basic human rights, such as: denial of inheritance rights to the daughter, payment of royalties in Fondoms as a prerequisite to obtaining a land certificate contrary to the law in force. Also, most Fons and village notables representing communities during LCB's meetings are ignorant of the legal rules regulating land.

### 2.3 Site Board Commission

Table 1 shows the composition of the SBC which is a body that manages State land between the Sub-Divisions, mostly on boundaries separating Sub-Divisions, expansion of village and allocating land for state use. This institution is chaired by the Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) of the concerned Division. The land tenure system is based on the two Ordinance-Laws of 74-1 and 74-2, and some Decrees and Executive Decisions or Orders.

**Table 1. Composition of site board commission**

<b>Senior Divisional Officer</b>	Chairperson
<b>Divisional Officer</b>	Member
<b>Mayor</b>	Member
<b>Divisional Delegate of Mindcaf</b>	Member
<b>Divisional Delegate of Minader</b>	Member
<b>Divisional Delegate of Mindhu</b>	Member
<b>Divisional Chief of Surveys</b>	Member
<b>Chief of the concerned village</b>	Members

*Source: Nkambe SDO's Secretariat (2023)*

### 2.4 Land Consultative Board

Table 2 shows the composition LCB which is a body that manages communal land that is untitled within the Sub-Division. The DO is the chairperson of the LCB; decisions are taken by consultative talks, and after in-depth field inspections/investigations in front of the

neighbours. Because of the frequency of land cases this commission meets every first week of each month. However, extraordinary sessions (ad hoc commission) can also hold where need be. This commission listens, conduct field investigations and take decisions that are respected by the courts. The LCB is the competent authority to manage national lands.

**Table 2. Composition of land consultative board**

<b>Divisional Officer</b>	Chairperson
<b>Sub-Divisional Service of Land Tenure</b>	Secretary
<b>Sub-Divisional Service of Survey</b>	Member
<b>Sub-Divisional Service of Mindhu</b>	Member
<b>Sub-Divisional Service of Minader</b>	Member
<b>Chief/Quarter Head of the Village</b>	Member
<b>Two (02) Notables</b>	Members

*Source: Nkambe Central and Ndu DOs' Secretariat (2023)*

The village chiefs and two other village leaders (Notables), and one representative each of relevant ministries are members of the commission. Decisions are adopted by a simple rule majority rule. Although, the commission is called consultative, deliberations of LCCs are significant for the attribution of land titles, land concessions and planting of pillars for demarcation. On the other hand, the courts only handle criminal matters on title lands.

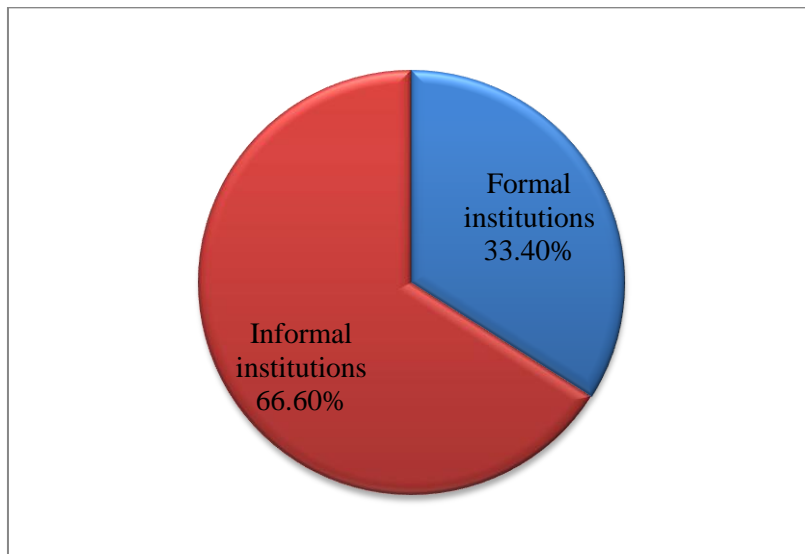
## 3. RESULTS

Field investigation revealed that generally, many of these institutions discriminate against the disadvantaged individuals and groups in the population, especially women, who have historically depended on the land for their livelihood (and even children and Orphans). Consequently, those who argued in favour of informal institutions advanced that they are easily accessible, cheaper and have won support from the indigenous population, though they are insensitive to gender roles as they also discriminate against the female folks.

Fig. 2 illustrate that the respondents mostly prefer Informal institutions (indigenous traditional institutions) 66.7% against the formal institutions 33.3% as land management/administration is concerned.

While the respondents who argued in favour of the formal institutions indicated that, although they are expensive; are the legally authorized institutions in land administration; and have ratified to many conventions that respect, protect and promote human rights and freedoms, democratic principles (Table 3), though its leaves much to be desired as effective implementation of these values has remain challenges to reckoned with. This is because, the local population, irrespective of gender, financial and political status, actively participate in the development process when their interests and rights are respected, protected and promoted. Furthermore, the decisions of the informal institutions were respected for fear of wrath of the ancestor and shame of the recalcitrant

deviant by the entire community. The traditions and customs of the indigenous communities, though unwritten were respected and the people lived in harmony. To compare the mechanisms for land administration in the Nkambe Plateau, community members mostly identified with the indigenous traditional mechanisms (66.70%), followed by land commissions (26.6%) and the courts (6.70%), (Fig. 3), since the local population are enshrined to their culture, and still hold ancestral claims to their family and village lands. On land inheritance problems such as a widow claiming private ownership on her deceased husband's land, people do not have testament of how their lands should be shared when they joined their ancestors ('No will').



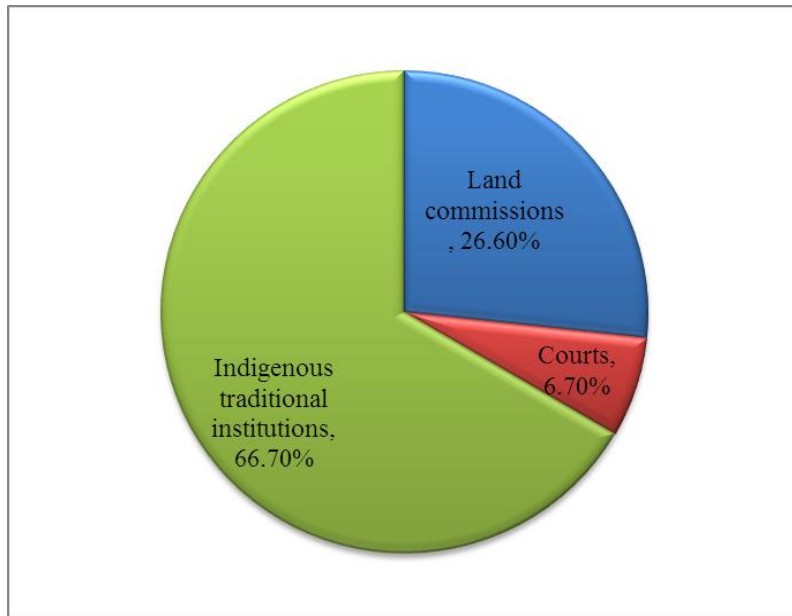
**Fig. 2. Preference for formal and informal institutional mechanisms in the Nkambe Plateau**  
 Source: Fieldwork (2023)

**Table 3. Characteristics of formal and informal institutions in land administration in the Nkambe Plateau**

Aspect	Formal Institution	Informal Institution
- Nature of evolution	- Exogenous	- Endogenous
- Functional and structural arrangement	- Common at state/ national level	- Site specific
- external input and material support	- High	- Low
- Consideration of social and cultural embeddedness	- Low	- High
- Private land ownership		
- Enforcement and monitoring	- State - Legally by state	-Local community - Based on consensual agreement of the community

Source: Adapted from Dash and Behera (2015)





**Fig. 3. Mechanisms in land administration in the Nkambe Plateau**  
 Source: Fieldwork (2023)

**Table 4. Frequency of land cases brought before the formal institution mechanisms for land administration (From 2010 to 2023)**

Area	Outcomes
Nkambe town	185
Ndu town	115
Peripheral area (rural areas)	45
<b>Total</b>	<b>345</b>

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

Informants equally admitted that when they have land issues, they attempted indigenous traditional institutions before turning to the formal Institutions since they are too expensive, majority of the local population do not have land certificates for the lands they claim private ownership upon. Frequencies are high for Warr and Wiya because they harbour administrative headquarters, and have these formal institutions. These low figures for marginal areas because they do not have formal institutions, are poor and ignorant of their operations.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that these institutions were grouped under the informal institutions (also called the indigenous traditional institutions) 66.7% and formal institutions (also called government/administrative institutions) 33.3% [31]. The informal institutions of land administration included Traditional Councils, Quarter and Family Meetings, while the formal

institutions included Land Commissions (LCB & SBC), and Courts. Furthermore, about 66.6% of the respondents preferred indigenous traditional institutions. They argued that, they were well-structured, easily accessible and decisions could be rendered promptly. This is in contrast with the frequent postponements and bureaucracy common with the administrative institutions, especially as most of these institutions are located in Nkambe town and Ndu town, far away from the peripheral communities. And it requires additional time and transportation costs to access these institutions. The respondents also raised the issue of loss of trust in these institutions emanating from bribery and corruption. This is promoted by the well-to-do of the society, and also because many of these institutions function in gross violation of Human Rights and Freedoms.

Many of the respondents admitted that some members of the land commissions have exploitative tendencies. Research findings,

equally revealed that some respondents show preference for the administrative institutions as far as land management is concerned. The respondents indicated that apart from the text in force which states that the land commissions' meetings are to be convened once in three (03) months (MINATD, 2019), the land commissions for Nkambe and Ndu meets monthly, and sometimes depending on the severity and intensity of the issues that have cropped up, ad hoc sessions are convened. On the other hand, the Traditional Council meets more frequently, that is every week with that of Ndu on *ntalla*, Wat on *yih* and Tabenken on *ngang* (interviews conducted with the local authorities of these areas, 2023). This has been argued, based on waste of land, labour (as they idle), time, reduction of agricultural productivity through crop damage, abandonment of farms, inadequate harvest and as well, the loss of animal through theft and death, loss of human lives, individual impoverishment and loss of government revenue sources. All these account for the stagnating development in the Nkambe Plateau.

On the basis of effectiveness and efficiency of institutions in land administration, 33.7% of the respondents admitted that these institutions are effective and efficient in land management, while 66.3% of the respondents hold that they are not up to the task in the Nkambe Plateau. The respondents advanced the following reasons for the weaknesses of institutions in the Nkambe Plateau. These include population growth 100%; the increasing number of livestock 100%, inadequate finance 95%; administrative bottlenecks, inadequate implementation of Land Laws and Ordinances, bribery and corruption 94.7%; adaptation to hydrological change 93.3%; land cover change 93%; local farming methods 92.7%; tribalism, favouritism, land grabbing and greed for benefits, 92.3%; speculative land purchases 81.3% and adaptation to climate variability 64.7%. These difficulties sometimes negatively affect land administration, causing the local population not to develop trust in these institutions.

Historically, colonial and post-colonial governance in Cameroon have remained highly centralized. Despite the much talked about 'decentralization', the authority of decision-making and execution of projects, have remained in the hands of those people without sound knowledge of the conditions prevailing in affected communities (local reality), since the Ministry of State Property, Surveys and Land

Tenure still resolve some land cases. Additionally, there is no real coordination between the related ministries in the domain of land administration, with each of the ministry acting independently of another instead of working together as a team when it comes to land administration. For example: Officials directly involved in local projects may lack the sufficient capacity to make better decisions, as most of the well-trained officials preferred to work only in the cities and not in the villages. In most cases, workers in the fields only provided information but without the power to act and make decisions without referring to hierarchy located in the Sub-Divisional, Divisional, Regional or National capitals far away from the local communities. During this time the local authorities and general population are bound to bear the stress of waiting for feedbacks or instructions from the centre for a problem they do not really have mastery over. This situation has caused the inhabitants in the Nkambe Plateau to adopt an attitude of feeling neglected from the centre of power.

While 59.7% of respondents admitted that decisions of institutions in land administration were respected, 40.3% respondents thought otherwise. A number of reasons were identified for the non-respect of these decisions which included: embezzlement, lack of proper follow-up, bribery and corruption (administrative bottlenecks), violation of orders and decisions. This, therefore, emphasize the fact that land laws and ordinances designed to manage land tenure systems and protect the environment should be reinforced in a rational way. The key, therefore, to meeting the challenges of pressure on land is to take both the short-term and long-term approaches, and plan for sustainable development.

Improper land management in the Nkambe Plateau affects different groups in different ways. Not only do they generally have a stronger impact on the livelihoods of the disadvantaged population than that of the well-to-do of the society; also they impact differently on men and women, urban and rural populations, farmers and pastoralists; with groups such as squatters, ethnic minorities, widows or orphans being extremely marginalized (Nformi et al. 2019; Fonjong et al. 2016). These different ways of perceiving the impacts of improper land management have strong implications on local development.

It was found out that though in several occasion decisions and decrees are violated and opposed, the government continue to promote the acquisition of land title as the ultimate way of effectively managing the land. Subject to the provisions of articles 2(3) and 24 of the decree of Land Tenure and State Lands in Cameroon, land certificate shall be unassailable, inviolable and final. But a majority of the local population does not support these authorized institutions as they continue to hold their ancestral claim to their family and village lands. Recently, land is increasingly becoming an economic asset in the Nkambe Plateau. Land users who are usually without tenure security, have become more and more vulnerable to losing their land to those with greater economic, political or social ability (the well-to-do of the society). These elites are absent from their community economic life, as most reside in big towns like Yaounde, Bamenda, Buea and Douala. This situation is even worst when they own the greatest share of the community land and are unwilling to develop or give it out for cultivation. This explains why most of these communities regularly suffer from food shortages.

Many people still have ancestral claims on private land ownership and land use rights. Thus, land tenure security and access to land constitute essential preconditions in eradicating poverty and ensuring the realization of fundamental human rights. As a result, the importance of securing land rights ensures the full implementation of existing land laws and the empowerment of local communities to claim the rights to which they are entitled cannot be stressed enough. Possible mechanisms include "training of law enforcers, building legal literacy at community level or assisting communities to pursue their land rights through the legal system". Field evidence suggests that most of the land has been acquired on national land without due process.

Indigenous traditional institutions make decisions on the basis of the customary rules and traditions. Such a decision is generally credited with high legitimacy by the community and has a good chance of being respected in practice. Procedural costs of the indigenous traditional institutions are low; they are in all the villages, which make the system easily accessible for everyone. However, informal institutions and the roles they apply often do not comply with national and international standards of equality and non-discrimination because they treat parties

differently according to their sex, age, status and position within the community; in most customary systems, women, children, young people and outsiders (strangers) are disadvantaged. Based on the challenges faced by the institutions in land administration, field report holds that the respondents perceived that population growth 100%; increasing number of livestock 100%; inadequate finance 95%; administration bottlenecks, inadequate implementation of land laws, ordinances, bribery and corruption 94.7%; adaptation to hydrological change 93.3%; land cover change 93%; local farming methods 92.7%; tribalism, favouritism, grabbing and greed for benefits 92.3%; the lack of support for authorized institutions in land administration 92.3%; speculative land purchases 81.3%; and adaptation to climate variability 64.7%.

The effects of improper land management are even more precarious as institutions in land administration face enormous challenges, which have remained a growing phenomenon. Findings revealed that the implications improper land management on development in the Nkambe Plateau ranged from reduced arable crop farmland and grazing land 96.7%, increased poverty 94.3%, retaliatory acts 92%, inadequate education and medical attention 83%, family separation and lack of participation in development 78.7%, unemployment and rural exodus 75.7% and increased tendency of bribery and corruption 50.7%.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study points to the fact that proper land management is fundamental to creating enabling environment for development in the Nkambe Plateau. Furthermore, the study holds that, the way forward in effective land management is for the Government and its development partners, and the local populations to seek means by which the relevant aspects of land tenure systems of the indigenous traditional institutions can be synthesised with those of the administrative institutions in order to harness their potentials. Involving indigenous traditional institutions in the process of land management offers greater prospects for social cohesion and sustainable development. There are measures which if instituted can serve as effective ways of proper land management and can help move the bar away from the unpleasant consequences of disturbed social relationships, destroyed livelihoods and underdevelopment in the Nkambe Plateau.

- The local inhabitants in the Nkambe Plateau in conjunction with government should be encouraged and assisted to build capacity and skills on non-farm activities (transport, health, industries and education) in order to reduce over dependence on land.
  - The study equally recommends that there should be the effective decentralization of powers to the local communities.
  - Cameroon's land laws are apparently neutral and in practice biased against women and are the major obstacle for equitable distribution of land between men and women. Thus, it is recommended that Cameroon's land review commission should go back to the drawing board and revise the laws to address the perennial question of inequality in land distribution between men and women.
  - Extensive sensitization of the rural population needs to be carried out on land rights and acquisition procedures for compliance.
  - Traditional leaders should designate female notables (the *Yahs*) to represent their communities at the board's meetings.
  - The Fondoms should review the customary policy of inheritance in favour of the daughter. They should be directly given land in their own right irrespective of their status as married or singles.
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## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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